

“I Can’t Close”

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When I ask sales people to tell me about their biggest challenge in sales, I generally hear three words; “**I Can’t Close**”. Given the fact that sales is our chosen profession, and that our livelihood depends on our ability to obtain checks, this is indeed a serious matter. As we examine this inability to close, however, my clients generally come to the conclusion that “**I Can’t Close**” is really only a symptom of a more serious underlying ailment. This hidden ailment is quite common, a great source of frustration, extremely debilitating and in fact is one of the leading causes of “sales termination.” (Wow, sounds like something on the side of a pack of cigarettes.)

When I hear someone say to me “**I Can’t Close**” we conduct a quick diagnosis, and invariably come to the same conclusion; closing is not the root problem. Closing is directly linked to one’s ability to qualify the opportunity. The real ailment and the one which must be addressed is... “**I Can’t Qualify**”. Closing a sale is either the easiest step of the sale, or the most difficult one, based upon how well you’ve met the prospect’s needs. Sure, you need poise, timing and guts, but people are actually dealing with the wrong end of the problem.

Providing you have asked the proper questions, established emotional need, quantified the financial impact of that need, determined the prospect’s financial ability to buy, and you are dealing with the ultimate decision maker, the close is a natural final step. If however, you have not gained mutual agreement on these 3 key points, which I call **Pain, Budget, and Decision**, your probability of closing the business falls to almost zero. It is on these occasions that you find yourself immersed in stalls, objections and smokescreens, as the close becomes an arm wrestling match between you and your prospect.

I do have good news for you though. Of all the ailments confronting sales people, qualifying is the easiest to fix, because it is mostly about technique and easily modified. Better news is that, with a strong focus and proper coaching, change can come about quickly. Let’s examine a few general thoughts to get you on track.

Q: In a typical sales call, how is talk time allocated?

A: You should be speaking 30% of the time, allowing the prospect to speak 70% of the time.

Q: How do you respond to your prospect’s questions?

A: You should be answering their questions with a more thought provoking question of your own.

Q: Does your qualification deal with their emotional needs?

A: You need to be asking 3 or more questions, delving deep, to uncover the emotional and personal impact as opposed to dealing with intellectual features and benefits.

Q: Do both you and the prospect have a mutual agreement on the next steps and the expected outcome?

A: You cannot close if you are on page 7 and the prospect is still on page 3 of the sales process.

Q: What are the 3-5 most frequent stalls and objections which you encounter on a regular basis?

A: If you can’t recite these and offer a powerful retort at this moment, you clearly will not be able to do so when the curtain’s up.

If you were uncomfortable with your own responses to the above questions, you need to make some adjustments.

- Review your sales system. Is it enabling you to obtain **Pain, Budget, and Decision** pieces of the puzzle?
- Make sure that you are controlling the sales process through effective questioning and a strong mutual agreement on next step(s).
- Remember your value as a sales professional (and ultimately your earnings potential) is determined more by the amount of information you gather than by the amount of information you dispense.
- Anticipate objections (there are really only 3-5 real ones) and prepare a powerful retort, which gets the prospect to reconsider or dismiss the objection.
- Sharing knowledge/expertise early on in the sales process is not necessarily a good idea as it turns you into an unpaid consultant who finds **YOUR** intellectual ideas and industry expertise being delivered by your competition

Remember to evaluate yourself as a sales professional often, embrace change and put in place steps for continuous improvement.

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