

Using Mini-closes to Advance the Occupational Health Sale

Reprinted with permission of Ryan Sales and Marketing Advisor September 2003

By Carolyn Merriman, president, Corporate Health Group

Closing is generally defined as the process of asking the prospect or customer for some level of commitment. As a part of seeking the employer's agreement to buy, the salesperson's close must be positioned as enhancing the prospect's desire for the service or solution, facilitating their need to acquire the solution now and to establish their level of commitment.

When queried, salespeople indicate that the skill they most wish to improve is closing and managing the objections associated with closing. If the salesperson has not properly laid the foundation of trust and credibility, and moved the prospect through the stages of needs assessment, benefit identification and matching all using mini-closes, they are likely to encounter difficulty in gaining the customer commitment to buy.

An example is found in John Koller's book, Encyclopedia of Sales and Selling: The Salesperson's Essential Handbook of Information (Performance Consulting, 1995): "Closing to a salesperson is only as important as it is to a surgeon. If the surgeon has done everything else right, then closing the incision should be uneventful. For the seller, if everything else has been done well, then the customer should be agreeable to buying."

The concept of mini-closes comes from the sales planning process. As the salesperson builds their strategies and tactics to ensure hitting their goals, they should identify all of the ways in which they can might seek or gain prospect commitment. Table 1 presents a list of mini-close commitment options.

Asking for Commitment

Different forms of commitment might include:

- Completion of a client profile
- Participating in a formal needs assessment
- Participating in a tour
- Receiving a proposal or presentation
- Sampling your program through trial physical exam, wellness, screenings or educational programming
- Granting permission to conduct a study, educational seminar, pilot or test case
- Talking to or visiting other client references
- Agreeing to send employees for work injury care while considering an onsite proposal for services

The Assumptive Closing Technique

Once the salesperson has established a credible dialogue based relationship with a prospect, they have earned the right to ask for the business and the prospect is most likely willing to listen.

An assumptive closing attitude is a way of asking for the business that assumes the prospect has decided to buy. Instead of asking *if* he wants to buy, the salesperson positions the close by asking them *how and when* they want the product or service.

“Mr. Smith, based on our conversations, you have indicated a desire to manage your new employees’ health screenings more efficiently and cost effectively than in previous years. To that end, we have put together an onsite-screening program so that they can be screened just after meeting with human resources. In order to handle the 1,000 employees coming on board in July, we would like to have our clinical team tour your plant, and set up operations in June so that we can easily manage the workload while staying within your budget. We are available the first week of June or the third week – which one would work best for you and your team so that we can get started?”

While the above statement represents a proposal’s assumptive close, it’s an example of pulling your presentation together to gain the prospect’s commitment.

Remember, every contact with your client gives you time to ask questions about their objectives and help you customize a plan of action. Then, and only then, should you consider yourself ready to move onto the assumptive close. Consider these five steps as you move to ask for the business:

1. Recap the person’s key concerns identified previously.
2. Reiterate the outcomes the customer desires.
3. Position the name of your solution, and identify what it can do for the customer.
4. Explain what the solution can do for your customer personally.
5. End with your closing question and a call for action (commitment.)

Mini-closes and the Assumptive Technique

- Mini-closes work best when the salesperson has thought through what tactics or commitment offers might work best for each specific prospect.
- The salesperson should plan ahead for what mini-close options they intend to offer – and think through the upcoming sales call in terms of optimum, midpoint and minimum. An example might be, “In order for us to demonstrate our capabilities, I’d like to have you
 - a) optimum – agree to send us five physical exams,
 - b) midpoint - do one test exam with our protocols or,
 - c) minimum - talk with one of our other trucking company clients to learn about their satisfaction with our program.
- Practice and prepare positive assumptive word, style and approach. Avoid the use of “if” it can be replaced by “when and how.”
- Position your closes as an action-oriented commitment. Use terms such as “be onsite on “x” date, see your first employee, and set up the tour for...”
- Always incorporate the close into benefit-oriented recommendations – WIIFM – “what’s in it for me” for the customer to do business with you?
- Ask for the close in a way that is appropriate to the prospect’s personality and buying style.
- Be prepared – when asking for the close – large or small, it often opens the door to the buyer’s objections, misunderstandings, or concerns. Listen and isolate the issue, provide a benefit-oriented, focused response, seek their agreement that you have in fact addressed the issue, and re-close for commitment.

8 Tips to Closing

1. Be prepared. Come with the proper paperwork and answers to detailed questions, payment information, and so on. Help make small decisions on the way to the sale (starting dates, staffing needs, etc.). It makes the close easier and less stressful for both of you.
2. Avoid selling overkill. Sell what the person needs (you can upsell later as their needs change and grow). Stick to the solution that suits the client best.
3. Watch and listen for verbal and non-verbal clues that the client is ready to commit. Are you being introduced to other members of his team? Does your customer maintain eye contact with you when talking about the solution?
4. Summarize what you have to offer, briefly. If the customer has decided to buy your product or service, move ahead with the details.
5. Clear up any concerns. Now is the time to manage objections and answer questions.
6. Ask for the business – the prospect expects as much and it is the salesperson’s responsibility. The prospect not only expects a close, they want to be asked. This is an opportunity for the salesperson to give the prospect control over the decision-making process.
7. Ask for the commitment with an action-oriented step, with confidence and a framework, for what implementation will look like.
8. Use close-ended questions to frame your close. “Would you sign the

Summary

Laying the right groundwork is the most effective way to close an occupational health sale. By understanding your customer’s wants, needs and desires, along with earning their trust, you will have done the appropriate homework to close the deal. Trust your instincts and don’t hesitate to ask for clarification along the way.

Closing need not be something to shy away from; practicing your close with a colleague can help you become at ease with this part of the sales cycle. Be prepared and scripted, visualize the outcome you want and articulate the outcome, as well.

Determine the maximum you will ask for and the minimum you will accept, and a middle point of compromise. Prepare yourself up front and you will also be prepared to offer a confident response. A successful close is your reward for a job well done and the next step to getting your client on the road to success, too.

Coming in October: *New Age Closing: Closing Prospects in Economically Challenging Times*



Carolyn Merriman, FRSA, President, Corporate Health Group,
www.corporatehealthgroup.com, 1-888-334-2500