

## **The Art of Closing**

Did you know that you sell for a living? In fact, *everyone* sells for a living. Whether you're a sales rep, a parent, a leader, a manager or a coach, on a daily basis we all find ourselves in situations where we must sell others on our way of thinking. In sales, this process is referred to as "closing." Since "closing skills" derive themselves directly from the sales industry, I'm going to discuss them within a sales context, but bear in mind that these skills are universal in their application and value. As you read through this chapter, keep in mind that I will provide questions at the end to help you reflect on how closing skills fit into your daily life.

It is typical for a novice persuader to encounter resistance. There are as many different reasons for resistance as there are personalities, so the trick lies in knowing which closing skill to use for which person. The more closing skills you have under your belt, the better equipped you will be to land a sale. A crucial closing concept to learn as soon as possible is that you should actually employ closing strategies throughout your entire presentation. Most people think of the close as the final wrap-up. While this is the sales point where the deal is formally and openly acknowledged as "let's do it" or "thanks, but no thanks," the masterful persuader builds the close in stages throughout the entire sales process. The last phase of the selling exchange is only the culminating step of several deliberate but less evident steps that have taken place beforehand. It is crucial, not only for your own good but also for your prospects' good, to help them through this process. Incrementally moving them closer and closer to agreement is much more effective than springing it on them at the end. There is nothing worse than seeing a shocked prospect with her/his mouth wide open following the close. Waiting to lunge with your close until the very end of your sales presentation could be compared to plunging unprepared into the deep end of the pool versus wading comfortably from the shallow end to the deep end only as you feel well prepared, well informed and well instructed to do so.

The incremental close helps avoid the old hard-close approach of the past. Remember the hard close? Old tactics used such strategies as bullying, pressuring or forcing your prospect into a decision. We've all experienced the hard close at one time or another.

Unfortunately, some “persuaders” still employ the hard-close strategy, but when they do, they’re really not persuading at all. Even if a prospect succumbs to one of these sales tactics, it is likely with resentment, buyer’s remorse and discontinued business in the future. What’s more, you can rest assured that unbeknownst to the offending salesperson, a prospect who is bullied into a sale will deter all her/his friends and family from patronizing the business where s/he endured such treatment.

Since studies show that how you open a sale is more important than how you close it, think of starting your close earlier on in the persuasive process. Let’s call this “collecting yeses.” We’ll discuss this concept more in-depth later on, but for the time being, what it basically means is that you concern yourself with drawing in your prospects early on. That is, you warm them up in stages until the ultimate conclusion is obvious to them and they decide for themselves exactly what you were hoping they’d decide in the first place.

Because you’re going to focus on closing as a process that begins early on in your presentation, it is important to consider the messages you are broadcasting right from the beginning. Superficial or not, people are going to draw conclusions from their earliest interactions with you, and those first impressions tend to be the longest lasting, too. It is said that the first and most lasting impression is made in about the first four minutes of a first encounter. Hence, be sure those first four minutes are positive ones because the cement dries fast! It is extremely difficult to overcome a bad first impression. Even if you try to make up for it later on, that first impression will linger. The most obvious advice is to be sure you look professional and well groomed in any persuasive situation. In other words, dress appropriately for the setting. Next, exude confidence that is not arrogant but rather is upbeat, positive and encouraging. This positivity in your demeanor will allow your prospects, who hardly know you, to take comfort in your ability to educate them about the product or service they are investigating. Direct eye contact and a sincere smile accompanied by a firm handshake and addressing your prospects by name always help.