

Closing the Sale

What is Closing?

I recall the day effortlessly. I'd been busy selling mortgages to customers of an estate agency in the 1980's and we had a new National Sales Director appointed. Now he was a pretty fierce individual. A big man with an equally big voice who had a reputation for reducing sales people to tears if you ever crossed him.

He came to visit us all on a one to one basis to see how we were doing and to get to know us, I guess. But I wasn't looking forward to the meeting. You see up until that moment, selling mortgages in the estate agency was really easy. I'm certainly not bragging here...I was very young and people just wanted me to arrange their mortgage and policies. They asked me to do the business and I just gave them information and advice and filled in the forms. It was a gravy chain. It was a massive property market with fewer players than there are today.

Then it all stopped. August 1998 it was and the market collapsed and selling mortgages became depressingly difficult.

In our meeting the sales director asked me lots of question about my selling process and could see that the previous year I had arranged hundreds of mortgages for customers. Next he asked me how I closed the sale. I had no idea what he meant and it was obvious. He then asked how I got people to commit. Again I had no answer. *"I guess they just did it"* was my meek reply. He then stood up and in a forceful gruff voice shouted, *"well in this new market you might as well give up selling then"* and he stormed out.

Expecting the sack imminently I was pleasantly surprised to see my name on the next sales training enrolment list. Yes, as you can appreciate Paul Archer was whisked off for some sales training where everything became very clear.

In sales you have to close the sale. That's it. Fullstop. Closing is the one skill that every sales person, what ever you're selling, just has to do.

But that's the problem, as I see it. Closing the sale has become synonymous with slick sales'ey types. Sharp suits and sharp closing techniques. The books and tapes cry out for you to "close the sale", "overcome objections", "win the sale", "ask for the order"...and it all gets a little too much for the average sales person.

So I'd like to give you my take on closing the sale. A method which you'll not notice that you're actually closing the sale according to the tapes and sales books out there. A method in which the customer doesn't know they're being closed and no fancy technique is being used. It's clean, tidy, easy to do and incredibly customer focussed. And that is what rapport selling is all about.

It's like eating soup...



Closing the Sale

Eating Soup

For lunch my wife and I had her home made turkey soup. Yes, you're right, Christmas wasn't long ago and the carcass has been boiling on the stove all day. My wife's turkey soup is famous because it feeds my whole family for days and is absolutely delicious.

Eating the soup is like closing sales. There's no way I'd ever dive into the soup, take an enormous spoonful and gulp it down. I'd scoop up a little, blow on it, feel the steam with my top lip, take a sip and only then would I take a decent mouthful.



Closing the sale is the same concept. You wouldn't go charging in would you?

"Would you like to sign the paperwork now, Mrs Brown" you say five minutes into the sale. You'd end up with a handbag around your chops!

No, you'd wait until Mrs Brown was ready to buy your product or service and only then would you ask. You have a much better chance then of getting a yes rather than a refusal. And nobody likes to be refused, which is another reason why plenty of sales people don't ever ask for the sale...they don't like to be rejected.

If you test the soup first to see how hot it is, you'll not burn your tongue. Likewise if you test the customer first, you'll not spoil the deal. So how do you do this?

It's like dating in your early teens. Before you asked the person out for the date of their dreams you checked with their friends to see if they were seeing anyone else and you might even have spoken to their best friends to assess your chances. Only then did you pluck up enough courage to ask them out.

People that didn't follow this rule were either really successful in the dating stakes or had red cheeks from all those slaps!

Now I do know of salespeople who are like this. They are so hardened to rejection, that they don't really care any more and just ask everyone. The double glazing cold calling merchants are like this. You say "no" so they go onto the next customer...eventually someone is going to say yes.

But I don't like to teach selling that way...I like to enjoy my job and the rapport we build with customers.

It's all about asking questions...

Closing the Sale

It's all about asking questions

The three types of questions you will want to ask leading up to the close are testing questions to feel the temperature of the soup, trial questions to taste a little of the soup and then closing questions to drink the soup.

Testing questions

Throughout the sales meeting you'll want to see how the customer is feeling about your product or service. Are they warming to you and the product or not?

You can tell all is going well verbally and non-verbally. Verbally the customer is replying to your questions positively.

"How do you feel about those benefits?"

"They sound good"

"Does it all make sense so far?"

"Yes thank you"

"Have I missed anything you'd like to know about?" *"No, everything's been covered."*

Non verbally the customer will be leaning forward, attentive towards you, giving you appropriate eye contact.

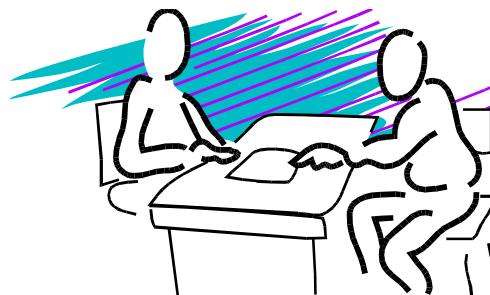


The opposite here is leaning backwards and various limbs crossed



Closing the Sale

Try placing documents or brochures in the middle of the table. If they take them, this is a sign of non verbal acceptance



These verbal and non verbal reactions are known as buying signals in the trade. You need to see them happening right in front of you so turn on those observation and listening skills.

Trial Questions

Back to my dating analogy, I remember when I met my wife at a party for the first time. Obviously she wasn't my wife then! "Claire" I said getting terribly tongue tied, "hypothetically speaking, if I was to take you out one evening, would you have any objections?" She accused me of being a lawyer at that moment and I nearly blew it completely. 15 years later we now laugh about my ridiculous trial close. Although not very elegant, it worked. It made her laugh and she said she would say yes. So I did and here I am today happily married and with three children too.

The same process needs to be followed in sales. You've tested the water and now need to be sure the customer is ready to say yes. As before you can do this verbally and non verbally.

Questions are needed here which serve as trial closes. A few questions need asking such as:

"Is this what you had in mind"

"Does this fit your budget?"

"If I can arrange that for you, would you be interested?"

"Are you OK with the whole package?"

In many cases your questions will throw up "no's" or "I'm not sure" or "I'll let you know". Dealing with customer concerns deserves more time spent which I'll give you later. But the best learning point here is that concerns or issues that are thrown out will tell you how close you are to the final close. If you have too many concerns from your customer, they're not ready to buy so you'll want to go back to more benefits or re-analysing their real needs. Get yourself into reverse gear



Closing the Sale

Non verbal trial closing is great fun. My favourite is to place the contract or application form or whatever needs signing in the middle of the table for them to take. A sure sign they want to go ahead.



The other non verbal trial close is silence but you need to combine this with a question. For example:

“If we got this going for you, would you be interested in going ahead right now?”

Next you go siiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiilent.

Closing Questions

When I’ve tested the temperature of my wife’s soup, taken a sip, I then have no hesitation in taking a really big spoonful and popping this straight into my mouth. Mmm...this tastes really good. I just know it’s going to be delicious.

In the same way when selling, if you’ve tested the customer for a buying signal, trialled some questions with them, then you just know they’re going to say yes. You just expect or assume they’ll buy.

So phrase your closing questions assuming they’ll say yes.

“Let’s go ahead then?”

“Shall we fill in the forms straightway then?”

“Shall we get the ball rolling then?”

“Would you like me to fill in the application form for you now?”

“How would you like to pay?”

Remember to go silent just after you’ve asked the final close question. Look at them, smile and wait. Easier said than done I know. Silence can be very loud in these situations but you need to keep quiet.

Some salespeople like to have several closing phrases or questions available to them and over the years we’ve given some strange names to these. The Duke of Wellington Close, the Half Nelson Close, the Alternative Close, the Balance Sheet Close.

Closing the Sale

Maybe another day we can talk about these if you're interested. I remember seeing a video many years ago. I think it was on the course that my fierce Sale Director sent me on. The video was ever so old, even then. Everyone had massive shirt collars, mullet haircuts, flowery shirts and horrendous flairs in the trousers.

I recall we went through 15 closing techniques on that video. And we had to learn them all by heart.

Really you don't need these. Remember to follow the three stage process which is very customer friendly and fits the rapport selling model:

- Test
- Trial
- Close by asking to go ahead

...and you won't go far wrong. Good luck in your closing.

