

Closing the Deal—No Pressure Necessary

by Elaine Schmitt

"Always Be Closing" is a mantra long held by many sales leaders. It has a well-deserved place in how salespeople think about and plan how to advance the sale. Rather than viewing closing as a standalone event, successful salespeople make sure that closing touches every step of their sales process. Each interaction and conversation with their customer moves the sale a step closer to reality. With each touch, they demonstrate an understanding of what their customer needs and when they need it rather than aggressively pushing for a decision before their customer is ready.

By professionally and collaboratively leading their customer through the selling process, successful salespeople often find that closing the sale becomes a very natural part of selling.

In our work with clients, we have observed that the most successful salespeople help their customers buy. How do they do it? These best practices advance their goals—and those of their customers.

- Define and communicate the possibilities to jointly create value
- Establish a target date for their customer to begin to realize the value
- Develop and execute a joint project plan with their customer

Let's take a closer look at how you might put these best practices to work for you.

Define and communicate the potential value your solution will bring to your customer. Value is defined by your customers. They will act—committing time, money, and people—to those projects they believe will generate positive results for their business. Here are four ways that you can convey the value you bring:

1. Understand your customer's needs and strategic initiatives. What must they get done to achieve their goals and vision? Where will they spend their time and money?
2. Connect the dots. Few buying decisions are made without value alignment and a solid business case. How will we together impact the business?
3. Communicate your differentiated value proposition in your customer's own language. Understand how they will measure success and frame your capabilities in the context of their business.
4. Get buy-in by gaining your customer's concurrence to your value. They need to validate that your thinking is correct. When you have these value conversations, you will be viewed as an enabler of your customer's business drivers rather than just a supplier.



Establish the target date for when your customer wants to begin realizing (or receiving) the value.

1. There are four components of a business case: Cost, Benefit, Impact, and *Timing*. This last component shouldn't just be critical to the salesperson; it also has to be critical to the customer. Sales efforts and implementation plans are frequently delayed or deferred because we fall short of making *Timing* critical for the customer.
2. Create urgency to proceed. Your customer has more than one iron in the fire. If you do not shape your value into a critical requirement for their success, their enthusiasm will dissipate. And you know that time kills deals.

Develop a joint project plan.

Once a target date has been established, it's time to gain agreement on the key events or milestones necessary to meet the target date. Selling opportunities should be treated as a project, and your customer must play an active role in developing and executing a joint project plan. The following best practices are instrumental in developing a successful plan.

1. Working backwards from the target date, define the timeline for the major events or milestones that have to occur, including:
 - Implementation / delivery date – *By when does the solution need to be delivered and installed for your customer to start getting the results expected?*
 - Commercial terms executed – *Once the decision has been made, how long will it take and what is the process for executing the contract?*
 - Decision date – *By when does your customer need to make a decision in order for you to be responsive to the delivery / installation date?*
 - Reference checks completed – *When do the reference checks need to be completed in order to reach the decision date?*
 - Proposal / business case delivered – *By when does your customer need the proposal/business case in order to reach the decision date?*
 - Solution defined and validated – *By when do you need your customer's validation of your solution in order to present a proposal by the date required?*
2. Define and enroll all the key players. Who from your customer and from your organization needs to be involved in each of the milestones?
3. Get team member commitments to short-term actions toward accomplishing the milestones, and establish completion dates for these actions.
4. Communicate the progress frequently to your team. After each short-term action is complete, always ask if there is anything else you need to complete the milestone.



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Always be closing the sale.

Remember, selling is a series of conversations that lead to joint commitments towards a common goal. The key words are joint commitments. This generates action, accountability, and energy. As your team executes the Project Plan, communicate progress frequently with the decision-maker and continually confirm that you are working on the right milestones and that the timing is still on target.

The most effective sales strategies are those that your customer feels they are a part of and that they “own.” If you do this job right, you will increase the odds that the decision will naturally fall into place because your customer is simply following their plan. No pressure necessary!

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