

SALES BOOST

By Sara Lavenduski

Use
these top
tips to close
confidently and
successfully.

INSIDE THE SECTION

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Numbers

8 Get Over Your
Fear

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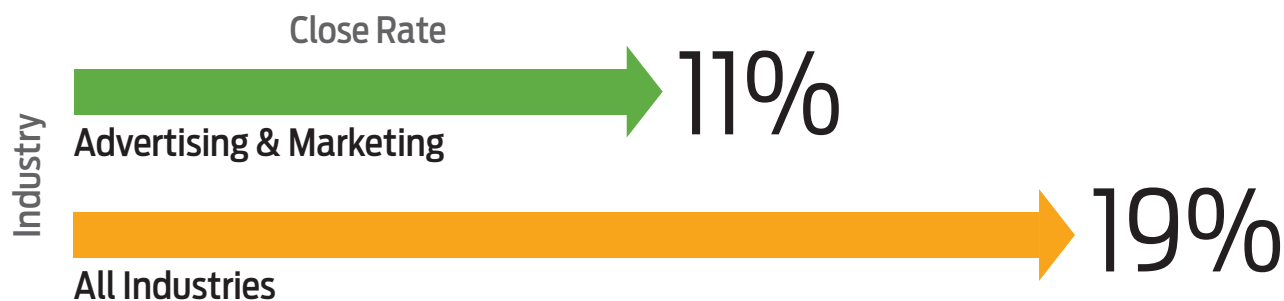
Perfect the Close

SALES BOOST

STATISTICS

Getting to the Close

Closing sales remains a perpetual challenge for sales reps.



Source: HubSpot



Twitter
Wisdom
on ... #closing

@B2B_SalesTips NEWSFLASH: You are already communicating your desires unintentionally. #Sales #perfectclose

@fayaz_shadman Through your #knowledge, #skills and facilitation you become the catalyst that empowers customers to reach their goals. #Sales #perfectclose

@rogcorp Did you know that the close is the most important step? #closethesale

@Grant_Cardone The buyer's uncertainty is a bigger threat to your close than a lower price somewhere else. #closethesale

@SandlerTraining People buy for their reasons, not the salesperson's reasons. Ask questions and create a solution. #closethesale

READ THIS!

In *Changing the Sales Conversation: Connect, Collaborate and Close*, consultative sales expert Linda Richardson writes that traditional sales methodologies

are outdated, and a new era of collaboration and relationship-building with prospects and clients will lead to more closed sales. Find it here: bit.ly/ChangingSalesConvoBookASI



EXPERT TIPS

Show No Fear

Get comfortable with 'no' and you'll be well on your way to the close.



The Pro: Amy O'Connor
Title: Senior Consultant
Company: Shore Consulting,
Auburn, CA

Q: What do sales reps fear the most when asking for the close?

AO: "Reps fear the word 'no.' And it's not even logical! Just saying, 'Here's a promo product. What do you think?' doesn't produce a no. Prospects won't say, 'Well, I was interested, but now that you asked, I'm saying no.' A no is clarity. Either it's really a no, and in that case just move on, or it's a path to yes. Ask them why it's a no. Maybe it's timing, pricing or the product. But if you never ask, you'll never get an objection to work through that gets you to yes."

Q: What are some common misconceptions about the perfect close?

AO: "There's no one perfect close, and don't spend all your time pitching and then ask prospects to buy. That means it was all about you. Instead, talk about them. If they have a trade show coming up, what are their needs? Figure out how your product can make things easier for them. Too often, we pitch

the same way and ask the same closing question. Ask about them, share what pertains to them, and the close will be a natural extension of the conversation."

Q: What does the ideal timing look like?

AO: "Sales reps say to themselves, 'I haven't earned the close yet.' Instead, ask early on when emotion is high, not when prospects are logical. You've talked to them, you understand their challenges and problems, and they're excited about the solution. Ask then – don't let them come up with objections."

Q: How can a sales rep know when a prospect won't actually close?

AO: "Sometimes prospects are just being nice. You think, 'We know they're stringing us along, but they're so nice.' Instead, find someone grumpy. No one's selling to them! But just know that you will have to get to a direct close question: 'Is this something you'd be interested in?' There has to be a finale at some point."

Q: Does body language make a difference?

AO: "Yes, people can smell fear.

Buyers are looking for confidence. They're not afraid of sales decisions, they're afraid of bad decisions. If you're shaking, they're thinking, 'This might be a bad decision.' Instead, say, 'I've been doing promo products for 20 years. This is what you need.' They're looking to borrow that confidence."

Q: How should a rep address a difficult prospect?

AO: "Most of sales isn't about technique – it's mindset. If you think, 'This guy is mean, and this is going to suck,' it will. Instead, think, 'He's mean ... great! That means no one else is talking to him! I have no competition.' Only think about how you can help, and that will lead to the sale."

Q: Why do sales reps sometimes not get to the close when they should have?

AO: "When we're in a moment of discomfort, we either boldly look prospects in the eye and ask for it ('Are you ready to do this today?'), or we yield and it feels safe in the moment ('Why don't you take a few days, go over the paperwork and let me know.'). That's

TAKEAWAYS

1

Put the client's needs first and the close will come naturally.

2

Show confidence throughout the process.

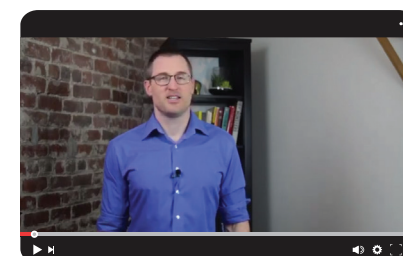
3

Make "the ask" non-negotiable for you.

yielding, and you come up with excuses: 'They weren't ready, that would have been too pushy.' To shortcut this moment, don't wait for it. Tell yourself, 'I will ask for the sale no matter what,' and now you have no choice. The decision has been made. At the end of the presentation, there will be a close question."

Amy O'Connor develops and delivers sales training programs based on her experience managing, coaching and motivating sales professionals. She is the premier Success Coach Institute (SCI) Certified Sales Trainer at Shore Consulting, and regularly speaks at seminars.

WATCH THIS!



This video, "I'll Think About It": How To NOT Lose Deals During Close," by software company Badger Maps, offers strategies for pushing back on a classic objection and not yielding when asking for the sale. Watch it at bit.ly/ClosingSaleVidASL.

THE FIRST SALES REP TO REACH A DECISION-MAKER AND SET A BUYING VISION HAS AN AVERAGE CLOSE RATE OF 74%. (FORRESTER)

DISTRIBUTOR TIPS

It Starts at the Beginning

This distributor looks at the close as the natural result from a process of discovery and relationship-building.



The Pro: Pablo Prahl (left)
Title: Managing Director
Company: Proforma A&G Marketing Group (asi/491659), Lake Mary, FL

For Pablo Prahl, the close isn't a single moment at the end. "It's a process of engagement," he says. "It's an entire situation. It's not the end of a relationship and it's not at the last minute. I always start the relationship with the close in mind. I don't leave all the negotiating for the end, and I don't focus all my energy at the end."

Prahl recommends focusing on building the relationship at the beginning so clients are less likely to say no.

"Sometimes sales reps focus

more on closing so they can make the commission they have to make instead of focusing on the client's needs," says Prahl. "They bring up pricing when they should be asking about how they can help."

Expedite the close by making yourself an indispensable part of the team, he says, and do this from the beginning. Instead of asking about "their" budget and "their" timeframe, speak in terms of "our" budget and "our" timeframe so they know you have their back. And if you haven't been granted access to the ultimate decision-maker, make your contact look like a rock star.

"For one of my current clients, I'm working with the marketing coordinator," says Prahl. "But the marketing director will be making the final decision. I'll include him in the conversation with the coordinator, so it sounds something like, 'John [the marketing director] will love this.' And then the coordinator will pitch it to John as his idea, which is fine with me, because then he looks like a hero."

Also, be honest about what will and won't work, whether it's the

product or timeframe. Clients will respect the transparency and recognize that you're in their corner. "Be honest with them about snags that can arise so they know you're sincere," says Prahl. "And if it's not the right solution for their needs, let them know. You don't want to just be an order-taker."

But even with all the best intentions and doing what you think is correct from the beginning, there are times when the close slips away. Fortunately, there are ways to mitigate the chances of this happening. "I've been in this situation before. Usually it's because I didn't ask the hard questions at the beginning, and I was 100% sure the sale was in my pocket," says Prahl. "You have to train yourself and your team to ask the hard questions."

Hard questions (usually centered around budget, pricing, timeframe and competitors) are awkward to broach, but it's imperative to avoid wasting precious time. Prahl remembers observing one sales rep at a presentation who asked a prospect outright, "Are you actually interested in my company or are we just your third quote?"

TAKEAWAYS

1

Focus on building a relationship of trust.

2

Position yourself as a member of the team.

3

Don't assume a sale will certainly close.

"I thought, 'I'll never have the guts to ask that,'" says Prahl. "But they respect you more, especially if you're dealing with someone in the C-suite. Then it becomes a peer-to-peer conversation. Otherwise your ego gets in the way and you think, 'I have this.' That's a mistake, because you might just be another company, another procurement step for them."

Instead, build the relationship before you get to the close. And don't count your chickens before they hatch. "Learn what they want first, then build around it," says Prahl. "Tell them, 'Now that you're our client, here's what we can do for you.'"



LISTEN TO THIS!

In this episode of the Advanced Selling Podcast, hosts Bryan Neale and Bill Caskey discuss

ways to make the close easier on the front end and expedite the process, and how to handle clients who are intellectually but not emotionally engaged. Listen to it at bit.ly/AdvancedSellingClosePodcastASI.



ONLY **2%** OF SALES ARE CLOSED ON THE FIRST CONTACT; THE REMAINING 98% CLOSE ONLY AFTER THE SALES REP HAS BUILT TRUST, DEMONSTRATED THE NEED FOR THE PRODUCT OR SERVICE AND COMMUNICATED CLEAR BENEFITS. (TIME TO HIRE)

CUSTOMER SERVICE

Six Ways to Treat Them Right

An excellent customer service experience will lead more naturally to a close.

1 Respect the Informed Buyer

It's challenging to sell to buyers who've already done their research and have detailed questions in-hand, but it's inescapable. Your search-engine optimized website should provide information they can use to do research on their own time. If they like what they see, they're more likely to want to commit to you. If a prospect is researching companies like yours, they're in a buying mindset; make sure they like what they see so they feel comfortable pursuing the relationship.

2 Spend More Time Listening Than Talking

It's tempting to spend a lot of time talking about your company – how working with you will benefit the client and all the positive features of the products you've spent so much time researching. But resist the urge, and make the conversation all about the prospect. Before the presentation, research her company using its website and social media to get a feel for its personality. Then ask the prospect about her upcoming needs and goals. She'll feel listened to and respected, not like she's being sold to.

3 Approach With a Service Mindset

Yes, hitting or exceeding your quota by increasing your close rate is important, and getting to the close should always be a goal. But first and foremost, be of service to clients. Salesforce recently found that a whopping 80% of B2B buyers expect companies to offer real-time communication options. Responding in a timely manner, giving them consultative advice based on your experience and respecting their needs goes a long way to becoming a trusted extension of their team. While some prospects will always be looking for the lowest price, others value a trusted relationship. The latter has the most potential in becoming long-term clients.

4 Commit for the Long-Term

Your mindset from the beginning should be that this is the start of a long-term relationship, and that the eventual close isn't a one-and-done moment, but hopefully one of many. To be successful, you'll have to be conscious of clients' brand needs while being ready to pivot with them as they make adjustments and grow and change. Don't be rigid in what you're offering them – be open to their ideas while maintaining

a consultative approach so they respect your experience. While closing the sale is imperative, don't let short-term sales goals and competition based on price negatively affect the customer service experience you offer.

5 Look at B2B as P2P

While B2B sales focus on selling to businesses as clients, it's still a person-to-person transaction. Relationship building, particularly in a time of quick online transactions, makes all the difference. It's OK to let the conversation naturally drift to common interests and even personal lives when appropriate in order to build rapport and humanize the process.

6 Make the Experience Seamless

Respect your prospects' and clients' time by keeping presentations short and to the point, and getting to decision-making time with a sense of urgency. If customers call you with questions for additional information, don't make them wait on hold, and avoid a back-and-forth that wastes time and energy. Buyers make decisions based on convenience; the easier you make the process for them, the more likely they are to buy from you.

Customer Service Tip Sheet

Stay in Control

There are some questions you may not be able to answer without going back to the supplier for more information. Don't get nervous, because prospects will notice. Instead of saying you don't know, say something that boosts confidence in you. Christopher Duffy, director of marketing at Ariel Premium Supply (asi/36730), suggests saying this: "I don't have that information in front of me, but I know who does. May I have some time to talk with a couple of colleagues to get you the right information the first time?"

Communicate More

Be honest with your prospects and clients, and share that level of communication with your suppliers. Get them every bit of information they need from the beginning, including style numbers, colors and artwork and share your feedback afterward.

Invest in Education

Good businesspeople never stop perfecting their trade. Research the best customer service methods. Attend seminars and classes. Constantly evaluate your processes, grow from your mistakes, and spread what you learn throughout your company so everyone is as informed and invested in success as you are.

90% OF BUYERS ARE LIKELY TO PURCHASE MORE IF THE COMPANY PROVIDES EXCELLENT CUSTOMER SERVICE. (HUBSPOT)



TOP TIPS

Classic Closing Techniques

When you're ready to ask for the close, look to these tried-and-true methods of getting to 'yes.'

The Question Close

Sounds like: "Does this product relieve your pain point?"

Asking a question along these lines allows the rep to address any objections while also asking for a commitment. If prospects aren't quite at a "yes," the rep can continue to sell until it becomes one, or open the door to other options. If the answer is indeed a "yes," the path to a close just got a little smoother.

The Assumptive Close

Sounds like: "Did this presentation meet your expectations?"

This close assumes positive intentions on the rep's part from the very first touch. It lends the process a consultative feel that builds trust between the rep and prospects, which makes them more likely to consider the rep a valued member of the team.

The Takeaway Close

Sounds like: "At that price, the laser-engraving won't be available."

If prospects are close to a yes but continues to balk at the price, give them a lower price that doesn't include a feature in which they've expressed interest. More likely they'll focus on the feature they won't receive rather than the discount.

The Objection Close

Sounds like: "Are there any reasons we shouldn't move forward with this product?"

Asking directly for any objections prospects may have allows you to address them head-on



and continue to make an airtight case. Inviting them to raise objections also shows you're confident enough in your product and yourself to answer them compellingly.

The Pros and Cons Close

Sounds like: "Let's go over the pros and cons of going with this product."

Summing up clients' objections and giving them a list of positives as to how those objections can be addressed should convince them that closing is in their best interest. Make sure you're familiar with their needs and pain points,

and how your products and services can address those and make their lives easier. Emphasize that in your summation.

The Sharp Angle Close

Sounds like: "If I can guarantee delivery in a month, are you ready to commit now?"

This closing question is best for prospects and clients who still have one objection they keep going back to. This direct approach lets the rep address the objection while also asking for a commitment. A "yes" signals a decision to close; a waffling response could mean they're not serious buyers, or there's another

factor affecting their decision that you're not aware of.

The Needs Close

Sounds like: "Let me make sure I have everything you're looking for here."

If prospects aren't sure how your product or service would benefit them, list all the things that they've said they needed in the discovery phase. Then, tell them exactly how your product or service meets each one of those needs.

The Time-Sensitive Close

Sounds like: "You said you need to get these delivered a week before your event date. Let's get the ball rolling today."

This approach cites the urgency prospects impressed upon you since they have an immediate need coming up. The sales rep, as a consultant, knows how many moving parts there are on every order and should lay out those steps as well if prospects still balk at closing. Making sure prospects have committed and the order is being worked on improves the chances they'll have their items in-hand with plenty of time to spare, and mitigates any last-minute snafus.

42% OF SALES REPS SAY THEY HAVE DIFFICULTY ESTABLISHING URGENCY WHEN IT COMES TO THE CLOSE. (HUBSPOT)

