OUT+COME | PRACTICAL GUIDE

The Discovery Call Question Bank

Over sixty questions, organised by what you are trying to uncover

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READ THIS FIRST

Discovery is a conversation, not an interrogation

The goal of discovery is simple. Understand the buyer's situation well enough to decide, together, whether and how you can help. It is not to pitch early, to prove you are clever, or to work through a list.

This question bank is organised by what you are trying to uncover, not by a methodology. Use it as a menu. Pick the questions that fit the conversation, and ignore the rest. The skill is in the listening, not the asking.

Seven principles

1. Ask one question at a time, then stop talking.
2. Follow the answer, not the script. The best next question is usually inside what they just said.
3. Listen for numbers, names, dates and feelings. Those are the details that matter.
4. Use their words back to them. It shows you listened, and it keeps you honest.
5. Use silence. A pause after an answer often brings the real answer.
6. Be willing to disqualify. A clear no early is a gift to both sides.
7. Write it down. You will not remember it, and the buyer notices that you care enough to.

> **A QUICK TEST**
>
> After the call, can you write the problem, the impact and the decision process in three sentences? If not, you have not finished discovery.

1. Opening and context

Set the frame and learn why they took the call.

01	Before we dive in, what prompted you to take this call?
02	What would make the next thirty minutes useful for you?
03	How much do you already know about what we do?
04	Is there anything you would like to be sure we cover?
05	Who else, if anyone, has been involved in looking at this so far?
06	Is it still fine to finish at the agreed time, and decide next steps together at the end?

LISTEN FOR

The real trigger for the call. How early or late they are in their thinking. Whether their expectations match yours.

2. Their situation

Understand how things work today, before you suggest anything.

07	Can you walk me through how this works today?
08	Who is involved at each step?
09	What tools or systems are involved?
10	How long has it worked this way?
11	What does a good week look like, and what does a bad one look like?
12	How do you measure how well it is going?
13	What has changed recently?
14	What have you already tried?

LISTEN FOR

Hand-offs, workarounds and manual steps. What they measure, and what they do not. Recent changes that created the need.

3. The problem and its causes

Move from symptoms to the real problem, in their words.

15	What is the hardest part of this today?
16	When did you first notice it?
17	What do you think is causing it?
18	How often does it happen?
19	Where does it hurt the most?
20	Who feels it most?
21	What have you tried that did not work, and why?
22	If you had to describe the real problem in your own words, what would you say?

LISTEN FOR

Causes rather than symptoms. Whether the problem is theirs or someone else's. Whether it is a real, felt problem or a vague wish.

4. Impact and the cost of doing nothing

Find out what the problem costs, using their numbers.

23	What does this cost you, in time, money or risk?
24	How do you know that number?
25	What happens downstream when this goes wrong?
26	Who else is affected?
27	What would it mean for the business if this were solved?
28	What happens if nothing changes over the next twelve months?
29	What would you do with the time or money you got back?
30	How does this affect your own priorities or targets?

LISTEN FOR

Specific numbers and examples. Who carries the cost. Whether the cost is large enough to act on. Whether doing nothing is a real option.

5. Urgency and why now

Learn what makes this a priority now, if it is one.

31	Why now, rather than last quarter?
32	Is there a date this needs to be sorted by? What drives it?
33	What happens if that date is missed?
34	Where does this sit among your other priorities?
35	What has stopped this being fixed already?
36	Who is pushing for this?

LISTEN FOR
A real deadline or event. Competing priorities. Whether anyone senior cares. Why it has not been solved before.

6. Decision process and people

Understand how a decision will actually be made.

37	How do decisions like this usually get made here?
38	Who needs to be involved, and what does each person care about?
39	Who will ultimately approve it?
40	Is there anyone who might not be in favour, and why?
41	What would they need to see?
42	What does the process look like after this conversation, step by step?
43	How long did the last similar decision take?
44	What is the best way to involve the others?

LISTEN FOR
Names and roles. Hidden blockers. Steps such as security, legal and procurement. Realistic timing.

7. Budget and value

Talk about money as a normal part of the conversation, without pushing.

45	Has budget been set aside for this?
46	Who owns that budget?
47	How has the team valued solving this?
48	If we found a good fit, how would you expect to fund it?
49	What would make the investment feel clearly worthwhile?
50	What would a good return look like to you?

LISTEN FOR
Whether money exists, and who controls it. How they think about value. Whether the problem is worth what a solution costs.

8. Alternatives and competition

Include in-house and doing nothing, which are the most common competitors.

51	What else are you considering, including building it yourselves or doing nothing?
52	What do you like about those options?
53	What worries you about them?
54	What would make you choose one over another?
55	Have you worked with a similar provider before? What was that like?

LISTEN FOR
The real alternatives. What they value. Past experiences that shape their expectations.

9. Success criteria

Agree what good looks like before you propose anything.

56	If this works brilliantly, what will be different in six months?
57	How will you know it has worked?
58	What would make this a failure for you?
59	Who needs to see the result, and what would they want to see?
60	What would you need to see in a first step to feel confident?

LISTEN FOR
Measures they will actually use. Risks they are worried about. The size of a sensible first step.

10. Closing the call

Finish with a clear, shared next step.

61	Based on what we have talked about, what do you see as the sensible next step?
62	Is there anything we have not covered that matters?
63	Who should be involved next time?
64	What should I prepare?
65	Can we put a date in the diary now?

LISTEN FOR
A next step the buyer proposes or agrees to, with a date. If you cannot get one, that is information too.

Eight questions to avoid

Instead of	Why it struggles	Try
Do you have budget for this?	Too early and closed. It puts people on the defensive.	How would you expect to fund a good solution?
Wouldn't it be better if...?	Leading. It tells them the answer you want.	What would be different if this were solved?
Are you the decision maker?	Awkward. It can sound like you doubt their authority.	How do decisions like this get made here?
What keeps you up at night?	A cliche. It invites a stock answer.	What is the hardest part of this today?
Is that a priority?	Yes or no, and usually yes.	Where does this sit among your other priorities?
Can you tell me about your business?	Lazy. You should have researched it.	Ask a specific question that shows you did the homework.

Instead of	Why it struggles	Try
Do you want to move forward?	Pressure, too early.	What do you see as a sensible next step?
Three questions at once	The buyer answers the easiest one.	Ask one question and wait.

When not to ask another question

- They have given you the answer twice. Move on.
- The answers are getting shorter. They may be tired, or unsure. Check in, or summarise.
- You have enough to decide on a next step. More questions will not change it.
- The buyer is explaining the problem to you with energy. Let them talk.
- The moment is sensitive. Acknowledge it before you ask anything else.
- You are asking to fill a silence. Wait instead.

The pocket card

Ten questions to keep beside you.

1. What prompted you to take this call?
2. Can you walk me through how this works today?
3. What is the hardest part of this today?
4. What does this cost you?
5. Why now?
6. How do decisions like this get made here?
7. Who else needs to be involved, and what do they care about?
8. What else are you considering, including doing nothing?
9. How will you know it has worked?
10. What do you see as the sensible next step?

NEXT STEP

A second pair of eyes?

These guides share general ideas. If you would like help applying them to your own team, market and numbers, we would be glad to talk.

Book a pit stop: outpluscome.com

This guide is general information and not legal, employment or professional advice. Examples are illustrative.