

Are You Closing Sales or Closing Relationships?

Poor salespeople focus on just closing the sale. Successful salespeople focus on closing the sale and the relationship. Which is your approach?

For many salespeople, the close of the sale typically comes at the end of the sales presentation. It represents for many, the final act in the sales process. It is unfortunate that these poorly informed and/ or trained salespeople, lack adequate understanding of the role of selling in today's competitive world.

Selling is not about only closing the current prospect on a particular product or service that solves one of their pressing problems, needs or desires. It is about building a trusting relationship and partnership with them, by becoming a resource, and helping them solve their on-going problems, or satisfying their continuing and evolving needs and desires.

Salespeople for years have been taught that to close a sale, they need to use devices or 'closing techniques'. For example; the "which would you prefer" or "get it before the price goes up", closes. These techniques, although sometimes successful, tend to focus only on how the current product or service solves a prospects problem, or satisfies a current need or want. The sales relationship must begin somewhere. The question is, how can you become a resource for a prospect, therefore beginning the relationship or partnership, before you have sold or closed this sale?

You must first evaluate your selling intent or philosophy that underlies the sales process and how it impacts your ability to close this sale and the future relationship.

If your focus is on the short term vs. the long term, your intent is most likely only on moving products or services now. If your intent is to develop a long- term mutually beneficial relationship with this new prospect, you may not sell this order, but that does not prevent you from beginning to build a positive relationship that can one day end in success.

It also depends on how you choose to define a successful sales relationship. All relationships, sales or otherwise are dynamic. They are either getting better or getting worse. In order for a relationship to be getting better there are several areas that need constant attention. They are: trust, respect, acceptance, integrity, communication, intent, the relationship direction, personal agendas and a willingness to make the relationship work.

It is possible to begin to develop all of these with a prospect that you have not sold or "closed" yet. You can provide information, guidance, recommendations, solutions, feedback and a variety of other services that would move the relationship from its current non-relationship status to one that is getting better.

I am not suggesting that you give away that which you sell. If you sell information or guidance for example, don't give it away. That only weakens your ability to build a positive and successful

win/ win future relationship. But, if you sell wigits for example, is there some other area that you can help this prospect that strengthens your position in their eyes.

Let me give you an example. During the past twenty plus years as a speaker and trainer I have given away hundreds of books and audiotapes, by other speakers and authors to clients and prospects. You might wonder why I would introduce a competitor to a client. Do I have brain damage?

This philosophy has served me well for years for a number of reasons. One, it shows the prospect or client I am just as interested in their success as my own. Two, it communicates that I am secure enough in my own business, and that I am not threatened by other potential resources that are available to them. Three, it shows them I am on the lookout for information or ideas that may or may not be related to what I do, that can contribute to their long- term success.

There have been many instances where I have sent these materials to prospects, and I have not as yet done any business with them. But there are many more instances where this approach has helped me distance myself from my competitors. Customers want value today. By showing an interest in them before closing the sale, I am creating the impression, "if Tim does this much before he has sold us, we can assume he will do as much or more after we buy from him." Granted once I sell them I have set up a high expectation for service and results, so I better work as hard to keep and develop the business as I did to get it. Otherwise, not only will I lose this business, but the potential of using them to get referral business or the right to use them as a reference.

It takes more time, resources and energy to generate a new customer than it does to keep an existing one. It is also easier to do more business with a present customer than it is to find more new ones. What is your approach? Are you investing a greater proportion of your time and resources to continue to find new business or satisfy, develop and keep existing business? I agree that a continual flow of new business is the lifeblood of growth and success in sales, however don't underestimate the ability to use your present customers to help you with that mission.

Next, few customers will just give you their business. You must ask for it, but you also have to earn the right to get it.

In my opinion, closing is more of a philosophy than a skill. It is more an attitude than a strategy. It is more about giving than getting, and it is more about service than your sales compensation.

What is a closing philosophy or attitude?

A closing attitude or philosophy says, "I am here to help you. I am here to do business with you. I am not on an educational crusade nor am I a professional visitor." We all make the same income, regardless of what we sell, on the sales we don't close. Nothing. But, successful salespeople leverage their time, energy and resources by earning their customers willingness to

either directly sell new business for them or indirectly support their overall sales efforts with other potential customers.

Closing the sale or relationship is not something that begins at some magical point during the sales process. It is the attitude you bring to every good prospect- selling situation. Notice I said good prospect. You will never turn a poor prospect into a customer with a quality product, effective and persuasive sales message or tricky close, however a well- qualified prospect will help you sell them. Keep in mind most people like to buy, but few people like to feel they are being sold to.