

**Executive White Paper**  
**Killer Closing Skills:**  
**Winning Strategies To Close More Business**



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One of the most challenging aspects of any sale is closing the deal. Knowing when to move from negotiation to finalizing the sale can be tricky waters to navigate, particularly if this is an area where you have struggled in the past.

In many ways, sales professionals typically see this aspect of interacting with clients as more of an art than a science. However, there is no mystery or hidden secrets in being able to close more business, but it does require an understanding of the process and how to adjust it to match the style, the needs and the interests of the person sitting across the table.

To help with your business closing skills and to convert qualified leads into customers, here are some critical techniques to master and incorporate into your sales closing process.

### **Testing the Waters**

While you may spend hours preparing a presentation and a sales strategy for introducing the product or service and developing trust and rapport with the prospective buyer, do you actually prepare for the close? Do you know how to test the buyer's perspective on how the meeting has gone thus far?

Making the transition from the sales portion of the presentation to the close means knowing what to say and how to frame the request. This has to be tailored to the prior discussion and not something that is just a standard phrase or a transition statement that you make regardless of the past dialogue. Think of it as testing to see if the information provided has met the needs of the client with regards to information and options. Then, if the client confirms they have the full picture and are ready to move forward, you can then complete the closing by asking for a commitment.

Being prepared through preparation, research and understanding what the client needs and how your product or service fills that need is critical. This provides the opportunity for statements such as:

- **After you deliver your sales presentation, ask these questions of the prospect, "Does that make sense?", "Are you with me so far?", "How does that sound?" and "Do you see what I mean?"**
- Another good question to ask during your sales presentation is, "Do you have any questions thus far?"\_



- Is there any further information that I can provide?
- What additional needs or requirements with this product/service need to be discussed to provide you what you need for a decision?
- With what we have discussed thus far, are the requirements you need being met with the product/service?
- What are your thoughts, ideas or insight into how this product/service will meet your needs?
- How do you see the solution/option/ideas we have discussed working for your company?
- Given what we have talked about so far, what additional questions might you have?

This is definitely not asking for the sale. This is the intermediate step and is often referred to as a trial close. The trial close will let you know if the buyer is not interested, interested but uncertain or ready to make the purchase.

The response of the buyer will let you know immediately what to do next. For example, if you ask the question, "How do you feel about the product?" you will get one of the three responses of not interested, interested but not sure or completely ready to do the deal.

Here are examples of how these might look and what to do next given the trial closing question of "How do you feel about the product":

- Not interested answer – "It is not going to suit our needs."
  - Sales Response – "I can understand that this is a new way to look at the challenge you are facing. Can you tell me more about the specific needs you have regarding XYZ?"

This type of open-ended question allows you to pinpoint just what the prospect is looking for and then provide information on how the product/service will fill those needs.



- Interested but not sure answer – "This sounds better than what we have now."
  - Sales Response – "We have talked about our XYZ, tell me a bit more about where you see the problems with your current XYZ system/product?"

This is another open-ended question that will provide more information on how to highlight the benefits of your product or service in relation to what the company is using now. This allows you to build a more complete picture of your product/service in the specific areas where the prospect sees challenges with their current supplier or product.

- Ready to make the purchase answer – " This is just what we need."
  - Sales Response – "Great. I have an order form that just needs your signature to get the delivery scheduled immediately."

This moves directly to the commitment from the prospect to make the purchase. This is not the time to ask open-ended questions but to confirm the sale and get the commitment and signed agreement.

Remember, the trail closing can be used to get a feel for the prospect and where they are in regards to closing the sale. By using a trial closing and open-ended questions for any response but the commitment to purchase, you keep the conversation moving forward and find out more about what the prospect is looking for and needs to make the sale.

### **Stay at the Table**

Physical presence does make a difference in closing a sale. It is important to have the right body language and to avoid making common mistakes that may inadvertently signal to the prospect you are uncertain about their commitment to the sale or, even worse, uncertain your product is the right fit.

Staying at the table is obviously critical for in-person sales meetings, but it is also important for phone sales meetings or even only video conference or Skype sales meetings. The actual presence at the table isn't always physical, but it is still conveyed through your voice, your choice of language and even the changes in tone, cadence and volume.



Conveying confidence in your ability to close the sale always starts with being informed and knowledgeable about the industry, the specific prospect and his or her company, as well as your product or service. This translates into a positive body language from the second you walk into the office or get on the phone.

Here are some simple ways to adjust your body language and become aware of how your physical and non-verbal messages can connect with your buyers to give you the edge in moving from presentations to sales closings.

- Posture counts – while your parents may have told you to sit up straight and keep your head up, it really adds up to looking more polished, professional and confident. Keep your shoulders relaxed and avoid scrunching them up to your neck as this can make you look stressed or in a hurry, limiting questions from the prospect.
- Match cadence – people are more comfortable when talking to someone with similar rates of speech. Individuals that speak slowly want to listen to someone with a slower rate of speed while fast talkers like others who have a faster cadence. This will also change over the course of the meeting. Speaking at a similar but not identical rate and avoiding sounding like you are rushing the close will be critical to making the prospect feel comfortable in proceeding. Remember, nodding with what the prospect is saying helps to confirm in their mind that they are making the right purchasing decision.
- Avoid bad habits – if you have a habit of rubbing your face, touching your hair or otherwise fidgeting, this can signal a sense of deceit or discomfort in your actions to the prospect. Avoid using these types of behaviors, including playing with jewelry or constantly wringing or moving your hands. While this is subtle, it can plant a seed of doubt in the prospect's mind and make them hesitate if they feel something is not being disclosed or accurately conveyed.
- Make eye contact – making eye contact needs to be done carefully. You don't want to appear to stare at the prospect and you don't want to come across as threatening. Make eye contact to stress areas of importance, agreement and interest. Also, use eye contact when you want to connect with the individual and show an understanding of the problems or issues that the company is facing. Making connections at key points in time also helps you to gauge when it is time to try a trial close and to judge their level of interest in continuing on with the conversation.



- Lean in – moving the body slightly forward and towards the speaker is a sign of being engaged, interested and positive about the conversation. Sitting back, pushing away or distancing yourself from the prospect can be signaling that you have already ended the conversation or are not interested.
- Focus fully – distractions such as cell phones, incoming emails and texts are a distraction that can turn off a prospective buyer. Even glancing down at a watch can signal to someone across the table that they are not the focus of your attention. Put everything on silent or, if you won't need the technology in the meeting, leave it in your office or in your car.

Since it is difficult to monitor the sales process, engage the prospect and watch your body language, try doing a mock sales presentation to a friend. Tape it and then play it back. Watch how your body position changes and the movements you use impact the other person's response. Also, listen for changes in the rate of speed, tone, inflection and volume that may be signaling frustration, impatience, uncertainty or even resignation that the prospect is not likely to make a purchase.

With this information, you can then begin rehearsing or practicing the control of these "tells" that may be undermining your ability to close the deal. Keep in mind, the same types of body language are also present in the prospect. Learning how to read his or her uncertainty, disinterest or frustration as well as their engagement and interest can assist in knowing what to emphasize and what to pivot from in the conversation.

### **Assume Every Prospect Will Be a Buyer**

There is nothing worse than preparing for a presentation if you already have the foregone conclusion that you are wasting your time. This is often the case when sales reps are told by colleagues that you can't sell into the company or that the person you are meeting with doesn't have the authority to make the decision.

Often these "sales myths" are predisposing you to do certain things to make the sales meeting become a self-fulfilling prophecy to walk away without a contract or a commitment for a sale. The mindset of wasting your time with the prospect will come across in the tone of voice and the level of enthusiasm you demonstrate. Additionally, it usually creates a situation where you, as the sales rep, are looking for a way to get out of the meeting and just provide the very basics of your presentation.



Ideally, if you are talking to the person with authority to sign a contract or make a deal, this half-hearted sales presentation is going to come across as flat and unproductive for the prospect. It is also going to reflect in how actively you engage in trying to learn more about the challenges the company is facing. Often it means you spend less time in research and preparation, which in turn means you may be caught with questions or problems that you haven't considered and don't know how to answer.

Go into every sales meeting with a positive, confident attitude that you will make the sale. This will help to be prepared, to know your industry and company information and to respond to issues, problems, needs and challenges for the prospect that come to light in your conversation.

## **Handling Negotiations**

It is very common in B2B sales that there will be considerable negotiation on the terms of the contract. While it may be possible to get a commitment to the sale and then negotiate the details, it is more common for the prospective buyer to want to hammer out the details and then commit to the purchase.

The negotiations over the details can often be developed from questions in a trial close. Good follow up questions may be framed to get to the challenges or the obstacles (either real or imaginary) that the prospect may see in doing business with the company.

For example a conversation may include:

Sales rep – How do you see the XYZ satisfying your needs? (trial close)

Prospect – I don't see it working at all with our current system. (not interested)

Sales rep – What specifically do you see as the incompatibility with your system? (open-ended question for more facts and information)

Prospect – You can't offer the volume or the delivery schedule we need. (more details provided about the negative response to the trial close)

Sales rep – If we address the volume and delivery schedule right now, would that satisfy your concerns and allow you to move forward? (moving to close)



Through this type of open negotiation, the sales rep continues to get more information from the client about the specific details that need to be addressed before the commitment for the purchase is requested. This is a very effective way to negotiate from a point of knowing what the buyer requires without making an assumption or trying to match needs that are not yet identified.

In this example, if the sales rep went back to sharing how the product would work in the current system without finding out it was the purchase volume and the delivery schedule that was holding the prospect back, the negotiation would be unsuccessful.

Remember, a no is not really a no in most cases. It is a message that the specific needs of the prospect are not being met or addressed in the conversation. It is a chance to find out more and create an agreement that satisfies those needs that will close the sale.

The other part of closing the deal is in being able to have the authority to actually negotiate the terms of the contract or the purchase agreement. As a sales professional, you should have a clear understanding of what you can offer as incentives to the prospect and when you need to confirm a decision with your sales manager or team leader.

The problem with not having a clear understanding of allowable negotiation parameters is that the prospective buyer can become very frustrated with the inability of the person across the table in finalizing the terms. It is similar to buying a car when the sales professional has to run back and forth to the sales manager to negotiate the final sales price and the added features.

Many prospective buyers, particularly when they have upper level decision-making authority, want to work with someone who has the same level of authority. They don't want to feel like they are working with a middleman who has no ability to close the deal without checking everything with a superior.

If you do have to talk to the sales manager for approval of negotiated terms be sure that:

- The sales manager is available to you at the time of your sales presentation. If you call and have to leave a voicemail, you run the risk of losing the buyer or creating frustration for the buyer in working with your company.





- Negotiate all terms and then make the call – this provides one phone call rather than multiple calls with each specific component of the deal.
- Keep your conversations brief – be as brief as possible on the call. For most buyers' time is money and your time on the phone with your sales manager is wasted time for the buyer.
- Consider conference calls – one effective option is to use a conference call to bring the sales manager or authority from your company into the meeting. This is often seen as very favorable for buyers who appreciate speaking to the person with authority directly while also creating a collaborative environment.

It is the best possible option to obtain prior approval for the terms that you anticipate to be required for the deal. This allows you to avoid the need to involve the sales manager or authority while also giving you the parameters to work within.

### **Known Outside or Inside Issues**

There can be any number of issues that are creating a sense of urgency for a prospective buyer to need to purchase your company's products or services. Knowing what these may be from changing industry standards to the growth of the company can be used effectively in moving from the sales presentation to the close.

Learning what these outside issues is now easier than ever before. By following the prospect and his or her company and industry on sites like LinkedIn and in industry and business publications, you can become familiar with where those pressure points to change, upgrade or improve for any given business.

Bringing these topics into the conversation can be a trigger for a prospect to move forward to becoming a buyer. When you can couple an event or a trigger to make a purchase with the availability or supply of your product or service, it is a very convincing close strategy.

For example, if you are selling a software application that meets an upcoming industry regulation change or requirement you can use that in a closing in a form similar to, "I understand that there are new security requirements in your industry that will be in effect next month. We currently have enough inventory to ship your



complete order immediately, will that help address the crunch that you must be experiencing to get this implemented?"

Depending on the place you assess the prospect to be in you can also use a more direct approach as well. This may look more like, "I have the ability to ship your full order tomorrow for delivery in two days, are you ready to sign the agreement to get it scheduled?"

Remember, the impending issue or change that may be motivating a prospect needs to be relative to your product or service. It won't work if you try to connect too many dots as it becomes unbelievable and loses authenticity.

### **Know Your Sales**

This is very different from knowing your product. By understanding companies your business sells to and how they relate to the prospect's business, you can create a sense of making the right choice by providing information that backs this claim.

This is a very powerful psychological message. For instance, if you are selling to a small business supply store and you can say that your company sells to Staples or Office Depot and they sell 5000 units per month you are creating a link between the prospect and a very well recognized office supply store.

In some cases, you may not be selling to Staples or Office Depot, but you may be able to find they market a similar product. Sharing that these channels sell a product that is similar, and then pointing out how your product has advantages, shows the prospect the possibilities.

It is important not to make inaccurate connections or provide irrelevant data. Case studies of how your products, services or support helped other businesses, reviews or feedback from industry analysts or experts are beneficial. Testimonials from your customers can be very helpful in creating the message that making a decision to buy from your company is the right thing to do because others are doing it and it is working for them.



## Learn to Ask the Right Questions

You may have heard the saying that there is no such thing as a bad question. While that may be true in some settings, in a sales meeting when you are moving to the close there are some very bad questions that need to be avoided at all costs if you are working with a person that is either still not showing interest or who is interested but not certain.

There are two basic types of questions. These include open-ended or open questions and closed or close-ended questions. Closed questions are those that can be answered with a yes or a no and are used to confirm something you already know or assume.

You can use a closed question with the prospect that is ready to buy. This could be in the form of confirming they are ready to sign the contract or verifying the terms of the sale.

However, if you give the prospect that is not yet convinced the chance to say "no," it puts a halt on further exploration of the needs of the prospect. It also opens the door to the prospect ending the meeting.

By using open-ended questions, which are questions that are answered with providing more information, you keep the conversation going to find any concerns. Consider the benefit of posing these questions that are constructed as open-ended questions compared to just getting yes or no answers:

- In what ways do you see this product/service addressing the issues you are facing?
- What would need to be included in terms to move this forward today?
- How would an ideal agreement for this product look from your perspective?

By using this type of questioning and staying with the information the prospect provides, you can continue to delve deeper into what they want to make a purchase. Often, they may also need clarification on the specifics of the product or service, don't assume they listened fully and attentively throughout your presentation.



## **Be Patient and Be Natural**

While it is important to be prepared and rehearsed in the presentation of the specifics of the product or service you are selling, the sales meeting itself cannot come across as scripted, acted or rote.

Some prospects may want to have more of a personal connection with their sales rep. They will want to know you are like-minded, have the same interests or perhaps have the same background in the industry.

Other prospects want to know more about your company and less about you specifically. They want to know they are buying from a leader in the industry that will stand behind their products or services.

Other prospects want a combination of both. While price and competitive terms will come into play in the final decision, they are not the only thing that buyers look to in making a purchase. In highly competitive industries, having the patience and the communication and conversational skills to answer questions, go with the prospect but still use your business sales plan will be important.

Coming across as natural and authentic in how the meeting transforms from introductions and "get to know you" to specifics of products will be important. It will be even more critical when moving into a trial closing, additional information finding through open-ended questions and then the close has to feel natural for the prospect.

Seeming rushed or forced in moving from one stage in the process to the other can undo all the good work you have done. You also don't want to be seen as dragging out the meeting or wasting the prospect's time. Staying within the time allotted and going to a trial close in advance of this actual point is always important to see where you stand.

When you receive the "ready to close" response, it is important to have the contract available and ready to fill in the blanks and get the signature. A common mistake that those new to sales make is to continue to keep talking and once the buyer is ready to close. This is not only frustrating for the buyer, but it can turn a sure sale into a lack of commitment. Talking the buyer out of the sale is not uncommon when the sales rep doesn't pick up on the clear signs of a close or doesn't simply provide the contract for approval once the buyer says yes.



## **Last Thoughts**

There is no single approach to closing a sale that works for all prospects and for all sales reps. Take the time to develop several techniques and closing strategies that are natural and comfortable for you to use.

Look carefully at how the prospect is responding and adjust your communication, presence, style and even your close to match with their needs and their preferred style. Keep notes on how different buyers respond to different techniques so you can continue to refine the close to be effective, efficient and customized to the individual across the table.

