

Successful Selling with NLP - The New Bazaar

Closing and Customer Service

In the Old Bazaar, the close was the focal point of the sale. It was where everything had been leading. It was make or break time. In the Old Bazaar, when you were about to close, imaginary crowds gathered to watch, trumpeters played a fanfare, you placed all your eggs in one basket, took a deep breathe and asked for the order.

Here are some old bazaar examples, (slightly exaggerated):

- The Authority close - "Go on, BUY IT!"
- The Guilt close - "I have put such a lot of effort and time into this, you owe it to me to buy."
- The Hypnotic close - "Can you not feel an urge to BUY NOW you know this product is for you, wasn't it?"
- The 'Economy' close - "Think how much money you will save on this special offer. You can't afford not to buy." (Countered by: "If I have no need for the product, I can save even more money by not buying at all")
- The Guillotine close - "I am afraid I can only offer this price today. Tomorrow prices have to rise by 30%."
- The Confusion close - "I can see you are the kind of adventurous person who likes the challenge of buying something you have doubts about."
- The Scarcity Close - "This is the last one I have. I am not sure when we will be getting them again."

Such manipulative closes have had their day. In the New Bazaar, the close is a choice, and the natural result of all that has gone before. It is a choice both you and the customer make. Do you, the sales person, want this person as a customer? And does the customer want you, your company and products? If there is not a positive response to this choice from both elements of the buying/selling process, the close will not happen.

To reach this choice point you need to be certain of three things.

* The customer is qualified.

* The product meets their need and their criteria, from their viewpoint.

* The sale is a winning move for both of you.

When and if you close, timing is all-important. Someone's internal state, how they feel inside, what they are thinking, manifests itself in their external or visible behaviour. That's how you know when someone close to you is feeling different inside, because their external behaviour, their posture, colouring, movements, mannerisms, change. It's the recognition of these changes in external behaviour that prompts you to ask, "What's up?" because you want to know what has changed in their internal state to create this change in their external behaviour. This change is a signal that they need your help or support. In the same way you know when someone is feeling really good inside because their external behaviour tells you.

With friends and relations you may find it easy to read their external behaviour and know what internal state it represents because you know them well. With someone new, even if you have had a number of meetings with them, your natural, unconscious ability to absorb and understand the signs, will not be so refined.

In the Old Bazaar, external behaviours are generalised and made applicable to all. In the New Bazaar, we say everyone is different. You need to read the non-verbal, external behaviour of the individual in order to be certain you are reading their internal state accurately. You need to talk with the customer about something pleasant to him in order to read or calibrate, his non-verbal messages that go with feeling good. You need to talk about uncertainties in the past to be able to read or calibrate all the signs that go with uncertainty. Do both of these things early in the interview as part of the small talk. Take a mental snapshot of both states. This is calibrating the customer. It is only by reading individuals in this way that you will be able to time your close to suit you and the customer. Do not close when you calibrate uncertainty.

A well-timed close is always successful.

Encountering a lot of objections tells you that your close was premature.

Closing the sale is very simple. You have to ask for the order. Do not introduce new information, it will simply be confusing. Backtrack the discussion, linking product to need and criteria. Once you have asked, be quiet and wait. You will be able to tell what the customer's answer will be by reading their external behaviour. How you ask for the order is also important, not so much the words you use as the way you use them. Your words must communicate that you are certain your proposal is right for the customer, but more importantly your non-verbal messages must say the same thing. With so much of our communication being non-verbal, if there is a clash between our verbal and non-verbal messages, incongruence, it will be the non-verbal message that will register as being the truth. If we 'um' and 'ah' when asking, "Is it all right to go ahead then?" we will trigger doubt in the customer's mind. In order to avoid this incongruence we need to do two things:

- Be absolutely clear that your proposal is right for the customer and that you have created a win-win relationship.
- Know that selling is an act of giving and not an act of taking away.

When product meets need and criteria, you will not need any special closing techniques. Manipulative closes have had their day. Closes are manipulative when they have nothing to do with the customers need.

Dealing with Questions, Objections and Issues

During the course of a meeting or a series of meetings, customers will ask you questions and raise issues or objections. At first these might throw you off course. You might feel like a sailor making good head way suddenly hit by a sideways wind. You have a choice. You can fight the wind. You can pretend it is not there. Or you try to harness the power it

gives you. The choice you make will be influenced by your interpretation of the customer's intention. If you choose to believe that the question, issue or objection is thrown into the conversation to cause trouble or halt proceedings, then it is likely you will resist. If you interpret the customer's intention as being positive, to seek more information, greater understanding and clarification, then you will harness the wind and make faster progress towards your destination.

Questions and objections help you clarify the customer's need. They point to customer's criteria either directly or indirectly. A long-term relationship with a customer is built on trust, not that nothing will go wrong, but that when it does you can put it right. The long-term relationship is more important than the short-term problem.

Questions

Answer customer questions as far as you are able, except for four areas:

- The question is a technical one, and although you have some answer, it is usually best referred to your technical backup. Precision questions about features and how they work fall into this category.
- The customer knows the answer already. Why is he asking? Not to find out the answer to that question. Stay away from guessing games.
- You cannot commit yourself or your company to what the customer wants. Negotiate rather than answer.
- You do not know. Just say so. And offer to find out and give them the answer later.

Objections

An objection is always valid for the customer. To address it, you have to look at it from their point of view. If the customer states an objection, turn it into a question. Say something like, "I understand you are concerned about..... (backtrack what the customer said)..... Is there a particular question you have about that aspect.....?"

It's like the vending machine salesman who thought he had defined the need and criteria of a customer to his complete satisfaction to be hit at the last moment by the statement, "We've done a survey. The staff don't want to drink the rubbish you get from those machines." All of the efficiency, savings, hygiene, and other benefits had been suddenly swept aside. Able to maintain his state and rapport, but only just, as he saw his hard earned

commission go flying out of the window, the sales person asked what question the customer really wanted to ask. After much support and encouragement, the customer said, "What will happen if the quality of the drinks deteriorates and the staff complain? What will management think of my decision then?" Having reached that point, a guarantee on quality control was all that was needed to re establish the sale.

Objections and issues usually come down to one of the following messages.

- "I need more time to make a decision." Give the time, and set up another meeting or contact to review progress, never leave it open ended. It may be that a manager needs to evaluate all the bids she has received and then make a decision. It may be

that there are criteria still to be addressed. Watch the customer and ask, "What do you still need to know?" or, "What area are you still uncertain about?" Often another person needs to be involved in the decision. If appropriate, ask if you can be there too. You are the best advocate for your own product. A customer may simply need to get several viewpoints from different, perhaps neutral, people before coming to a decision, in which case make that as easy as possible. He may also want names of previous clients he can talk to.

- "Thank you. I want to shop around."
Say, "Naturally, it is absolutely right to explore the market before committing yourself. Do you have any questions I can answer right now?" You could also ask, "Who else will you be talking to?" or, "Who else will you be seeing?"
- "I do not like some parts of the product."
Ask, "Which parts exactly are you unhappy about?" It would be a pity if an all or nothing decision (buy or not buy) hinged on a part that might be changeable or negotiable.
- Money. There are two possible objections.
"It's too cheap."
This may mean the customer does not trust you, and she is saying, "Where's the catch?" Low price equals poor quality in her mind. This is a credibility issue. You need to show your customer that whatever the price, your product meets her criteria. If your price is seriously below the general market price, this can paradoxically be a drawback. You must explain why.
"It's too expensive."
The budget may not be available. You ask, "If we can find a way to deal with the price issue that satisfies you, would you buy?" If the customer says "Yes." then negotiate round price. Beware of setting up a lose/win situation where you reduce your price just to make the sale. It is usually unrealistic and sets the buyer up to lose later. Always tell buyers if they are getting a special deal, if you are prepared to do so. Make it completely specific to the one sale, and make it clear that there are no strings attached. The customer does not want to buy a debt as well as a product. If they say "No." or hesitate then there are either other objections, or the money issue is not negotiable.

It is usually better not to negotiate on price if you can possibly help it. Value for money often hides behind the price objection. If money was unlimited we could buy anything and everything we wanted. Alas, it is not. Money represents scarcity and choice. Spending money on one thing means we cannot have something else. Money is a measure of value. We decide where to spend money based on our value hierarchy.

Customer's will pay more for added value, usually one of the three 'Rs':

Reputation

Reliability

Relationship.

There are two further ways to deal with the price objection. They both involve cost analysis. The first is a cost effectiveness comparison. Given the customer's need, your product is the most cost effective way of meeting it. This argument hinges on the way from element of the customer's need. They must do something, the only question is, what? The second is a cost benefit analysis. You show that the measurable benefits of having the product are greater than the cost. This aspect is based on the towards aspect of the need - future benefit. There are a number of questions that help surface objections. These are useful when you believe that there is an unvoiced block to progress.

"Is there anything that prevents you making a decision about this today?"

In cases where the customer simply seems uncertain, you may need to fish for the specific objection to help crystallise it. Useful questions are:

"Are you satisfied about the cost and the financing options?"

"Are you satisfied with the guarantee, and the service?"

"Is there something I did not fully explain to you?"

"Is it the rightprice..... timing... length....?"

"What is the main concern you have left?"

As you deal with objections, you can find out about others that still need attention, by using what is called the Conditional Close. When dealing with an objection, ask, "If this issue were resolved to your satisfaction, would there be anything else that would need to be addressed?" The general form of the conditional close is, "If.....this and this...were to happen....then would you buy?" This is a powerful question which may be received as harassment if you ask it persistently. Handle it with care.

There is an interesting pattern of behaviour that you have probably met called the polarity response, or Devil's Advocate. A person who uses this pattern of behaviour will find some point to disagree on whatever you say. Their favourite phrase is: "Yes but....." This can be annoying, and really all they are doing is looking for the exception. They are addicted to looking for difference. Polarity responders are easy to deal with because they are so consistent. Simply phrase in the negative. Instead of saying, "You will like this.....", say, "I'm not sure if you will like this....." Do not say, "This will interest you...." , say, "This may not interest you....." For those readers who are polarity responders, this paragraph may not be quite what you were looking for.....

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