



## Taking the Mystery Out of Closing

by Rick Davis

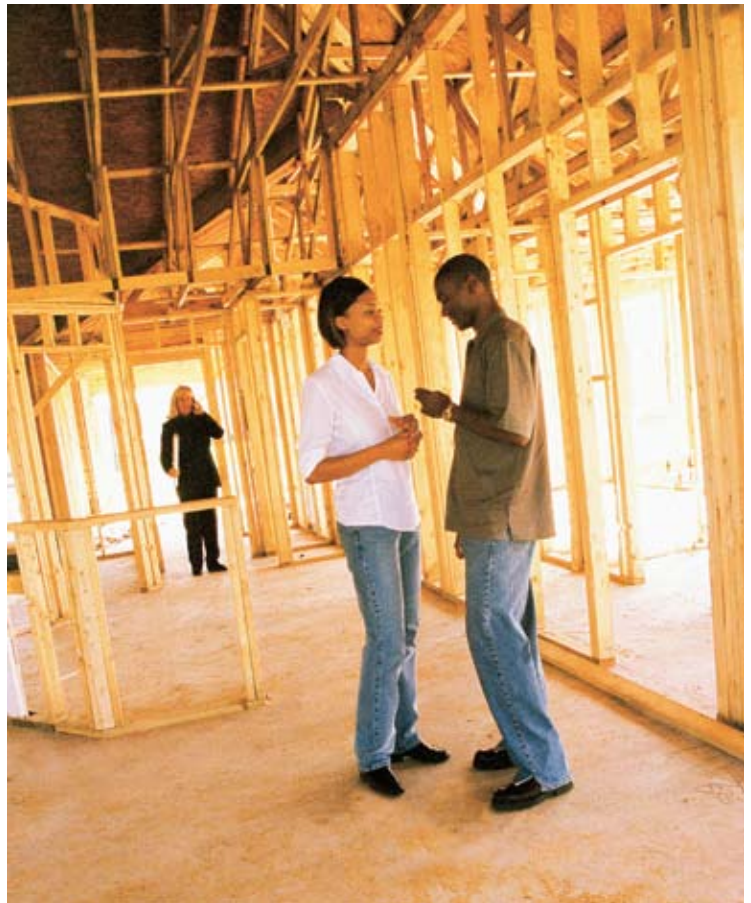
If you have ever felt that closing is an accidental process that is mysteriously out of your control, you are not alone; a surprising number of salespeople candidly admit to me that they feel the same way. Unfortunately, salespeople are taught gimmicks and manipulative tactics for closing that usually never work in the competitive — and often combative — world of construction supply, leading many reps to feel they are not in control.

Countless seminars throughout the country are led by old-style trainers that teach the same ridiculous methods that were in vogue in the 1950s — such as the Ben Franklin close, the reduce-to-the-absurd close or the Nike close (i.e., “just do it”). These manipulative tactics are not the methods of the successful sales leaders of the 21st century. Despite what most salespeople are taught, closing is not an all-or-nothing moment of tense confrontation in which you “ask for the order.”

The good news is that you may already be employing effective closing techniques and not even realize it. In reality, closing a sale is not an event, but rather a process, a series of little victories. The actual moment of the close is merely a casual and sequential step in a process with ebb and flow that culminates in a casual agreement to conduct business with little conflict at the final moment when the deal is made. The secret to sales success is keeping this ebb and flow moving, which means maintaining a momentum of meetings and appointments, each with a purpose and a goal of understanding clients’ needs.

### Follow the Leader

Perhaps the best way to illustrate the actual method of closing a sale is to follow the process of Mikhail, a Chicago salesman for a roofing and siding dealer. When I observed him in action, he first made a call on the client with only a business card, one brochure (which included an abundance of references for the prospect to call), a blank writing tablet and a “brag book” that highlighted pictures of projects his company had successfully completed in the past. He didn’t even take an order form with him to the initial call, saying, “I don’t do bids. I give my clients proposals and I can only do that after I have a thorough understanding of their project.”



During the first call (which was a one-legger), he investigated the reason that his client had invited him in. He wanted to know about the long-term plans for the client’s home — asking questions like “How long do you plan to live here?” and “Is the project for beauty, energy, resale value or some combination?” During the call, he showed the prospect pictures of similar houses, which, in this case, were Victorian. The brag book had an abundance of architectural styles to choose from, but he focused on houses similar to that of the prospect.

The prospect had originally called about new vinyl siding. During the sales call, Mikhail discovered that a competing company had already given a quote to replace the roof. With no panic, he told the prospect that his company had an

excellent variety of roofing products that they could install as well. He cited the advantage of timing the roof before the siding installation. Note: He did not even suggest that the client should buy the roof from him ... yet. He merely acted in a consultative capacity to advise the client and, as you can obviously expect, catapult his credibility.

At the conclusion of the first meeting, Mikhail scheduled the next meeting, at which he would deliver his proposal. At the second call, he presented a proposal and graciously accepted the prospect's desire to discuss the project details with his wife. He suggested that he meet with both of them to provide color samples at a third meeting.

At the third meeting, the spouse was still not in attendance. Mikhail went through the samples and, as you might expect, suggested that he leave a few of the most favorable behind so that the client could show his spouse. He scheduled a time when he could pick up his samples and, if the client wanted to move forward, discuss next steps to the buying process.

At that next meeting, Mikhail closed the deal. He never asked for the order and, in fact, prior to the meeting the client had suggested that he and Mikhail should discuss the process of construction planning. The project went off flawlessly and the satisfied client eagerly submitted a recommendation letter to the remodeling company. Additionally, this client provided referrals for two other projects in the neighborhood.

The question here is: When was the "close" of the sale? Was it the signing of the purchase order, as most of us would think? Or was it the verbal commitment prior to the meeting? Was it the "credibility moment" when Mikhail advised the client on construction scheduling? Or perhaps it was the meeting that occurred between the spouses when Mikhail wasn't even there. In fact, all of those factors contributed to the "close." The close is not one moment of ultimate confrontation. It is a series of small successes that lead to the ultimate sale.

Behind the scenes, this client had two other salespeople that had tried fruitlessly for a one-time close and one no-show salesperson. Additionally, the couple agreed that they wanted one credible remodeler to handle the entire project and, in spite of a slightly higher price for the roof, went with Mikhail's company. Lastly, the couple agreed that there was not another remodeler that even remotely displayed the level of professionalism of Mikhail. I know all this to be true because I was Mikhail's client!

## Time for Business

So if closing really is a series of meetings and events, how do you secure time with prospective clients on a long-term basis? The best way is to conclude meetings by scheduling the next appointment, just like Mikhail did.

The following systematic approach can help you improve your chances for scoring the next meeting.

**1. Listen carefully to understand a potential client's challenges and reasons so that a follow-up meeting might**

**be appropriate.** Identify any opportunity to justify a mutually beneficial meeting with a prospect such as the delivery of the proposal or samples — or the pickup of the samples.

**2. Then state that reason for a future meeting.** Rather than ask the poorly phrased (and ubiquitous) question "What else can I do for you?" specifically state a reason for the next meeting. You can't expect a potential customer to do your job for you. Use the phrase "We ought to meet because I have something that would truly be beneficial for you." Then state what the purpose of a follow-up meeting would be.

**3. Schedule the meeting.** After you have clearly stated the reason for a meeting, leave with a set time and date, which the prospect will be less likely to cancel than casual plans.

The reality of the "close" is that it has less to do with manipulation and tricks and more to do with sincere intention to help prospects and clients grow. When you keep that purpose in your heart, you'll discover it is easier to schedule meetings and create an ongoing series of miniature closes that lead to greater confidence and systematic sales success. **R**

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