

To Close or Not to Close?

The “why, who, how & when” of closing sales.



Closing should not be this hard!

By Henry Ching, Sales Trainer & Coach @ Progress-U Limited

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Closing.

This topic is one of the thorniest topics in sales. When you have finished up a meeting or call with a prospect you reach the moment of truth. To close or not to close? That is THE question in sales in many ways because a sales cycle without a positive close is really an exercise in public relations (not that there is anything wrong with that - if that is the objective of the call).

But let's face it. All salespeople would like to walk away with an order. A salesperson who does not close well and consistently, is faced with a life of frustration and poor commission cheques.

So it is self evident as to why to close is important. But the next three questions are harder to answer.

Many salespeople often forget to ask themselves who is the decision maker. Who to ask for the order? An example of this is when a married couple goes to buy a small family car. Many salespeople (even today) make the mistake that they believe they know who the customer is. They just assume it is the husband (especially if the salesperson is a man). The salesperson will spend a lot of time talking about the power output of the car, how well it brakes and its handling abilities only to the husband while the wife looks on. I think we know where this sale is going. So I suppose that it is always important to make sure to know who the decision maker is and to make sure that when there is an appropriate moment to close that this person is at least considered.

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The next question is how? By this I mean what questions/tactics to use to ask for the order. Many people think that you must memorise every closing question or technique there is in the book. I don't agree. I researched the internet and found that there are 148 closing questions. 148! I cannot even remember 8, much less 148. I think here that simplicity is best.

What do I mean by simplicity? First things first. Buyers are people. People like other people to be authentic. In fact, people can spot a fake fairly well. There is another obvious fact. Buyers today are sophisticated.

What does this mean? You don't need tricks or techniques to ask for business. I actually think they make things worse. Let's keep the closing simple and honest. Provided the call has gone well and the buyer has shown a genuine need and has the money to spend, then there is an opportunity to do a trial close.

If you are not sure, there is a way of testing resistance. An example of this is when the meeting with the customer has gone well and the customer starts talking about delivery or implementation or the exact product they want.

Some good testing questions here is to ask are:

'Do you feel comfortable I have answered all your questions?'

'Would you like to proceed at this stage?'

'So when did you want to make a decision?'

Not many customers would be upset by these types of simple, direct questions. A positive response to these questions would lead to a positive outcome and an order (I would predict).

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Now the toughest question of all. When to close? There are too many factors to consider all the conditions necessary before deciding when to close. At the logical end of a meeting or discussion is the short answer. What I mean by that is one should not be bound by a certain time or stage in the sales cycle.

This is when it is important to combine 'hard' and 'soft' skills. Hard skills like your logic tells you have addressed all the needs and answered all the questions. But people are not robots. You cannot just tick off a checklist and then assume you can close. Soft skills like reading the eagerness, attitude and mood of the customer are important.

But I think the real answer to when to close is this.

When you have earned the right!

Have you earned the right to ask? If you really feel the answer is yes, then you are ready to close.

This means that you and the customer are in alignment - you have both invested time in coming to a solution or deciding on a product. You have answered all their questions, fulfilled all their needs, addressed their objections, potentially even coached them to better understand their real needs. You have now made them feel comfortable with the decision to purchase.

When you reach that stage, closing is easy. Customers often close themselves.

Talk to you next month.

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Henry Ching is a Sales Trainer and Coach at Progress-U Limited. Henry works with sales managers, salespeople, entrepreneurs and anyone else who want to further develop their sales skills and methods using Best Practice thinking.

Today, even top sales performers face ever-increasing challenges in:

- How to shorten the sales cycles;
- How to avoid being drawn into a margin destroying price war;
- How to qualify better so they work on higher quality deals;
- How to close effectively and
- How to maximize the return on investment on the sales efforts made.

Henry assists his clients in tackling these challenges through Progress-U's innovative and unique "Stop Selling!" approach and by sharing his extensive experience gathered during his corporate career.

Henry is known for his creativity and humour when it comes to tackling difficult sales situations or working on complex deals. He has developed sales strategies and training that have helped many clients address their sales challenges.

During his corporate sales career at IBM Australia, Fujitsu and Information Builders, Henry has worked with Blue Chip clients like Mercedes Benz, HJ Heinz, Dun & Bradstreet and the Australian Defence Force. He succeeded in highly competitive sales environments that required thinking 'outside the box'.

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