

## **Asking For the Sale Is a Process Not an Event**

Popular opinion maintains the most important skill in selling is the ability to close. Owners and sales managers validate that strong closers usually sell more than weak closers. Sellers who are uncomfortable closing may rationalize that educating the prospect will motivate them to buy. They reason that if the prospect understands the product or service completely, they will realize why their solution is best. Over presenting information can be effective with some analytical buying styles; however, this approach fails more than it succeeds. Excess information tends to confuse buyers and prolongs the cycle generating stalls and requests to 'think it over.' Think of closing as simply helping potential clients make a decision, even if the answer is 'no'. Incorporate these suggestions to help you close more comfortably and effectively:

- Closing works best as a process, rather than an event that occurs at the end of a sales presentation. By consistently taking your prospects through a process you will increase your closing percentage. A typical sales process might include: (1) the development of need; (2) qualifying for the decision process and criteria; (3) establishing a budget; (4) due diligence, if necessary; and (5) presenting a solution or proposal. Close each step with a question to gain commitment. When the prospect agrees (a decision) to the need to fix a problem, you move closer to the final 'yes'. Reach agreement early on which decision makers should be involved before presenting to shorten your cycle, and prevent surprises at the end. If you also clarify the ability of the buyer to make the required investment before presenting, you take away another obstacle to getting a 'yes'. By gaining mini decisions to stop or continue at each step, you move closer to a smaller and easier final decision.
- Second, if you, as a seller, truly believe in using integrity, and in turn, want complete honesty from your prospect, then you must lead by example and be completely honest and direct. Hence, if you are expecting a decision at the end of a sales call, inform the prospect of your expectations before presenting or submitting a proposal. It is easier than you might think. There are several ways to ask for a decision before presenting, but keep it simple and sincere. It could sound like this, "I am happy to put together a proposal (or presentation). Would you in turn feel comfortable giving a clear decision, yes or no, after reviewing it? Just tell me how much time you need to review it." Another approach might be, "Assuming I present our suggested solution to you, and you don't like it, would you be able to tell me that? If you do like it, what would happen next?" Mahan Khalsa, in his book Let's Get Real says it best, "Let's get real, or let's not play." Asking before presenting gains a more attentive audience and prospects like knowing they have a choice at the end. It may not be possible in some complex situations, but you can usually gain a clear next step and time frame, which moves you toward final closure.
- Third, realize that engaging a prospect to talk more will naturally result in easier decisions. Perhaps you have experienced asking a question, and as you asked it, your mind discovered the answer. Verbalizing makes it easier for many people to clarify their own thoughts and reach conclusions. Be prepared with provocative questions, listen closely, and then follow-up with clarifying questions. Even if your questions result in a less than favorable decision, you still have an opportunity to influence and change that decision. Once you leave and are no longer in front of your prospect, it is difficult to change their mind.
- Fourth, take advantage of the natural human response that scientists say exists in the 'old brain' called the amygdale. Here resides the basic human response to fight or flight. If you take something away most

people will either give it up, or fight for it. When prospects are on the fence or waffling, try taking your proposal away. One manager sent his representatives out to collect all proposals in the hands of prospects that had been without a decision for over thirty days. Those who were sincerely interested, said so, mostly giving yes decisions (fight), and the rest gave them back (flight), resulting in increased productivity due to saved time, energy, and resources chasing prospects not ready to buy.

Remember that some buyers have great difficulty making decisions, regardless of your skills. Work your sales process, ask more questions, and know what will happen before giving any presentation or proposal. Learn to take advantage of the natural human response of fight or flight. Decisions to not make a decision really mean it is 'no for now' and accept it as such. Above all, be sincere in your intent when asking, and use a comfortable tonality.

