



## Sample Questions for a Value Conversation

Here's the way I define a value conversation in the book:

A value conversation is a dialogue with a client in which you develop an understanding of how a client defines the value of the outcomes, both tangible and intangible, which will occur because of your work for them.

There's no one right way to conduct a value conversation. That conversation can be held in one sitting or it can be a dialogue held over several different points in time.

A value conversation is just that, a conversation. It's not an interrogation. It's a natural exchange. A great value conversation should be a trust builder, and trust is built as you develop the rapport which comes from a natural dialogue.

I've developed a list of sample questions for you to get ideas of questions you might ask in a value conversation to adapt to your own practice and circumstances. Whatever you do, please do not go right down this specific list. Every professional services discipline has its own dynamic and parameters which necessitate specific questions.

While there are some questions which are similar in their intent and the response you're looking for, this list is hardly exhaustive. You're talking with another human being, which means every value conversation takes on contours which are determined, in part, by the person you are speaking with.

For ease of your consideration, I've grouped these questions into five different categories:

- Understanding Basic Client Needs
- Defining and Prioritizing Value
- Budget and Time Constraints
- Understanding Client Expectations and Commitment
- Exploring Alternatives and Closing Questions

There's nothing magic in these categories, either, as there is overlap in specific questions.

Use this list as a springboard to develop the questions that best fit your business and your ideal clients.

<b>Understanding Basic Client Needs</b>	
Question	What You Hope to Learn and Other Comments
Can you describe your company's current situation and needs?	This question goes beyond the project at hand to the bigger picture of where the business sits currently.
What are your short-term and long-term objectives?	Same idea here.
What is your ideal outcome for this project?	An initial shot at how the client defines value.
Who are the key stakeholders in this project?	This question helps determine whether others should be at the table for the discussion you're having.
How does this project align with your overall business strategy?	A similar question to the one above.
How are you currently addressing this need?	Coupled with the next question, you're starting to get into the client defining their pain points.
What problems are you experiencing with the current approach?	You're asking for them to describe their current pain.
How does this project fit into the bigger picture of your organization?	Again, you are widening the lens for exploration of the larger implications of a solution.
What's driving this need right now?	"Why now" is <i>always</i> a great question, and it is imperative that you ask this question and dig into the answer. Follow-ups to this question could include "why not wait until next year?"
What will happen if this issue isn't addressed soon?	Related to the previous question. Essentially you're asking "why not wait?" You want to understand the pains (and their tangible and intangible costs) which are sharp enough to cause this prospect to make a change.

<b>Defining and Prioritizing Value</b>	
Question	What You Hope to Learn and Other Comments
For this project, what does value mean to the organization and to you personally?	Their definition of value, which you will help them further develop and define in this conversation.
How do you measure value or success, both to the organization and to you personally?	Many clients will respond to this question with tangible answers, such as “\$10 million in additional revenue and a big bonus.” What you’re introducing here is the intangible value both the company and they personally will enjoy because of the additional \$10 million in revenue.
How would the ideal solution improve your business processes?	Improvement in business processes which are an outgrowth of your work is additional value you are providing.
How much time or money could be saved with an effective solution?	A question most clients have given at least some thought to.
What are the tangible and intangible benefits you are seeking from this project?	You’re ultimately going to help them see more value
How might this project increase your [fill in the blank]?	You might have several iterations of this question as you have multiple ways to fill in the blank: revenue, market
What would [fill their answers to the question above] mean to the organization and to you personally?	You’re allowing the prospect to dream of what the promised land of a solution looks and feels like. You’re tapping into powerful emotional drivers. Allow the client’s mind to run wild here. Asking a follow-up such as “what would that do for you” allows for further value discovery.
What would [fill in their answers to the question above] enable the organization to do that it cannot currently do today?	You’re allowing the prospect to dream of what the promised land of a solution looks and feels like.
What are the critical features or aspects you need in the solutions we’re aiming for?	A direct question to uncover client-perceived value.
Can you rank the importance of these features?	Same thing.
Any non-negotiables in this project?	High value answers are likely here, such as a “completed by” date.

<b>Budget and Time Constraints</b>	
Question	What You Hope to Learn and Other Comments
Do you have a budget allocated for this project?	An important question to get some sense of what they anticipate paying for the project at hand. Remember, this number a data point; it is rarely the price you'll settle on. It was made up before the client ever got in touch with you, and before you will hopefully have a thorough value conversation that gives them a more precise idea of the value they'll receive from the project.
How does this budget align with the value you hope to gain?	You're inviting the client to think about how spending money with you is an investment with an associated return, not a sunk cost.
Is there flexibility in the budget if it means a higher value outcome?	"Would you spend more if I could show that you'll receive more value than you originally thought possible?" That's essentially what you're asking here.
What financial implications could there be if the issue is not resolved?	Risks that are tangible.
How quickly do you need this solution implemented?	Urgency is an important client value. Remember that urgency can be created by other parties not in your conversation, like the spouse of a business owner or the board of directors.
What are the risks if the project is delayed?	Another way to get at both urgency and risk.

<b>Understanding Client Expectations and Commitment</b>	
Question	What You Hope to Learn and Other Comments
How committed is your organization to addressing this need?	A particularly important question is you are working with an enterprise organization.
Who else needs to be involved in the decision-making process?	It's imperative you know whether you are talking to the decision maker.
How soon are you hoping to make a decision?	Establishing urgency
What are your biggest concerns about this project?	Establish client perceived risks, and therefore, their deepest fears.
What could potentially prevent this project from moving forward?	Same
What are your expectations from us as your service provider?	You're looking to achieve alignment on service expectations, and also uncover ways to "surprise and delight" with unexpected value in the future.
What experience do you have working with service providers like us?	Same
How would you like us to communicate with you throughout the project?	Their idea of great communication might be so different from yours that you determine they're a bad fit.
What has been your experience with similar projects in the past?	A different question than the similar service provider question.
What would make you consider this project a success?	Several ways to ask this question, and you're looking for both tangibles and intangibles.

## Closing the Discussion and Exploring Alternatives

Question	What You Hope to Learn and Other Comments
Why me (or us)?	Another vital question which establishes value the client already sees in you. They could be sitting in front of hundreds of other providers, but what is it that they see in you which makes you uniquely qualified?
What makes a provider like us the best fit to solve the problem?	Same idea as the previous question. With this question you are hopefully establishing value in you and the solutions you will craft.
Have you considered any alternatives to our services?	An extremely important question. What you want the client to express is why addressing the problem by hiring you is better than hiring someone else, doing the work internally, or some other way. It's not only just competitors, but alternative ways of fulfilling the objective.
What is your plan if you decide not to proceed with our services?	"Plan B" is an alternative which has more tangible and intangible costs than your project, and you're getting the client to think about those costs.
What are the implications of putting this off until next year?	Again, a vital question and answer in which you're gauging urgency.
How would what we do and our approach compare with other alternatives you've considered?	It may be early for this question. You may not have gotten so far as to discuss your approach.
Is there anything we haven't covered that you'd like to discuss?	You're asking for any lingering issues or concerns which might be in the "closet."
Do you have any questions or concerns about our proposed approach?	Again, it may be early for this question. It's vital, though, that you understand the risks a prospect sees ahead. Those risks engender some level of fear, and fear is a powerful emotion.
What are the next steps from your perspective?	As the expert, you should be the one to provide an answer to this question, but it could be that there are some lingering issues which haven't been addressed yet.
Is there anything we should avoid based on your past experiences?	A similar question to the one above. Because fear of loss is such a powerful emotion, it's important to uncover such fears in the client.
What's your contingency plan if the project faces unexpected challenges?	The extent to which a client has no other contingency plans, the higher the perceived value the client will have in the project's outcomes.