

Closing the Sale – Why is it so Misunderstood?

Closing is an integral part of the sales process and is used to conclude the transaction of making a sale. So why is it that volumes of books and sales seminars focus so much on closing the sale? After all, whilst it's an important step it isn't the be all and end all to sales...or is it? Some companies think so and have dedicated sales staff referred to as 'closers', usually the high performers of the sales team. At the other extreme there are salespeople who think it's beneath them to close, in other words ask for the order. You can hear them saying, *"The prospect will go ahead and buy once they see how good the product or service is."* Is it any coincidence that they languish at the foot of the sales team chart?

Why, when we've done all the hard work, have found a solution to our prospects' problems do we shy away from asking them to go ahead? Why does this part cause stress for so many salespeople? I once witnessed a salesperson's voice change so dramatically when he was about to attempt to close, that the prospect showed concern and asked if he was okay.

Genuinely relating with prospects and clients will be a problem when the focal point of the conversation is on closing because prospects/clients have the sense that the sale is more important to the salesperson than they are. As buyers, we are better educated and informed than ever before and are probably resistant to old sales styles, so using robotic methods of closing will only attract objections and an emotional divide between you and your prospect. The prospect may think they want what you have anyway and give you the business just to get rid of you. However: they may not have really got what was in it for them and might then call your office and cancel. This is not a foundation on which to build future repeat business.

The sales process does vary depending on the type of product and its selling environment. For example in Direct Selling where you have just the one meeting to win the order, many of the closing techniques developed have been taught in sales courses for decades, with a strong emphasis on building emotional involvement followed by closing which is done multiple times. The reason is that the prospect, who isn't really convinced, objects, the salesperson responds and recloses and this cycle can be repeated many times. Closing terms such as the T or Benjamin Franklin Close, Alternate Close, Assumptive Close and the Direct close are some of the more popular ones.

However in Relationship or Consultative Sales the selling cycle is longer and more complex involving many people in the buying decision process. In these selling environments the salesperson needs to identify key problems that are causing concern. These can be high operating costs or an opportunity that can give the organisation an advantage in their market. Closing becomes easy when the right product or service is recommended; in fact in many cases the client will do the closing for you, asking you when you can get started.

So where from here you might ask?

The key to successful closing isn't at the end of the sales process but at the beginning. What does that mean? A range of other core skills needs to be mastered and when these skills are used well closing will be a breeze. You will also set up an environment where future sales opportunities will be open to you.

So what are these other core skills?

1) Know your natural sales style(s)

It's amazing how many salespeople are unaware of their predominant sales style(s) and the impact it or they have on every skill within the sales process. In fact it's possible to have 2 or 3 sales styles which can provide greater selling flexibility.

Without this knowledge, building rapport, developing trust and creating an environment where the prospect feels they like, trust and believe the salesperson is akin to playing Russian Roulette. The appropriate sales style will help to develop empathy, allowing you to understand the thoughts, feelings and motives of the prospect. They will feel central to the decision making process because it's about what they want and need. It will also give you a pointer on how best to proceed.

Not knowing your natural sales style and how to style shift in order to match the buyer will severely limit your success in sales. Because you will only be able to consistently sell to prospects and clients whose buying style matches you, many opportunities will continue to be missed. For example the way rapport is built with a *task orientated* prospect is different from a *people orientated* prospect. Whilst you will understand this, decades of coaching salespeople has shown me it's an area that isn't grasped easily and requires education and practice.

2) Ask the right questions and listen

Think of the 20/80 rule when asking questions. You must ask the right questions for 20% of the time encouraging the prospect to speak for the other 80%. Remember, when your prospect is talking, you are the one in control of the meeting. They will give you the valuable information enabling you to recommend the right product or service whilst allowing your prospect to feel relaxed. The reason for this is people relax when the other person actively listens and shares good eye contact. It shows respect and genuine caring.

3) Recommend the right product or service

Structured sales language is used to effectively communicate your recommendation. The structure makes it easy for the prospect to understand, allows them to make an informed decision more easily and this impacts positively on closing the sale. The structure is Features, Transition Phrases and Benefits. In our experience salespeople generally do a great job in highlighting the features of their product or service.

However they then fail in closing the business because too many features have been given, sadly many of which are of no interest to the prospect and for those that are of interest, the sales person has failed to link them to a benefit or value for the prospect.

The features and benefits are linked when you use Transition Phrases such as *"What that means is"* or *"The end result will be."* The features lie with your product or service, the benefit or value is the expected outcome for the prospect. It's the tailored benefits, in other words "what's in it for them", that generate the expression of interest which makes closing easy.

4) Close – the natural conclusion to a good meeting

Closing should feel natural to your prospect and to you. If you have applied your sales process well you will attract expressions of interest, or buying signals. For example *"If I give you the order now when could I expect delivery?"* or *"What are your terms?"* The prospect is interested in buying and you are close to a conclusion but not there just yet. A common mistake is to give an answer and leave it at that. This is not closing.

Closing is to ask a question your prospect can easily answer in the normal flow of the conversation. So in the first example the response could be *"You can expect delivery on Friday. Would this be a suitable day or do you need it urgently?"* This answers their question and provides an option if the time frame isn't suitable. Alternatively you could say *"When would be a good day for you to receive delivery?"*

Whatever day is given opens the discussion for negotiation and the prospect is totally involved and feels in control of the proceedings.


If any area of the sales process hasn't been applied correctly, let's say you spoke too fast and the prospect missed a vital benefit you can expect a sales objection.

Closing is an important skill to master just like any other part of the sales process. Remember, you've mastered the skills from the beginning and now it's simply the bit that happens at the conclusion of the meeting and should be the easiest part to apply, because by then you have done all the hard work leading up to it.

For more information or if you would like to discuss your particular situation please contact Kurt Newman on 02) 9453 9288 or email sales@salesconsultants.com.au.



Kurt's expertise is in sales strategy, sales management development; group structured sales training and infield sales coaching. As a sales person he has successfully sold products and services in 4 major market/product segments: new product sales, consultative sales, relationship sales and retail. During his selling career he created sales records for three companies in two industries and won many sales awards for outstanding performance.

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