

How to Close the Sale

This article is a “how to” for you to pass along to your sales reps. With today’s competitive business climate you’ll help your team by passing along ideas on how to close the sale. This may help them convert the tough ones, the stalled ones, and even the ones they thought they’d lost.

Closing can be an anxious time for sales reps, it's do or die time, yes or no. There is a lot of pressure on you to say the right thing, in the right way, at the right time. No doubt, by the time you get to the close you have invested a great deal of time and energy into the sale. You care about the outcome of the sale and have a deep interest in getting to “yes”. Are there ways to increase your odds, close more sales, and feel more confident? Absolutely! The following steps will help you manage the “close” like every other area of the sales process – with ease and strategy.

Step 1. Readiness Assessment. Step one is exactly what it sounds like, you must assess how “ready” the client is to buy before you ask him or her to buy from you. Timing is essential in the close. If you sell too soon you risk appearing inexperienced, overanxious, and pushy. If you sell too late, or don’t ask for the business at all, the client will read this as a lack of confidence and you’ll create doubt within your buyer. I utilize one master question which guides Step 1 and all subsequent steps of the close. The customer is always thinking: “Based on all the options available to me, why should I do business with you?” Your ability to uncover the answer to this question during the sales process will often make or break your close. Ideally, the customer has decided that you are the best option for them and they’re ready to buy from you. Assumptions will kill the sale here and you must deal from accurate information. Your best strategy is to flush out all the answers by asking yourself a series of questions such as:

- What are the customer's objectives for making this purchase?
- What kind of business result is the customer trying to create?
- How well do my products and services meet these objectives?
- Have I clearly articulated the connection between the client's objectives and my products and services?
- What indicators is the client sending me about their readiness?
- How accepting have they been to my ideas?
- What's their sense of urgency in getting their problem solved or desire satisfied?
- Is there anything that the client has asked for that I have not delivered?

If you have a clear response to each of these questions than you have a good handle on the customer’s objectives, decision making criteria, timeline, and readiness. If not, go back and ask a few clarifying questions before you attempt to close the sale. If you feel that they are “ready” continue to Step 2.

Step 2. Final Summary: Now it is time for you to transition from selling to the close with a final summary. The objective here is to clearly and concisely state your

understanding of the client's situation and briefly review the fit between your products and services. The goal is to test the waters, you are making sure that you and the client are on track together. You must confirm that you've heard all of the details correctly and that the customer understands your solution correctly. This type of final summary gives you the ultimate opportunity to position yourself, your company, your products and services, and makes it easy for the prospective customer to say yes. Take a look at how this final summery works in action. Recently I was on a sales call with a mid-size bank proposing a sales training project for their team of Branch Managers. At the close of the meeting I simply stated "Okay, just to finalize for both of us where we are...your primary objective with this business development program is to give your Branch Managers the tools to be better sales executives, you need to increase small business checking accounts by 14%, and you'd like the rollout to happen in 8 small groups of 10-12 managers each, delivered over the next 3 months." You might check in here with a simple "Is that right?" or just look for a nod. In this case, I received a confirming nod and followed up with "As we discussed, the financial investment for this project is \$\$\$, which will ensure each manager participates in one sales skills-based session, participates in one learning lab, creates an action individual, and receives a 90-day coaching to sales success plan." That's it, the final summary has been delivered and the decision is on the table. This is where you must study the prospective client's nonverbal clues of facial expressions and body language. Do they appear accepting and interested, seem pleased and in agreement? Or does the look convey a message of surprise, confusion, or even distaste? Either way, it's time to go for the close, you've already put it on the table.

3. Invite Confirmation: The transition from the final statement to the asking for the business is to invite a confirmation of agreement. In the bank situation I very simply asked, "Does that cover everything?" to which the buyer responded "yes." If the customer is "with" you, they will quickly confirm with a yes and you will continue on to Step 4. If they still have some unanswered questions, this is the spot where you'll see objections surface. Don't charge ahead and don't pretend you don't notice the hesitation. Instead, be bold and deal with the objection directly as it comes up. Always stick with a solid objection handling process. In my experience the best objection handling process is collaborative in nature. The one I teach is a cycle which requires the sales rep to: Listen, Show Empathy (not sympathy), Ask Questions, Summarize, Answer, Check In, and Close Again. This process allows you to sell through involvement and shift from traditional objection handling to a more sophisticated process of problem solving. Rapport is maintained as the issues are resolved. A perfect set up to transition back to the close.

4. Ask for the Business: There are many kinds of tricky closes, with lots of fancy names, but in sales today you need to rise above the tactics and use a strong sales strategy to close the sale. My advice, be direct and expect the sale. So what are the actual words that you can use to close the sale? There are two approaches which work quite well, one is question-driven and one is statement-driven, both are strong and create great results. A question-driven example looks like this, when it's time to ask for the business you would simply ask "How does this look to you?" or "What's

your timeframe in getting this started?” or “Do you we have a ‘go’?” or “What’s your process for getting this going?” A statement-driven example will bridge the close with a strong statement such as: “Let’s take a look at next steps” or “So based on everything we’ve discussed, we’re looking at a November 1 kick-off, let’s check our calendars together right now”. The easiest way to ask for the business is to do just that, ask. Whether you are more comfortable with a question or a statement, make sure you ask! Back to the bank example for a moment, I used the question-driven close and directly asked “Shall we move forward with this?” and they nicely responded with a question “Absolutely, when can we schedule this?” Test a few of the suggestions I just mentioned with your customers and you decide which feels most natural to you and creates the best sales results.

Closing the sale is often the most dreaded part of the sale because it's where you either get paid or not. You've got time, energy, and emotion invested in the sale. You're strength will come from postponing your internal “noise” and focus on giving the prospective customer what he or she needs to say yes. The more sales that you expect to close, the more sales you will close. Consciously and deliberately spend time in each of the steps of this closing process – Readiness Assessment, Final Summary, Invite Confirmation, and Ask for the Business. Don't rush the prospective client, but don't linger either. Let the clues from your prospective customer guide the pace of the close while you focus on managing the steps of the close. Ultimately, this is decision time. Use the process to help your prospective clients see that based on all the options available to them, you are the best!