

## 14. CLOSING TECHNIQUES

Keith Stevenson, in his book *Go Selling* defined closing as follows: 'Closing is what distinguishes the salesperson from the representative. The representative leaves the customer better informed and the salesperson leaves the customer with an order.' No better definition exists.

There are many closing techniques but, again we will use a simple mnemonic that describes seven tried and proven methods. The mnemonic is ASPINIA. The ASPINIA is the brightest flower in the selling garden and is one that every salesperson should have, if not in a buttonhole, then inside his or her head.

ASPINIA stands for the following seven closing techniques:

- Assume the Deal.  
*'So how much trade-in were you hoping for on your current car?'*
- Subordinate Question.  
*'Are you going to buy a manual or automatic?'*
- Physical action.  
*'Let's go for a test drive.'*
- Inducement.  
*'We have been authorised to offer a 10 per cent discount to those clients who purchase by the end of the week.'*
- Narrative Close.  
*'We have agreed you want an blue, automatic station wagon with power steering. Our other office can bring one over now. While that is being done let's complete the documentation.'*
- Impending Event.  
*'The manufacturer has announced it will no longer be making this model so if you want it you should decide now.'*
- Ask for the Order.  
*'Shall we start drawing up the documentation now?'*

Other closes could be added to this list but, as I explained before, you should never try to have more than seven items in a list. Seven closing techniques are enough for most salespeople.

Most selling text books begin the chapter on closing methods by first noting that many salespeople fail to get the order because they do not ask for it. Once that lesson has been learnt and the salesperson still fails to get the order the novice is told to try at least five closes during a presentation. While trying five closes generally improves the close/presentation ratio, the salesperson can become a particularly boring individual in the process especially if the same closing technique is used again and again!

The closing rate improves when the salesperson tries a different close at each opportunity. Each of the seven closes listed above appeals most to a certain personality type. If the salesperson tries the closing technique which matches the personality type the probability of a successful close rises substantially. Salespeople who use Empathy Selling already know which closing technique appeals to which component type, so, after they have determined the dominant components of the personality of the prospect, they use those closing techniques that are more likely to lead to success.

### **Assume the Sale**

The first technique, Assume-the-Sale, works best with Doublecheckers, who often like others to make decisions for them.

I remember a department store refrigerator saleswoman who provided a good example of the Assume-the-Sale close. After the prospect entered the store the professional would immediately usher the family past all the refrigerators to her desk where they would all sit down. She would then pick out an order form and fill it in while she asked the prospect various questions such as name, address, size of family (which dictated refrigerator size), special likes and dislikes etc. When the form was completed she would repeat all the details and then mark a large and heavy X next to each place where the prospect was to sign. She would then say: 'Is that right, Ms Blank?' and place the form in front of the prospect. She would then shut

up and not say a word because she knew the next person to speak loses. There would usually be a long silence often up to five minutes. The customer would then smile, shrug and sign.

When I first heard this technique described, I refused to believe it. Nobody would do that, I thought. Two days later my managing director gave me fifty raffle tickets to sell for a local hospital board, of which my managing director was a member. As he gave me the tickets he told me that none were to be returned. I was going to a party that night and I decided I would test the Assume-the-Sale technique.

At the party I went up to complete strangers, smiled and introduced myself. I then asked them for their name and address and filled in the details on the ticket. I then said the ticket cost a dollar, handed it over and asked if the name and address were correct. Then I would say nothing. I gave no details of the prizes or the raffle. Only one person refused to hand over a dollar. Fifty people out of fifty-one gave me a dollar in silence with no questions asked! I became an instant convert to the Assume-the-Sale technique.

The technique is particularly powerful with the most difficult type to close – the Doublechecker. It works with the Doublechecker because it provides little opportunity to procrastinate over a decision – it allows no freedom of choice. Doublecheckers will usually make a decision when there is only one choice; if offered a diversity of solutions they will not choose. Doublecheckers have not realised the turtle only makes progress when it sticks its neck out.

### **Subordinate Question Technique**

The Subordinate-Question technique changes the buying decision from a major one (should I buy this product or not?) to a minor one (should it be in red or blue?). It is sometimes referred to as 'closing on a minor point'.

This is the closing technique most appropriate for the Politician. Politicians delight in making decisions so the more you can give them the happier they will be. Make the close a whole series of subordinate questions such as:

*'Do you want a black one or brown one?'*

*'Do you want power steering or power brakes?' etc.*

By contrast, this method is a complete failure with a Doublechecker. Ask a Doublechecker a series of subordinate questions and you will most likely delay the sale by months.

### **Physical Action**

The Physical Action close is sometimes defined as handing the prospect a pen, opening the cash register, preparing an order form. These are, in fact, examples of the Assume-the-Sale close. The Physical-Action close entails the prospect becoming involved in some physical action with the product. A good example of this technique is the variation known as the Puppy-Dog Close when you put a water cooler into an office for a two-week free trial. By the end of the trial, the staff are so enamoured of the product that they refuse to part with it. It is just like putting a strange puppy dog into a home. Soon it becomes a pet.

The Physical-Action close works best with Engineers. They like to get involved with any new product by trying it out and seeing if it works. If you time the introduction of a free trial so the Engineer has sufficient opportunity to evaluate the product then you will usually get the order if the product itself is satisfactory.

The Physical-Action technique, while excellent for an Engineer, can be a disaster with a Hustler. The Hustler is by nature too lazy to try the product and will try to persuade someone else to do the physical evaluation. However, if you try to take the product away, the Hustler will plead for another month. After six months the Hustler will then return it saying that your major competitor has also offered a free trial.

The Hustler will tell you that while your product is preferred, it is company policy to be fair and give competitors a reasonable opportunity. After twelve months neither you nor your competitor will finish with an order but the Hustler would have had one year's free use of you and your competitor's products.

### **Inducement**

This technique covers all the various inducements such as two years warranty instead of one, 10 per cent discount if you sign now and so on. The Inducement sale is the ideal technique for the Hustler. Try to offer an inducement that costs your company a limited amount but is perceived as good value by the prospect.

Inducement sales do not appeal to the Normal as it implies a potential reduction in quality and makes the Normal suspicious of either the product, the supplier or you.

### **Narrative Close**

The Narrative Close is the one in which the salesperson reiterates the benefits and, if possible, uses some third party as a referral. The Narrative technique works best with people with a lot of Normal component. Because of their dominant desire for social approval Normals prefer products which have the endorsement of other users. They also prefer logic (seen as mature) to emotion (seen as childish) and find the logical nature of the Narrative close especially appealing. Among adults the Normal is probably the most common dominant component and this explains why the Narrative close is one of the most successful.

A derivation of the Narrative technique is the Benjamin Franklin close, named after its famous inventor, the American statesman. In this close the salesperson draws a line down the centre of a piece of paper and titles the two columns Yes and No. Under the Yes column the salesperson slowly lists every agreed benefit. Under the No column the customer is asked to list every point against the product. Both columns are tallied and the logical decision is made. After the Assume-the-Sale technique the Benjamin Franklin close is probably the easiest technique to use, but even experienced salespeople seldom use it. Novice sales executives would do well to practise the Benjamin Franklin close. Of all sales techniques it makes most use of the axiom that seven out of eight people prefer to think they buy rather than that they are sold.

### **Impending Event**

The Impending Event, such as price rises, material shortages or industrial disputes is a well known and often tried technique which usually fails because most people are optimistic and do not believe that a disaster will strike soon. It is often used as a fear close on Doublecheckers with mixed results. The Impending Event close works best with someone who can imagine the effects of an Impending Event and the personality type with the best imagination is the Artist. The Impending Event close is therefore most successful with the Artist.

### **Ask for the Order**

Asking for the order in a blunt forthright manner works best with the Mover. Movers tend to be insensitive so using an insensitive method is particularly apt. The Mover will need to be closed repeatedly - just ask for the order in a casual, confident and friendly manner again, and again, and again. Movers need to be liked and abhor rejection. Once they begin to believe that they will jeopardise the friendly (albeit temporary) relationship with you if they do not sign, you will then probably close the sale.

### **Conclusion**

Closing is what distinguishes the salesperson from the representative. A representative never tries to close because he or she fears rejection; in fact, representatives are sometimes called 'colourful closers' because they are thought to be yellow.

The salesperson who will succeed most is the one who realises that the personality type of the prospect must determine closing technique. There are many other closing methods and every salesperson has favourites, but no single method works every time with all individuals. You should now try to identify which of your favourite closing techniques would work best with each of the seven personality types. Then, in closing situations, apply the appropriate closing technique after you have analysed the prospect. If you do this systematically rather than haphazardly, your close rate should improve.