Closing techniques

A ‘close’ is just sales-jargon for a ‘sale’ – closing the sale.

Closing the contract

And there are proven techniques for increasing the probability of getting a ‘yes’. That’s why closing techniques are one of the most popular topics in sales training.

The mistake many sales people make is associating the techniques exclusively with the final sale of the product or service. But, unless you are selling a very simply service, there are lots of closes – all along the way before the final ‘yes’.

Getting an appointment to see people, for example.

In fact, some closing techniques are a perfect way to get to a ‘yes’ in an infinite variety of circumstances.

Things as SIMPLE as phoning someone we’ve never met before – finance company, possible funding organisation, potential distributor – and persuading them to let us visit them face-to-face. A graphic designer, phoning local print companies to show them a portfolio.
To things as **COMPLEX** as getting a bank manager to agree to a loan.

Clearly, they are not a magic wand, so don’t expect an inevitable ‘yes’. But research has shown that salespeople who use formal closing techniques all the time achieve more Yes’s than those who don’t.

**Types of close**

Hard-core sales people use about a dozen different techniques but, as an entrepreneur, you will NEVER have the time to become completely confident with all of them. So I’ve chosen just a handful of the easiest ones that I think you could feel comfortable with. Just choose three that you think you could live with - AND that seem most relevant to the sort of yes-situations you’re likely to meet in your environment.

Let’s see how they work in real life
The Assumptive close

This is where you act as though the other person *has already made the decision*. It moves the conversation towards the next level of questions.

Like many of you, I sell a service to businesses. In my case, it’s copywriting.

When people find me via my website, they often send a brief - describing their requirements, expecting an email in return. Instead, I phone them to discuss the document, *and I speak as though I have already been accepted*....”

“OK, I can start work on Monday and we should be able to get the whole thing wrapped up within a couple of weeks. I will need to speak to some of your internal experts, though, for more details, so who should I be talking to?”

I’ve already passed the conversation from *will-you or won’t-you* to talking about the *next step*.

And *acting as if something is true*, makes it difficult for the other person to deny it.

This, by the way, is one of the most common closes used by professional salespeople.
The Alternative close

I love this one.

The alternative close is a variation of the Assumptive Close. It works by offering a choice that isn’t between 'Yes' or 'No'. It’s a choice between 'Yes' and 'Yes'.

This technique works well in so many different situations where you are seeking agreement, and not just selling products.

I use it all the time when trying to get a face-to-face meeting.

Rather than “Could I possibly come round to see you?” – the answer could be yes or no

I say: “Shall we meet Thursday morning or Friday afternoon?”

Acting as if the other person has already decided to meet me – and the only question left is which of a limited number of options they should choose.

Another example might be:

“Do you want the basic web package or the tailored one?”
Imagine standing in a pet shop, tempted to buy that cute little puppy. Now imagine how that desire would be enhanced twentyfold, if the puppy were put into your arms.

That is exactly what the car salesperson is doing when they suggests a *test drive*.

That’s why some web developers – if the potential value of the sale justifies it – will create a mockup of what their prospect’s site – letting the prospect press the keys and navigate around it.

That’s why Microsoft gives people a free month’s trial of their Office solutions.
Half Nelson

When you’re getting near to a ‘Yes’, you’ll often be thrown an objection which is dead easy to answer. The secret is not to!

Instead, make it a condition of resolving their objection that they go ahead.

Let’s suppose our fictitious web developer has been asked:

“With your websites, would it be possible for each of our clients to have a secure login to their own personal information?”

If the answer’s ‘yes’, it’s so tempting to say so – but so much more powerful to ask:

“If we could, would you go ahead?”

Always phrase it "If we could, would you?" - not "Would you if we could?"

Starting with 'would you' is inviting them to raise more objections. On the other hand, starting with 'If we could....' puts focus on this single objection – which we know we can answer!
Winston Churchill (or Balance Sheet) close

The strength of the balance sheet close is that it demonstrates that you are actively trying to HELP the other person to make up their mind. It’s the ultimate in ‘non-confrontational’.

It works particularly well where the other person is genuinely having difficulty coming to a decision.

We literally sit down with them - the same side of the desk - and draw up a balance sheet of pro’s and con’s. Well, almost

The Balance-sheet Close works by building trust. It guides the other person's thinking and hopefully saves them the trouble of weighing up the pros and the cons for themselves.

On a blank sheet of paper, draw a line down the middle, with the headings Cons (reasons not to buy) on the left and Pros (reasons to buy) on the right – just like a balance sheet
Start with the cons and let the prospect do all the work themselves. Starting with the cons makes it more credible, as if you are giving them fair consideration. And, because they’re coming at it unprepared, they’ll soon run out of reasons not to go ahead. Don’t make any suggestions. Keep quiet.

Then you cover the pros. Here you DO help the prospect to build up a long list - much longer then the Cons. Remember, when we talked about features and benefits I asked you to spend a half day brainstorming the pro’s of your offering. Now you can see why. You’ll have a complete armoury.

As you raise each one, check that the other person agrees – don’t force the issue. Don’t try to persuade – simply move on to the next one. Don’t rush – you are thinking things through, TOGETHER.

Hey, now you’ve got a long list of pro’s and a short list of con’s that the other person has agreed to. Time for an assumptive close...

“Well, that seems to be it. When shall we start work?”
The crap, OK, perfect close

In this close, we make three offers.

Almost every graphic designer I have worked with uses this technique, post-sale, to get their customer to sign off their design – that’s when they get paid!

Instead of simply presenting their hard-worked-on design, with the possibility of a rejection - they prepare three designs. One crap, one OK (both of which took no time at all to produce) and the third – their real design, on which they have spent all their time and effort.

They begin by presenting the first, selling it up as though they believe it is the perfect solution, but really knowing that the client will be disappointed.

Next they move to the OK design, again selling for all it’s worth.

The client begins to feel some relief now, but is still not excited.

Then they reveal the true design, as though it were just one of three. Nothing special. The client is absolutely thrilled to see something demonstrably better. They’re able to assert their
superior taste and insight. They even start lecturing the
designer on why this is the perfect design. In other words...

They start selling to themselves

The client feel great – the designer gets the ‘yes’.

It works like a dream. And you can see how it can work pre-
close in other sales situations, whatever your product, service
or concept.
Close early, close often

I have shadowed underperforming salespeople and a common reason for their poor performance is that they never get round to asking for a ‘yes’. They’re too worried about being rebuffed. Better to just ‘keep on selling’.

Top sales people start attempting a close as early as possible – and keep closing all the way until they succeed - or decide to cut their losses.

Good closing!