What Would Socrates Say?

By Richard Petrie

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How to Flip Client Objections Using 5 Simple Questions

Socrates didn’t build buildings — but he built belief. Here’s how to use his method to win more projects without being pushy.

Introduction: The Ancient Greek Who Outsold Every Architect Alive

Socrates didn’t build buildings — but he built belief.
And if you’ve ever sat across from a hesitant client, you know belief is half the battle.

He never begged for approval, dropped his fees, or tried to “close” anyone. He just asked questions that quietly turned other people’s certainty into curiosity.

He didn’t win arguments. He led people to their own conclusions. And that’s exactly what you need when a client says: “We just want something simple.” or “We’ll wait until things settle down.”

Those aren’t objections — they’re unexamined thoughts. The moment you start explaining, you lose. The moment you start asking, you lead.

Here are the 5 Socratic questions you can use to guide clients to clarity without pressure or persuasion.

The Socratic 5 – Quick Reference

1. Say it clearly	“What do you mean by that?”
2. Prove it	“What makes you confident that’s true?”
3. Show it	“Can you give me an example?”
4. Consider other angles	“What else could be true?”
5. Check the stakes	“If you’re wrong, what might you miss?”

Summary: Why Socrates Would’ve Been a Brilliant Architect

If you think about it, Socrates and architects aren’t that different.
He shaped ideas. You shape space.
He asked better questions. You draw better answers.

And like any good architect, he understood that structure matters.
The wrong foundation — in thinking or in design — makes everything crumble.

That’s how you move from chasing clients to coaching them — from convincing to collaborating.

Because you don’t need to push people to make good decisions. You just need to help them see clearly.

So next time someone says, “We’ll think about it,” take a deep breath, smile, and channel your inner Greek philosopher.

Don’t argue. Don’t rush. Don’t sell. Just ask.

And watch as their thinking — and your project pipeline — quietly transforms.

— Richard Petrie

P.S. The most powerful tool in your studio isn’t Revit or Photoshop. It’s the right question asked at the right time.

Socratic Architect Card

Objection: Let me think about it

• What exactly are you thinking over?

• What would need to happen for you to feel certain moving forward?

• Has waiting ever made a decision easier?

• What would someone who’s done this before say?

• If you wait, what opportunity might you miss?

Socratic Architect Card

Objection: You're too expensive

• What are you comparing that to?

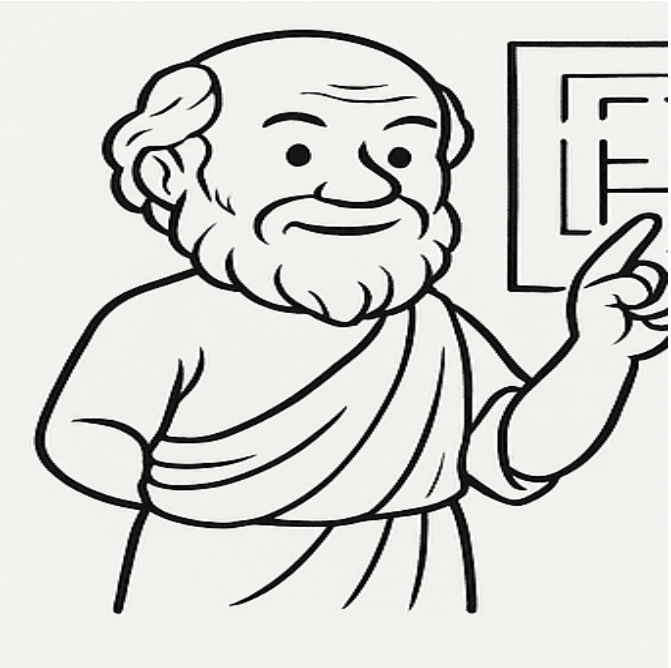
• What makes you confident a lower price means the same value?

• Can you think of a cheaper option that turned out well?

• Could a higher investment protect you later?

• If expectations aren’t met, what would that cost?

Socratic Architect Card



Objection: We'll use our builder’s draftsman

• What exactly will the draftsman handle?

• What makes you confident they’ll solve your site challenges?

• Know anyone who did that and got high quality?

• Do you prefer fast or timeless?

• If limits appear later, how will you feel?

Socratic Architect Card

Objection: We just want a few sketches first

- What would those sketches show you?
- Why confident sketches answer the big questions?
- Seen great sketches turn into disappointing buildings?
- What if discovery avoids expensive redesign later?
- If we skip groundwork, what could go wrong?

Socratic Architect Card

Objection: We'll wait until things settle down

• What will ‘settled’ look like?

• Why are you confident waiting will help?

• When has waiting actually created clarity?

• What if designing now is the smart move?

• If building costs rise, what happens to your plan?

Socratic Architect Card

Objection: We'll just manage it ourselves

- Which parts will you manage?
- How will that fit around your own work and life?
- Know anyone who did that and stayed sane?
- Is control doing everything — or having structure?
- If something goes wrong, who carries the risk?

Socratic Architect Card

Objection: We’re getting other quotes

• What exactly are you comparing?

• How will you judge value versus price?

• Ever gone cheap and paid twice?

• Would you compare who reduces risk instead of cost?

• If the cheapest option derails, what’s the real cost?

Socratic Architect Card

Objection: We just want something simple

• What does simple look like to you?

• Why are you confident simple will give you what you want?

• Can you show me a project you'd call simple?

• What if elegance—not simplicity—is what you're actually after?

• If we under-design in the name of simplicity, what might you regret later?

Socratic Architect Card

Objection: We're not ready to start yet

• What needs to happen before you'll feel ready?

• How do you know waiting will help?

• Has waiting ever created clarity before?

• What if starting is how you create readiness?

• If you delay, what might change for the worse?