

Wrapping up the Business

When it comes to closing an engagement, many are apprehensive, fearful of being seen as too aggressive, awkward, or even desperate. However, once you have presented your proposal, it is important to ask for the business because business rarely closes itself. The key is to know your prospect, their needs, and their situation - which should happen earlier in the sales process. If you do, then asking for the business should be a natural progression in your conversation.

In our last article, we shared how to handle some common objections you might face after asking the prospect how they feel about your proposed approach to their needs. If the answer is positive from the beginning and/or you have successfully addressed any concerns, it is appropriate to ask for their business.

A few popular closing methods you may wish to try are the:

- **Straightforward Close** - The most direct closing method is to simply ask if the prospect is ready to make a decision and, if they are, how they feel about awarding the business to your firm.

With this method, you may say something like, *"If you are comfortable with our planned approach, the next step is to complete our paperwork. Are you ready to approve the engagement and sign our engagement letter?"*

While it can be quite effective and is certainly appropriate, this method can make some people, especially those new to selling, uncomfortable because of its directness. However, if you have covered all of the other steps in the sales cycle and feel you have addressed the prospect's needs with your proposal, the prospect is expecting this type of question.

- **Reverse Close** – With the reverse close method, you ask a question that you hope elicits a "no." For instance, you may ask, *"Can you think of any reason why you wouldn't want to move forward on this engagement with our firm?"* When your prospect (hopefully) says, "No, I can't think of any reason not to move forward; we are satisfied with your answers to our initial objections," then you are ready to make a straightforward close by presenting your engagement letter or other paperwork and asking them to sign it. The psychology behind this closing method is that it may feel easier for the prospect to commit by saying no, instead of yes.
- **Trial Close** – Another popular closing method is called the trial close, where you ask an open-ended question to get a better feeling for where you stand on earning the business versus asking for the business outright.

You may ask something like, *“Can you tell me the likelihood of your firm moving forward on this engagement with us?”*

This method allows you to learn where the prospect is in the decision-making process, their timing, and what he or she thinks the next steps should be. It may also uncover some additional issues. Based upon their reply (and potentially some verbal and non-verbal cues), you may need to go back into handling objections or perhaps make a straightforward (or even assumptive) closing statement. Be careful not to get into a circular conversation where you are unable to move forward and close the business.

- **Assumptive Close** – The last closing method we’ll share is the assumptive close. While some testify to the impressive effectiveness of this method, it is not for everyone. In this case, you will presume that the business is already sold – a bolder move than the other methods! First, ask an open-ended question to uncover any further issues and the prospect’s thoughts about moving forward, as in the trial close. If no issues are raised, then you may say something like, *“It appears that you are comfortable with all aspects of our proposal and have no further objections. If you agree that that’s the case, would you like to begin this project next Monday or the first of the month?”*

When you get the go-ahead on the business, there are a few things to keep in mind:

- Complete all necessary agreements and engagement letters, clearly stating services scope, pricing, and timing.
- Show gratitude simply by saying thank you verbally and also with a written note. You may also choose to send a firm premium or two with your logo to keep your firm top of mind as other needs arise.
- Brief others in your organization to be sure you all fulfill on the commitments you made to the prospect during and after the sale and as written in your proposal. Be diligent in your follow through and level of client service.
- Check in regularly to uncover any unmet or new needs and address any concerns or issues that may arise.

There are a number of ways to close an engagement and as many theories on the “correct” method. Choose the closing method and language that feels comfortable and natural to you in the moment, with that prospect. Be flexible, too, as not every situation – or prospect – is the same. The most important part is letting the prospect know that you would like their business. You can’t get what you don’t ask for! Then make the new client glad that they said “yes” by doing what you said you would do by when you said you would do it.

Krista Remer is a consultant and Jennifer Wilson is a partner and co-founder of ConvergenceCoaching, LLC, a leadership and marketing consulting and coaching firm that specializes in helping CPA and IT firms achieve success. Learn more about the company at www.convergencecoaching.com.