

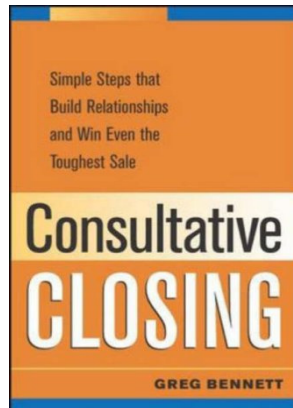
Consultative Closing

Simple Steps That Build Relationships and Win Even the Toughest Sale

About the Author

Greg Bennett describes himself as a “Sales Head Coach,” meaning he enjoys succeeding through the other people. He forms lasting training and coaching partnerships with organizations and individuals to improve their sales performance, focusing on developing and closing more business while enhancing customer relationships.

Bennett published his first book, *Consultative Closing: Simple Steps that Build Relationships and Win Even the Toughest Sale*, which outlines his leading-edge strategies for closing sales quickly and easily while building customer relationships that last.



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■ The Big Idea

For the past several years, the often-unwarranted myth of the pushy, aggressive, and worst of all, deceitful salesperson has become ingrained in American culture. While consultative selling, the practice of becoming an advisor to the customer, is the most effective method of engaging a client, it has also made the process more challenging – leaving salespeople who are afraid to close the deal and clients who are reluctant to make a decision.

Consultative Closing bridges the gap between the aggressive salesperson who gets results and the informed consultant who builds lasting relationships. With a revolutionary step-by-step approach to the sales process and proven methods and strategies, this hands-on field guide helps you maneuver the pitfalls and overcome the fears that can hinder any deal, ensuring that you achieve a successful close while building strong “partnerships” with clients to maximize their investment in your product.

Why You Need This Book

This book will enable you to achieve maximum success – and help you have the best of both worlds – making the deal and keeping the client.

CONSULTATIVE CLOSING SALESPeOPLE WILL RULE THE WORLD

Closing is a good thing. Consultative Closing is an even better thing. Let's dig into the simple steps that will make you a more effective closer immediately.

Consultative selling is the only way to sell, but the process can lead to problems with closing.

Consultative sales people typically don't acknowledge that there is a sales call taking place and that the person they're talking to is playing the role of client. This leads to an increased use of deception to avoid conflict.

Closing needs to be redefined as not just a YES, but a YES or NO.

Consultative salespeople typically aren't comfortable with hard-sell closing strategies, though there are some positives to the harder style, like getting people to take action.

The secret to success in sales in the future is combining the best of consultative selling with the action mindset of harder-edge sellers (all while building and sustaining strong client relationships).

MINI-STEPS

Here is a quick overview of what Mini-Steps are and what they're designed to do:

Mini-Steps Are:

- Identifiable steps within the sales process.
- Physical, action-oriented steps taken by the client, the salesperson, or a third party.
- Steps we can put on a time-line of Before, During, and After the sale.

Mini-Steps Are Designed To:

- Move the closing process from the verbal to the physical, as clients will now prove how “interested” they are through their actions and not their words.
- Give the salesperson several opportunities to “take the client’s temperature” during their time in the sales pipeline process. If the client won’t take a simple action-oriented Mini-Step early on, it is a clear sign that something has happened inside that client’s decision-making process.
- Show the client that the salesperson has a much more thorough process before, during, and after the sale – this will make the competition look lazy and weak in comparison.
- Remove the client from the market by tying him down to a course of action early. Once steps are taken, it is much harder to undo those steps and go in another direction.

There are no rules for how many steps there must be in your process, or for what steps must be included. The amount and scope of the steps you develop are totally up to you. The key is to have enough of the right steps to effectively drive your sales machine.

HOW TO USE MINI-STEPS TO CLOSE FOR ACTION

Just having the Mini-Steps isn't enough. You need to know how to ask good closing questions.

When you have a defined Mini-Step, you can get more direct with your questioning through what we call an Assumptive Suggestion (an assumptive tone, but tempered with a suggestion).

You must learn how to listen and respond to what you're hearing and seeing. Listening is actually observing, moving beyond the verbal and focusing on the physical and action steps.

There are only two possible outcomes to an action-oriented question: Either YES the client is taking action, or NO the client is not taking action.

If you get YES, seize the moment and be specific with your actions, and if you get affirmation, keep taking action steps.

If you get NO, be realistic. Don't pretend you didn't see or hear the response given by the client.

Mini-Steps are an excellent tool for closing various removed decision makers (RDMs) and lower level decision makers (LLDMs).

WHY SALESPEOPLE ARE SO AFRAID OF NO

- They've done a lot of work to get a client to a certain point and don't want to blow it. They've probably spent a great deal of time prospecting and working their way in to an opportunity with a client, they've questioned and probed, they've listened and presented ideas, and they probably developed several proposals along the way. It's too hard to imagine just saying NO and walking away.

- They feel that NO is too final and MAYBE is a more comfortable resting place. A client who is actively engaged on his role within a sales call, the sales clock is on, and the word MAYBE usually leads to anything but a YES. In fact, MAYBE usually leads to a stalled sale, a covering up of the real issues, and eventually a NO, whether it's said or the thing just sort of "goes away."
- They like to be liked and don't want to cause conflict. Salespeople find it's much easier, faster, and less stressful to accept the client's MAYBE bone tossed their way than to face what they feel is the harsh reality of NO.
- They like having a good story to tell their boss, partner, friends, spouse – and mostly, themselves. Salespeople usually come back with some sort of positive spin.

Whether it's ego, or pride, or a desire only to see positive outcomes, whatever the reason, we all like to tell ourselves and others good stories about how things are going, what we've got cookin', and how we've got our act together. While it's beautiful to believe in a positive outcome, it's nuts to look at the reality of today and just pretend that a NO client is really a YES client.

CONSULTATIVE CLOSING BY FOCUSING ON AFTER THE SALE

Here are some simple steps to get into place right way:

Step 1: Create A "Maximizer Manual" For Everything The Client Buys

This manual can also be delivered with a special gift, a way of saying "welcome to the family." Make the first time buy a big thing, especially if you'd like to form a long-term relationship with this client.

Step 2: Develop Post-Sale Check-Up Meetings

These meetings can be as formal or informal as you feel is necessary, and can take place either face-to-face or over the phone. You can also develop several follow-up checklists and surveys to help solicit the type of feedback you need.

Step 3: Create Mini-Steps Out Of Post-Buy Events and Use Them To Close The Sale

So with whatever post-buy things you develop, you'll need to break them out into tangible action-oriented Mini-Steps and treat them like you do the pre-buy steps: define deliverables, assign responsibility, pick rough delivery dates, and so forth.

SOME SIMPLE STEPS FOR MANAGERS TO IMPROVE PROSPECTING ACCOUNTABILITY

Establish a solid average number of new business calls each person on the team must make on a weekly basis in order to adequately fill the pipeline on a regular basis.

When the salesperson gets busy, establish a minimum number of new calls each salesperson must make, even in their busiest times.

Introduce staff-wide mandatory prospecting times. This one step has had a more positive impact on the overall prospecting effectiveness of my clients than anything else we have suggested. It also provides a great support system for salespeople who otherwise may quit after a few calls on their own.

Pay particular attention to salespeople who have a lot of pending business in their pipeline, because their tendency will be to stop for a while to catch up. We all have a desire to do the safer, seemingly more productive thing, rather than pick up the phone and make new contacts.

A FOUR-WEEK PLAN FOR IMPLEMENTATION AND LASTING SUCCESS

Week 1

- Get 3 x 5 cards and write each Mini-Step you currently have, along with ones you need to create, on a card. If you want to take an extra step and get colored cards, or get some colored stickers to signify different types of steps that can be even more effective.
- Make a list of all the opportunities you now have in the pipeline.
- In conjunction with your post-buy Mini-Steps review, list what you give clients to help them not only to use your product, but to maximize their investment. Think of yourself owning the product or service. Knowing what you know, what would you do to make sure you get the most from your product?

Week 2

- Make your Mini-Steps accessible wherever you have client contact – in your office, cubicle, or in your notebook – and even write the steps on a card you can easily carry with you. The idea is to keep the next steps in mind as you go through the closing process with the client.
- If you have a sales manager, or are a sales manager, review the debriefing process after a call to make sure you're asking clear questions that get a firm response.
- If you have a renewable product or service, you need to establish strategic touch points in between renewal time periods. If it's an annual cycle, the touch points may happen on a quarterly basis, or more or less often, depending on your particular situation.

Week 3

- Analyze the performance of your Mini-Steps and the action-oriented questions you're using in conjunction with them.
- After each call, go to clients you've allowed to slip back into MAYBE and ask them for clarification on where they truly are.
- One way to support your network is to tell customers that your ongoing touch points are excellent opportunities to do some networking. And not just for your needs. Networking can also help the client solve a particular challenge.

Week 4

- Review your Mini-Step process from start to finish. Now that you've had a chance to use the various steps, you may want to lay the cards out again on the table. Consider changing around the order, or adding or subtracting a few steps.
- Make it a habit to ask yourself after each client contact, "Did I get a YES for this action?" If the answer is, "No, I didn't," or "I'm not sure," then you're being seduced back into Maybe-Land and you need to pick up the phone and clarify exactly what happened and where you are.

You need to review your total After-the-Sale program. Is it something that will truly help a client understand not only how to use the product, but more importantly, is it something that will maximize the investment on both ends?

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