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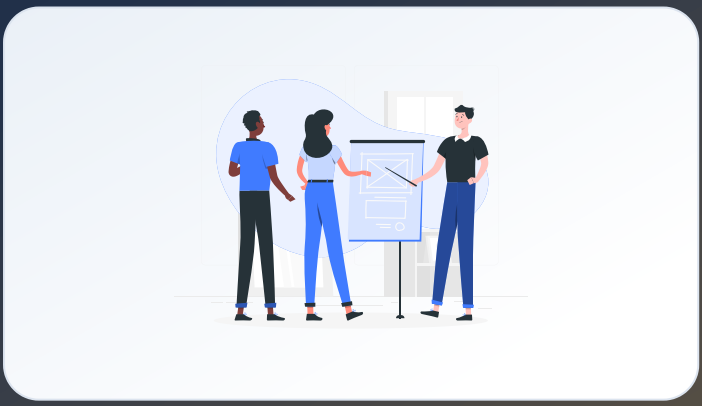
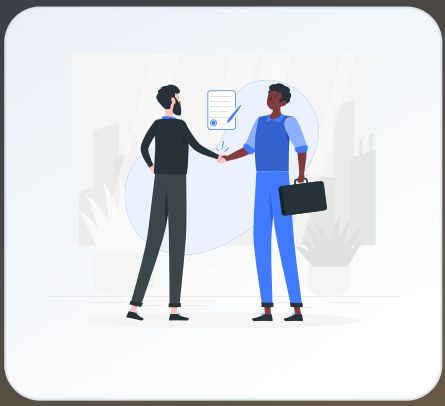
MODULE 4 · FREELANCER-TO-STARTUP TOOLKIT

Winning Clients

Turning conversations into clients, sell by understanding, not pressuring. Uncover the real problem, and let the right solution sell itself.





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MODULE FOUR

Winning Clients

04

Most freelancers dislike selling because they think it means convincing or pressuring. It doesn't, good selling is just understanding, then helping.

Clients don't buy a service for its own sake, they buy a **solution to a problem**. This module replaces the sales pitch with a simple, repeatable **conversation**: understand the client's situation, uncover the real pain, help them picture success, and only then recommend. Sales stops being persuasion and becomes helping people make good decisions.



By the end, a participant can

- Run a structured sales conversation without pressure or scripts.
- Uncover a client's real pain and needs through good questions.
- Handle objections by returning to value, and agree a clear next step.

⏱ ~3 hrs facilitated | 3 facilitator-led + 2 self-directed | 🌍 Localised · PT · LT · SI | Youthpass · Communication + entrepreneurship

CONCEPTS IN THIS MODULE

1 · Sell the outcome, not the task
2 · Understand first, sell later
3 · The four-step conversation
4 · Step 1 · Discover the pain
5 · The 5-Why method
6 · Bridge today to the future
7 · Handle objections like a pro
8 · Closing is just the next step

ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES

F1 · Discover Before You Sell, 60 min
F2 · Handling Objections, 60 min
F3 · Right Time to Recommend, 60 min
S1 · Reframe Your Pitch, 30 min
S2 · Your Discovery Questions, 40 min
+ Case study · resources · templates

WHAT CLIENTS ACTUALLY BUY

Sell the outcome, not the task

Clients don't buy your hours or your service, they buy the result it gives them. Nobody wants a logo; they want a business that looks trustworthy. Nobody wants a website; they want more customers. When you sell the task you compete on price. When you sell the outcome you become worth paying for.



Sell the Outcome, Not the Task

Clients don't buy your service, they buy the problem it solves.

THE SERVICE · what you do	THE OUTCOME · why they buy
"I build websites."	"I help you look professional and win enquiries."
"I create social posts."	"I keep you visible so customers keep coming."
"I do coaching sessions."	"I help you make confident decisions, faster."

The service is the method. The client's problem is the reason for buying, so lead with the reason.

The task is the method

Your service is how you deliver, it's not the reason anyone buys. Lead with the reason: the change the client will feel, not the deliverable you'll produce.

Outcomes escape price wars

Ten designers offer "a logo" at ten prices. Only you offer "a brand clients trust on sight." Sell that, and there's no one to compare you to.

The service is the method. The client's problem is the reason for buying, so lead with the reason.

THE MINDSET THAT WINS

Understand first, sell later

The instinct when meeting a client is to talk, to pitch, to prove yourself. The professionals do the opposite: they ask and listen first, and sell almost last. A conversation aimed at understanding builds trust and uncovers the real problem, which is exactly what lets you recommend something the client actually wants to buy.



Understand First, Sell Later

Drop the pitch, open a collaborative conversation instead.

THE PITCH MINDSET

"I'm here to sell you my service."

The client gets guarded, cautious, and closed.

THE SOLUTION MINDSET

"Let's find out together if I can help."

The client feels safe, opens up, and shares the real problem.

Success begins with understanding, not presenting.

Diagnose before you prescribe

A doctor who prescribes before examining is dangerous. Understand the client's situation fully before you propose anything, the recommendation is only as good as the diagnosis.

Listening is the sale

Every question that shows you understand builds more trust than a paragraph of pitching. People buy from those who clearly get their problem.

Approach every conversation to understand, not to pitch. Success begins with understanding, not presenting.

A SIMPLE STRUCTURE

The four-step conversation

Selling well isn't a talent, it's a structure you can follow. Four steps: discover the pain, identify the need, help the client envision success, then recommend. Do the first three properly and the fourth, the actual pitch, almost makes itself. Most freelancers rush to step four; the professionals live in steps one to three.



The Four-Step Sales Conversation

A simplified Solution-Selling flow, understand fully before you recommend.

1	2	3	4
DISCOVER the pain	**IDENTIFY** the needs	**ENVISION** success	**RECOMMEND** the solution
the real problem, not the symptom	what a solution must achieve	paint the future once it's solved	bridge today to that future

Steps 1–3 are all questions. Get them right and step 4, the actual selling, becomes the easy part.

Three steps of listening, one of talking

The first three steps are about understanding the client; only the last is about your solution. If step four feels hard, you rushed steps one to three.

Envision before you recommend

Before pitching, help the client picture the better future. Once they can see success clearly, your recommendation is simply the route to a place they already want to reach.

Understand fully before you recommend. Do steps 1–3 well and step 4 sells itself.

THE LONGEST STEP

Discover the pain

Clients rarely describe their real problem, they describe a symptom. “I need a new website” is a symptom; the pain underneath might be “I'm losing clients to competitors who look more professional.” Discovering that pain, with patient, open questions, is the longest and most important step, because you can only solve a problem you've actually reached.



Step 1 · Discover the Pain

The longest part, ask, dig, and reach the cause beneath the symptom.

SITUATION understand today	ROOT CAUSE find the why	IMPACT is it worth fixing?
“How do you handle this now?”	“When did it start?”	“How does it affect the business?”
“What's working about it?”	“What have you tried? Results?”	“What's it costing you / your team?”

Clients first describe symptoms. Your job is the follow-up question that reaches the real cause.

Symptoms hide the pain

What a client first asks for is usually a symptom, not the cause. Keep asking gentle questions until you reach the real frustration underneath.

Ask, don't assume

It's tempting to assume you know the problem, you often don't. Let the client tell you, with open questions and genuine curiosity, before you decide what they need.

Clients describe symptoms; your follow-up questions reach the cause. Understand the pain before anything else.

REACH THE ROOT

The 5-Why method

When a client names a problem, ask “why?”, and keep asking, about five times. Each answer peels back a layer until you hit the root cause, which is usually very different from where you started. The 5-Why method is a simple, powerful tool for step one: it drills past the symptom to the real problem, where your real value lives.



The 5-Why Method

Follow-up questions that drill from the symptom down to the root cause.

SYMPTOM
“Our conversion rate is low.”

↓

WHY?
“The leads are poor quality.”

↓

WHY?
“They're not our target customers.”

↓

WHY?
“Our ads reach the wrong people.”

↓

ROOT CAUSE
“We don't clearly know who our ideal client is.”

Stop too early and you sell “better leads.” Reach the root and you sell the real fix, worth far more.

Five whys to the root

Each “why?” goes one layer deeper. By the fifth, you're usually at the true cause, not the surface complaint, and that's the problem worth solving.

The root is where the value is

Anyone can fix the symptom. Reaching the root cause is what lets you solve the problem properly, and charge for solving something that actually matters.

Drill past the symptom to the root cause, that's where the real problem, and your real value, live.

CONNECT THE GAP

Bridge today to the future

Once you understand the pain, your job is to build a bridge: from where the client is now (the problem) to where they want to be (the vision), with your solution as the span between. Connect what you recommend directly to the pain and future they described, and the sale stops being a pitch, it becomes the obvious way across.



Your Solution Is the Bridge

Span the gap from the client's painful today to the future they described.



Recommend only after pain, need and vision are clear, then the solution obviously bridges the gap.

Pain, need, vision, solution

Name the pain, state the need it creates, paint the future of it solved, then offer your solution as the bridge. In that order, the recommendation feels inevitable.

Recommend when the far side is clear

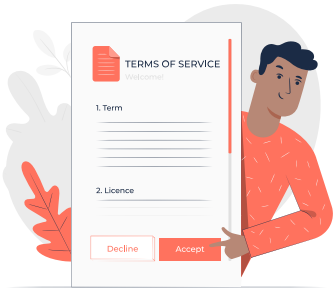
Don't propose your solution until the client can see the future they want. A bridge to nowhere sells nothing; a bridge to a place they crave sells itself.

Recommend only once pain, need and vision are clear, then connect the solution to exactly what you heard.

WHEN THEY PUSH BACK

Handle objections like a pro

An objection isn't a rejection, it's a question about value in disguise. “It's too expensive” usually means “I'm not yet sure it's worth it.” The professional never pushes back; they get curious, understand the real hesitation, and gently guide the conversation back to the outcome. Handled well, an objection is the moment a sale is actually made.



Handle Objections Like a Pro

An objection is a question in disguise, go back to the value, not the price.

“It's too expensive.”	They're unsure of the value. Explore what they're comparing against, then return to the pain it solves.
“I need to think about it.”	They lack a clear picture. Ask what specifically they'd like to think through, then fill that gap.
“Just send me a proposal.”	Often a polite exit. Confirm the pain and next step first, so the proposal answers a real need.

Never push for the decision, understand the hesitation, then guide.

An objection is a question

Behind “too expensive” or “let me think” is usually an unanswered question about value or risk. Answer the question, don't fight the objection.

Never push, get curious

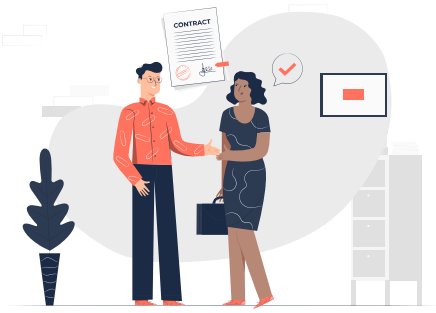
Pushing back makes clients defensive. Instead ask what's behind the hesitation, understanding the real concern is what dissolves it, not persuasion.

An objection is a question about value. Never push, understand the hesitation, then guide back to the outcome.

THE RIGHT NEXT STEP

Closing is just the next step

Forget the high-pressure “close.” In real client work, closing simply means agreeing the right next step together, a proposal, a trial, a follow-up call. If you've understood the pain and built the bridge, the next step is obvious and low-pressure. The goal isn't to force a yes today; it's to keep moving forward, together.



Closing Is Just the Next Step

Not a hard sell, a clear, agreed action you both walk toward.

toward a shared yes

4 **Agree together**
a booked call, a trial, a proposal, a shared yes

3 **Propose the step**
suggest one concrete next action, not “buy now”

2 **Confirm value**
check the solution fits what matters most

1 **Summarise**
reflect back the pain, need and vision you heard

The objective isn't to close today, it's to agree the right next step together.

Agree a next step, not a signature

You don't have to win everything today. A clear, agreed next step, a proposal, a small trial, a scheduled call, is a successful close that keeps momentum.

No pressure, just direction

If the earlier steps were done well, closing is natural. Simply propose the logical next step and check the client's happy to take it, no arm-twisting required.

The objective isn't to close today, it's to agree the right next step together.

FACILITATOR-LED

F1 • Discover Before You Sell

60 min

Role-play & discussion

BASED ON

Selling a service · Solution Selling · the first client conversation · the 5-Why method.

BY THE END, PARTICIPANTS CAN

Run a discovery conversation without pitching, and uncover a client's real pain and needs.

Step by step

1. **Frame it** · 5 min
   The goal is to understand, not to sell. Today nobody is allowed to pitch, only ask and reflect.
2. **Demo the two mindsets** · 10 min
   Role-play a pitchy conversation, then a curious one. Ask the group to spot the difference in how the "client" responds.
3. **Discovery in pairs** · 20 min
   A plays a client with a vague complaint; B asks situation, cause and impact questions, no offer. Then swap.
4. **Reach the root** · 10 min
   Each pair uses follow-up questions (5-Why) to move from the symptom to the underlying cause.
5. **Debrief** · 10 min
   What was the real pain vs the first complaint? What was hardest? (Usually: resisting the urge to pitch.)
6. **Commit** · 5 min
   Each person writes three discovery questions they'll use in a real conversation this week.

THE FRAMEWORK

Understand the situation, pain and needs before ever discussing a solution.

→ See the full diagram

MATERIALS

Printed Discovery Question Bank; role-play briefs (a client with an outdated website / few enquiries); a listening-tally sheet.

FACILITATOR PREP

Read the four-step framework. Prepare one relatable client scenario. Be ready to model a bad (pitchy) and a good (curious) conversation yourself.

Facilitator tips

The pitch reflex is universal, enforce "questions only." For shy learners, give the full question bank to read from. For migrant/Roma youth, discovery can happen in their community and first language, their networks are a real client source, not a limitation.

→ What can I do next?

Hold one real discovery conversation this week and write down the client's exact words about their problem.

Reflection & Youthpass

What did I learn by asking that I would have missed by pitching? **Youthpass:** Communication (active listening) + entrepreneurship, "I can learn the real problem instead of guessing."

★ Expert extension

Map each question you asked to a step (situation / cause / impact). Gaps show which part of the client's world you didn't yet understand, and where objections would later have come from.

FACILITATOR-LED

F2 • Handling Objections

60 min

Practice & discussion

BASED ON

Handling objections by returning to value, pain and desired outcomes.

BY THE END, PARTICIPANTS CAN

Respond to common objections without pressure, by reconnecting to the value discovered earlier.

Step by step

1. **Frame it** · 5 min
   An objection isn't rejection, it's a request for more clarity, usually about value.
2. **The wrong instinct** · 10 min
   Show what pushing for a decision does. Then show acknowledging + exploring the concern instead.
3. **Objection stations** · 20 min
   In pairs, draw an objection card and practise: acknowledge → explore → return to the pain and outcomes.
4. **The price reframe** · 10 min
   Rehearse reconnecting "too expensive" to the cost of NOT solving the problem discovered earlier.
5. **Debrief** · 10 min
   Which responses felt honest and which felt like tricks? Keep only the honest ones.
6. **Commit** · 5 min
   Each person writes their calm, value-based answer to the objection they fear most.

THE FRAMEWORK

An objection is a question about value, go back to the pain, not the price.

→ See the full diagram

MATERIALS

Objection cards ("too expensive", "need to think", "send a proposal"); the discovery notes from F1 to reconnect to.

FACILITATOR PREP

Read the objections section. Prepare 4–5 real objection cards. Have example value-based responses ready to model.

Facilitator tips

Some learners fear objections as personal rejection, reframe them as normal and useful. Ban manipulative closing tricks; everything here is about honesty and understanding. Let anxious learners script their exact sentence.

→ What can I do next?

Next time you hear an objection, ask one exploring question before you answer anything.

Reflection & Youthpass

Which objection do I fear most, and what honest question could I ask instead of defending? **Youthpass:** Communication + entrepreneurship, "I can turn a 'no' into a better conversation."

FACILITATOR-LED

F3 · Is It the Right Time to Recommend?

60 min

Judgement & role-play

BASED ON

Envisioning success and recommending a solution, knowing when the conversation is ready.

BY THE END, PARTICIPANTS CAN

Judge whether pain, needs and vision are clear enough to recommend, and make a recommendation that bridges to them.

Step by step

1. **Frame it** · 5 min
   Recommending too early is the classic mistake. First check: are pain, need and vision all clear?
2. **Ready or not?** · 15 min
   Groups read transcripts and decide if it's time to recommend. If not, what's still missing?
3. **Envision success** · 10 min
   Practise the step-3 questions that help a client picture the future once the problem is solved.
4. **Build the bridge** · 20 min
   Each learner writes a Pain → Need → Vision → Solution recommendation for one scenario, in the client's words.
5. **Share & refine** · 10 min
   A few read theirs aloud; the group checks the solution connects to what was actually heard.

THE FRAMEWORK

Recommend only when pain, need and vision are clear, then bridge today to the future.

→ See the full diagram

MATERIALS

The Pain→Need→Vision→Solution bridge sheet; short conversation transcripts (some ready to recommend, some not).

FACILITATOR PREP

Read steps 2–4. Prepare transcripts at different stages of readiness. Model one clear pain→solution bridge.

Facilitator tips

Watch for learners racing to the recommendation, send them back to gather the missing piece. Keep the vision step concrete and in the client's language, not yours.

→ What can I do next?

For a real prospect, write out their pain, need and vision before you draft any proposal.

Reflection & Youthpass

Was my last recommendation built on what the client said, or on what I wanted to sell? **Youthpass:** Entrepreneurship, "I can time my recommendation and connect it to the client's real goals."

★ Expert extension

A weak recommendation usually traces to a weak discovery. When a proposal is ignored, go back and find which of pain / need / vision you never actually established.

SELF-DIRECTED · ~30 min · Mini-mission

S1 • Reframe Your Pitch

Turn what you do into why it matters, the outcome the client actually buys.

1. **Write your service line**
   the plain "I do X" version.
2. **Ask "so that what?"**
   keep asking until you reach a real client outcome.
3. **Write the outcome line**
   "I help [client] achieve [result]."
4. **Test it on someone**
   does it make them ask "how?", that's a good sign.



→ Next

Use your outcome line as your intro everywhere, profile, proposals, first hellos.

✎ Your workings

Reflection & Youthpass

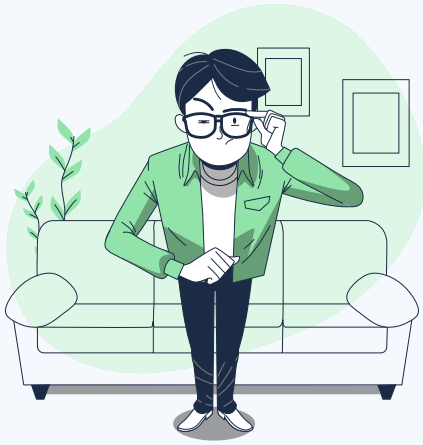
Did I understand before I recommended? Where did I talk when I should have asked?

SELF-DIRECTED · ~40 min · Planning exercise

S2 • Your Discovery Questions

Build the question set you'll bring to every client conversation.

1. **Pick a real client type**
   one kind of client you want more of.
2. **Write 2 questions per group**
   situation · root cause · impact, use the bank.
3. **Add a needs and vision question**
   "what would success look like in 6–12 months?"
4. **Rehearse staying quiet**
   ask, then let the silence do the work.



→ Next

Take your questions into one real conversation this week, and only listen.

✎ Your workings

Reflection & Youthpass

Did I understand before I recommended? Where did I talk when I should have asked? **Youthpass:** "I can hold a sales conversation that helps the client decide, without pressure."

A WORKED CONVERSATION

The construction company's website

A freelancer who builds websites for small businesses gets an enquiry: a **local construction company** wants a new website because "the current one is outdated." The easy move is to quote for a website. Instead, the freelancer runs the four steps.

Discover the pain. "How are enquiries coming in now?" It turns out the site barely appears on Google and the few visitors never call. The outdated look is the *symptom*; the real pain is **not enough enquiries to plan the year or hire with confidence.**

Identify needs & envision success. What would success look like? "A steady stream of local enquiries, enough to keep the crew busy through winter." Now the goal is clear, and it's not "a prettier website."

Recommend. The freelancer bridges it back: "A new site built around local search, so people looking for a builder in your area find you and call, steadying your enquiries through the quiet months." Same website work, but sold as the outcome the client actually wanted, at a value that reflects it.

Composite scenario from the SHIFT partnership's real-life sales worksheet. Facilitator tip: run it live as a role-play (see F1), pausing at each step to ask "what's the real pain now?".



THE MODULE 4 IDEAS IN THIS STORY

- **Outcome, not the task →**
- **Discover the pain (not the symptom) →**
- **The 5-Why root cause →**
- **Bridge pain → solution →**

What you can borrow, for any service

1. **Don't quote the request.** The first ask ("a new website") is rarely the real need. Slow down and find it.
2. **Sell the outcome.** "Steady local enquiries" is worth far more than "a website", and it's what they actually want.
3. **Bridge it back.** Recommend in the client's own words, connecting the fix to the pain and the future they described.

Same work, sold differently: not "a website," but the steady enquiries the client was really after.

GO DEEPER

Resource library

Everything to go further with Module 4. The **printable templates are built into this booklet** (next pages) and also at shift.elnlab.eu/resources.

SHIFT printable templates

- First-Contact / Cold-Call Guide · S1 ↗
- Discovery Question Bank · F1/S2 ↗

Reading & further learning

- Solution Selling, Michael Bosworth
- SPIN Selling, Neil Rackham
- The Mom Test, Rob Fitzpatrick
- To Sell Is Human, Daniel Pink

Practise the skill

- Role-play with a peer, questions only
- Record one real call and review your talk-vs-ask ratio
- Write pain→need→vision before any proposal
- Keep a "great questions" list that works

Where to find first clients

- Your existing network, tell them the outcome you deliver
- Local businesses that serve the same clients
- Community groups & the weekly market
- Referrals, every happy client feeds the top

Watch & listen (free)

- Solution Selling, explained
- SPIN questions, walkthrough
- The Mom Test, talk

Case study

A worked four-step conversation is on the previous page, the construction company's website. Run it live as a role-play with F1.

PRINTABLE TEMPLATE · 1 OF 2

First-Contact / Cold-Call Guide

A structure for reaching out for self-directed activity **S1**, stay curious, and aim only for the next step.

First-Contact / Cold-Call Guide

SHIFT · print & use

A structure, not a script, stay curious and aim only for the next step.

1 · Open warmly
Who you are, and one sentence on who you help.

2 · The reason
"I'm reaching out because businesses like yours often struggle with ..."

3 · Ask, don't pitch
One genuine question about their situation. Then listen.

4 · Offer a next step
"Would a short call to explore it be useful?", not "do you want to buy?"

5 · If not now
"No problem, may I follow up in a month?" Leave the door open.

▶ **Your goal is a conversation, never a hard sell. Curiosity opens more doors than pressure.**

1. **Open with the outcome**, one line on who you help and how, not a list of services.
2. **Ask, don't pitch**, one genuine question about their situation, then listen.
3. **Aim for a next step**, a short call to explore, never "do you want to buy?"

A first contact is a conversation, not a sale. Curiosity opens more doors than pressure.

PRINTABLE TEMPLATE · 2 OF 2

Discovery Question Bank

The questions for facilitator activity **F1** and self-directed **S2**. Ask one, then be quiet.

Discovery Question Bank

SHIFT · print & use

Bring these to any client conversation, ask, then be quiet.

SITUATION	" How are you handling this today? " What's working about it?
ROOT CAUSE	" When did you first notice it? " What have you tried, and what happened?
IMPACT	" How is it affecting the business? " What's it costing your team or customers?
NEEDS	" What would you like to achieve? " What must a solution deliver?
VISION	" What would success look like in 6–12 months? " How would that change things?

1. **Stay in questions** through steps 1–3, situation, cause, impact, needs, vision.
2. **Reach the root**, follow up until you're past the symptom to the real cause.
3. **Only then recommend**, once pain, need and vision are all clear.

Bring these to every client conversation. The best questions, and the silence after them, win the work.