

Denver Business Journal - July 16, 2007

<http://denver.bizjournals.com/denver/stories/2007/07/16/smallb4.html>

DENVER BUSINESS JOURNAL

Friday, July 13, 2007

To boost closings, follow these basic guidelines

Denver Business Journal - by [Garry Duncan](#)

Do you think your closing percentage should be higher?

An Internet search on closing techniques or a review of the business shelf at the local bookstore reveals dozens of techniques and philosophies on closing. Regardless of which set of closing techniques or philosophies you subscribe to, first review a few basics.

- Ask yourself, "Do I have enough qualified prospects in my funnel?"

Regardless of your technique or philosophy, you won't close enough sales if there aren't enough opportunities. Most seasoned representatives attest to the fact that when the funnel gets thin, courage fades. Fear of risking the relationship or upsetting the seller thwarts asking for a decision.

The best solution is to keep your funnel full. A review of your business likely shows that many sales happen close together. Why? Probably because the funnel was full and you were more confident, spawning more buyer confidence and thus more positive decisions. You were less fearful of losing the prospect.

- Even though you may have many possibilities in the funnel, are you sure they're really prospects?

Having interest or need alone doesn't make a prospect. Think of all the things you need and then consider which things (of significant investment) you'll actually buy. The list is probably quite a bit shorter -- and the same would be true for prospects.

One way to ascertain the urgency and necessity of a prospect's stated need is to explore the evidence and impact of their situation as part of your qualifying process.

- How often are you actually talking to the person who is the final decision maker?

It's difficult to close a sale with someone who can't make the decision, and it's equally difficult to get a contact to close for you. Subordinate contacts may be hesitant to ask superiors for a decision, not wanting to pester or annoy them.

Avoid this situation by obtaining the information you need about the decision process, decision

criteria and timing of the decision early, and then work to involve the final decision-maker before you invest too many resources into the project.

- A past mentor liked to say that the people most excited about what you have are often the least likely to buy because they usually have no money.

They may as well be excited, because they have no investment to lose. Focus panels confirm that mentor's sage advice, because participants often love an idea or new product until they have an opportunity to make a personal expenditure for it.

The point is, you can't close a sale for which there is no money or budget, so make sure you determine that before asking for the order.

Unfortunately, not all buyers can give an emphatic no, and are equally concerned about wanting to be polite, so they say positive things to be courteous.

Sellers, in turn, get "happy ears," confusing courtesy for interest and interest for commitment.

Get an objective ear on your calls by debriefing them with a manager or a colleague. Believing and being passionate about what you sell is a positive, but seems to impair hearing throughout the call. Improve closing percentages by being more astute and sensitive to red flags earlier.

Even with well-qualified prospects in your funnel, it's difficult for some buyers to make a decision without your assistance. Hesitation, cold feet, buyer's remorse -- or whatever you prefer to call it -- is real, and needs reassurance and gentle nudging to get a decision.

In these situations, timing is also important. Hard pressure usually doesn't work. But warranties, testimonials, hand holding and reassurance often do, as does telling them it's OK to tell you "no" so they can feel comfortable sharing their real concerns -- allowing you to address those.

There are hundreds of one-liners that exist on how to close. Here's one common line that's increasingly offensive to buyers:

"If I can ..., will you ... [buy]?"

It's old, offensive and a poor way to gain commitment. It takes away the choice of the prospect and sets up a greater likelihood to receive a stall or excuse.

Buyers have a sensitive ear to leading questions because they make them feel trapped. Increase comfort by asking the question in a non-leading, neutral way.

For example, "If I can ... what will you do, or what will happen next?"

This way, you get to the same result, and now you have empowered the customer to tell you the truth. Even if the answer is no, you have a greater chance of being a participant in future opportunities.

Your sales process and how you ask both are important. Whichever way you decide to ask, it's

important that your tonality and body language convey that you're comfortable, confident and sincere, so practice.

If you're uncomfortable, your prospect will sense it -- and increase their discomfort.

Garry Duncan is principal of Denver-based Leadership Connections, a sales training company. Reach him at 303-462-1277 or garry@leadershipconnections.com.

All contents of this site © American City Business Journals Inc. All rights reserved.