

The Little Book of Closing

**10 painless ways to ask for
the order**



Neville Merritt

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Make closing painless

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Make closing painless

I meet a lot of people who tell me they don't like selling. They feel uncomfortable about asking for the order yet they are fully confident that the services they are offering are of high quality and provide great value for the client.

So why is that? Usually, we find that it isn't the concept of selling that they are uncomfortable about, it's the moment when they have to ask for the order. Because they worry about it, it becomes a big deal and they shy away from it, hoping the customer will help them out by asking to buy.

It doesn't need to be scary at all. There are lots of ways of taking the pressure off asking for the order. In professional sales circles we call this Closing the Order. There are many different tactics for defusing any tension and making this a painless, natural sequence of the buyer-seller partnership.

In this ebook I have put together 10 of my favourite closes and when to use them. Only the last one, the Direct Close, is that scary "asking for the order" close and even that can be made much easier with a simple choice of words.

I hope you find these useful!

Neville Merritt



Like all Closes, **The Scarcity Close** can be cheesy or smooth, depending how you do it. Scarcity plays on the subconscious reaction to want something that may soon be gone. It's a survival response, fear of famine if you like.

If you sell products, you could say you only have a few in stock/that size/that colour. Maybe they are difficult to source, or long delivery times if you don't order now. You can refer to limited availability of special prices, discounts, or the need to buy now before the new price list come into force.

Services can also use this Close:

“Book your slot now before we get busy in the xxx season”

“I think Mary would be the best designer for this job, but she's going to be too busy after next month”

“I only take on a few clients at a time but I could squeeze you in.”

As with all Closes, don't just use them for asking for the order. Use them for moving to the next stage in your sales cycle - for example

“I'd like to fit in a site visit but I have only one free day this month.”



The Assumptive Close

The Assumptive Close can be really annoying and cheesy if done badly. Many experienced customers see this one coming and will push back. The Assumptive Close ignores the fact that the customer hasn't said the magic word Yes and carries on as if they had.

A bad Assumptive Close would be: "I think we are all in agreement, let's start the installation next week." Too obvious. A more effective Assumptive Close is where your conversation subtly shifts to a position where the customer is assumed to have said yes:

"This will be an interesting project, I'm really looking forward to working with your team"

"As a customer, you have access to our advice line and User Group"

"I'll get the forms sent over"

"How would you like the project progress reported? I'll be here every week anyway."

If that goes well you can then move onto

"Let's get the contracts signed" etc...

As with many other closes, you can also use the Assumptive Close to move customers along the Buyer's Journey. This works well in the early stages when you need them to make a commitment:

"I expect you'll want to see samples, where shall I send them?"

"We can set up a demonstration for you. Who would you like to bring along?"



I love the **Reverse Close** because you are un-selling. Nobody can accuse you of being pushy with a reverse close.

I accidentally used this to win my biggest ever order. We were invited in to visit a group of five manufacturing plants but they only showed us one, which was fairly conventional. Our solution had features for more complex manufacturing. I called the IT director and told him that we could do the job but he could find other cheaper and simpler systems because ours had many features that plant wouldn't need. He instantly came back and pleaded for me to visit his other plants where the requirements were far more complex, and he pretty much drove the sale from then on.

A reverse close is where you pull back and assess the customer's reaction. Like my example above:

“Our system is very sophisticated but you may not want all those features.”

“This product is very high quality but it might be more than you want to pay.”

“My top-line service includes x and y but you might not want that.”

A reverse close builds your credibility because you are not trying to force your best/most costly product on the customer, in fact you are handing over the control of the sale to them.

If they are keen to carry on they will tell you.



The **Contract Close** is a simple trade. It's another close that is easy to use if you don't feel comfortable closing! "If I do xxx, will you place the order?" Examples could be:

"That's a hefty discount. If I get it authorised will you place the order today?"

"If I reserve the build slot for you, will you confirm your order?"

It is a good one for event-based services.

"Yes I can block out that date for you, but I will need you to sign the agreement to confirm it."

Many closes can be combined. The Contract Close can be combined with the Scarcity Close.

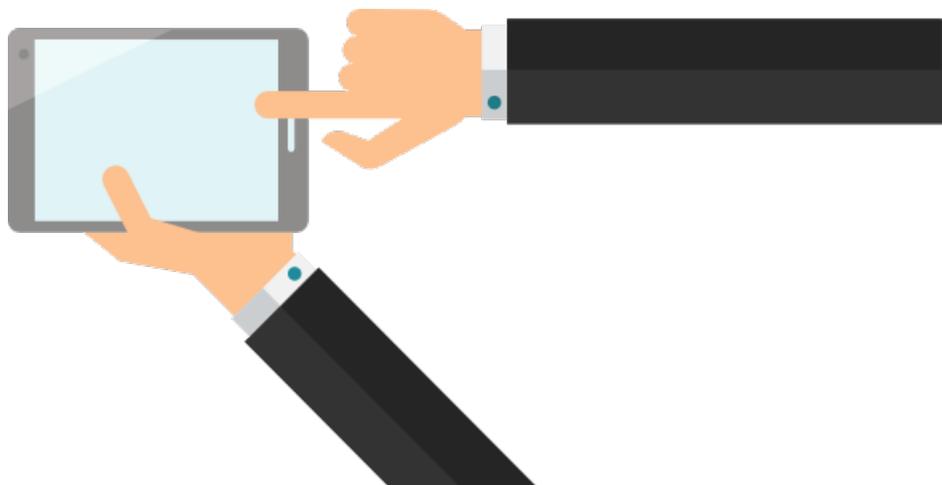
"I have several people interested in booking me for that date. I can hold it for you if you confirm it with a purchase order."

It also works well in pre-sales for gaining commitment and access to authority.

"Yes I can do a site audit but I'll need to review the findings with your CFO. Can you arrange a meeting at the end of the visit?"

I like closes that aren't too obvious, particularly closes that give the purchaser a sense of control.

Some people refer to this as the Conditional Close - it's the same thing.



The Alternative Close

The **Alternative Close** is another close that can be cheesy and obvious if the timing is wrong. It is an Assumptive Close with a difference. You are providing the customer with a choice which implies they are going to go ahead.

“Would you like it in the blue colour or red?”

“Shall I deliver it on Wednesday or Thursday?”

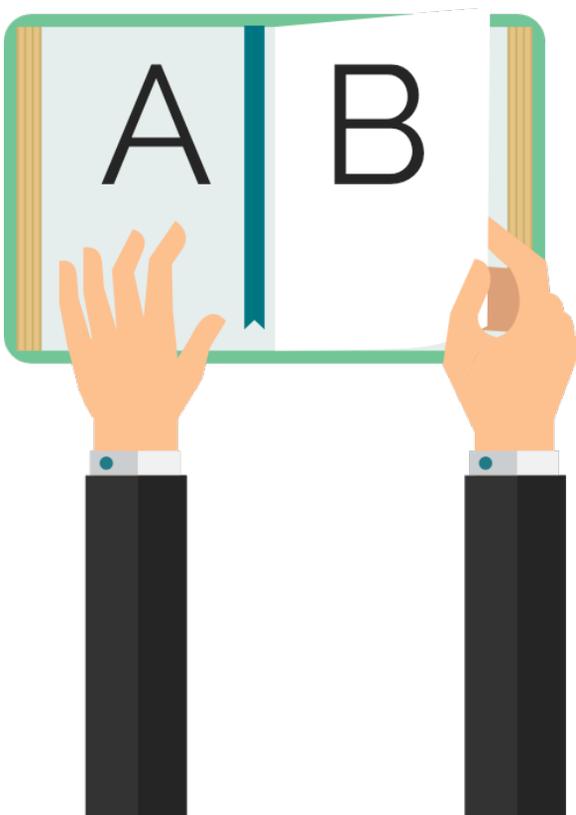
Too cheesy if it's too soon, but if the customer is ready and is thinking of saying yes anyway, it will be a relief to be given a non-threatening way of moving ahead.

By giving the customer a choice, you are giving them control, and no customer wants to lose control to a salesperson.

This is another easy close that you can use pre-sales too, to arrange dates for visits or demonstrations:

“Shall I quote for the x or y specification?”

“I'd like to meet your directors. Who would be responsible for this area, your CFO or CTO?”



A word about closing in general: if you are not a professional salesperson you might not find it easy or natural to go for the close. Equally, your customer may not be a professional buyer and may hesitate to say Yes even though they want to. Gentle closing can help them, and they may welcome that.

The Puppy Dog Close

The **Puppy Dog Close** is named after the famous puppy story. A pet shop owner would say to a family: “Take the puppy home and if after the weekend you don’t want it, bring it right back.” Of course, the kids would never let the puppy go back and the parents were stuck with it.

This close is very non-threatening.

“Try it and if you change your mind, no problem.”

There are many variations of this, and they may not seem like closes but they can be. Freemium subscription apps allow you to try the free version then upgrade to the pay (useable) version. Car test drives and any try-before-you-buy are effective Puppy Dog Closes if it is likely that the customer won’t want to let go of the product. I’ve seen it with vending machines, industrial equipment, even photographers who give you the contact print but make you buy the framed print.

This is stretching a point slightly but you could use this pre-sale as well.

“Let me send you a quote anyway.”

The quote is your Trojan Horse. If you use my proven quote formula it will be a compelling sales message right in the customer’s hand. They will want more.

One note of caution: always have a well-thought strategy for a Puppy Dog Close. There has to be a customer commitment and a hook to want more. Otherwise, it isn’t a Puppy Dog Close, you are just giving things away.



Ben Franklin was an inventor, politician and businessman. Whenever he had to make a decision, he would make two lists: why he should do it, and why he should not. The list that contained the more compelling reasons would be the way he decided.

When you are closing the sale, you are helping the customer make a decision. This can only work in some situations; ideally when you have a close working relationship and it is a complex decision.

You sit next to the customer and draw a line down the centre of a sheet of paper. Put Yes at the top on one side, and No on the other side of the line. Then you list all the reasons why the customer should go ahead. Then pass the paper to the customer and get them to list all the reasons why not.

Unless you have messed up, their list will be a lot shorter because a) you wouldn't do this unless you were sure it would turn out this way and b) you have been practicing this all night and they haven't.

This is also known as the **Balance Sheet Close** for those that understand accounting.



YES

NO

The Emotional Close

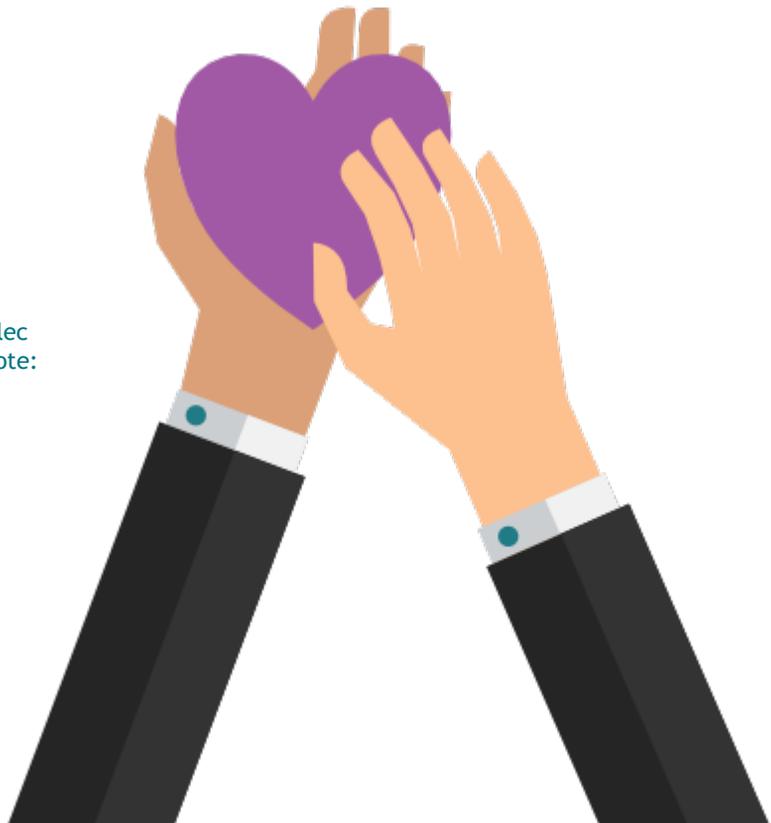
The **Emotional Close** works better in the 2020s when salespeople are helpful, liked and build close rapport with their customers. It wasn't so good in the days of Glengarry Glen Ross*.

The Emotional Close plays on the relationship you have built up with the customer and their natural good intent. You might think this is taking advantage of their good nature, but here goes anyway. This close works well when the customer has said yes, there are no other competitors in the field yet they still haven't committed to the order. You had probably forecast this weeks ago and you are under pressure from your sales director. So you go for the emotional close.

“Ken, I know you are going the place the order with us and I haven't put any pressure on you but the truth is, I'm in a bit of a situation. We had the crew all lined up for an installation on another site but they've postponed the build. Is there any chance you could place the order now so we don't have to lay off the crew? It would really help us out. Thank you so much.”

This has to be true obviously, it wouldn't be right to enter it for the Booker Prize for fiction but why not lay on the emotional close when it's needed?

* 1992 movie starring Al Pacino, Jack Lemmon and Alec Baldwin which includes the quote: “ABC Always Be Closing”



The **Trial Close** is not really asking for an order but if you get a positive response you can go straight for any of the more direct closes. A Trial Close can be used at any time when things seem to be going well. It has two purposes, firstly it gets the customer into the habit of telling you that they are happy with progress so far; secondly at the right time you can use it to check that your final close is not going to be rebuffed. A Trial Close could be:

“What do you think so far?”

“Could you see this working for your company?”

“How does this compare with what you are looking for?”

If the customer responds positively, you can carry on. If they are ready to place an order you can go on with:

“Great, let’s start shall we?”

Prof. Robert Cialdini’s Seven Principles of Influence included Commitment. If you can get your customer to voice their intentions or opinions, they are more likely to go through with it. For the same reason, you don’t want to close too soon because your customer could voice their objections which is going to register all the wrong thoughts in their minds!



With the **Direct Close** you come right out with it. Ask for the order! But that's too pushy you might say, I'm not salesy, I don't like asking for the order. We all secretly fear rejection and asking for an order might feel like inviting rejection.

The first eight closes in this book are all ones you could use instead of a Direct Close so there are plenty of alternative approaches. Close #9, the Trial Close is your ticket to No Rejection. If you use a Trial Close and everything seems to be going well, then you can assume a Direct Close will gain a Yes answer. But don't be clumsy about it. If you say: "Well, give me the order then," you'll probably get the slap you were dreading. Instead, find a more inclusive way of saying it:

"Let's get started!"

"Shall we sort out the paperwork and get things signed away?"

"Will we go ahead then?"

The word **We** in your direct close is important. This demonstrates a shared endeavour rather than a customer succumbing to a pushy salesperson.



Bonus!

These 10 Closes were first published as a series on LinkedIn. I was asked if I was going to include the **Columbo Close**. I didn't at the time, because firstly that would have made 11 and secondly it is not really a close, it is more of a re-opener. It is a useful tactic, so here it is anyway.

The Columbo Close is named after the TV detective series Columbo, where the affable main character used this technique to extract information from his suspects. Columbo would interview someone he thought was hiding information, often by visiting them in their office. At the conclusion of the interview, Columbo would thank them, get up and say goodbye. The suspect visibly relaxed, thinking he had got away with it. But at the door, Columbo would turn and ask one more casual question. The suspect, caught off guard, would blurt out something incriminating.

This technique can be used when you have a tough negotiation or your customer is refusing to commit to an order. At the end of a frustrating and fruitless meeting, you would say:

“Oh well, I guess we'll have to leave it there. What a pity. Thanks for your time anyway.”

You then have a more relaxed chat about plans for the weekend etc. As you are about to leave, you casually ask:

“By the way, just out of interest, what would it have taken to secure the order today?”

They may tell you, and it may be something you can accommodate!

Do you use any of these closes?
Could you use more of them? Which ones do you think would work for your type of sale or personal style? Do head over to the [Ascent Club](#) to ask questions and share ideas, or feel free to [contact me directly](#). I'd love to hear your experience of asking for the order with these closes.



What next?

When you run a business, you soon realise that the most important thing is to win paying customers. Without income, you don't have a business. But many of us set up a business to deliver services or products that we passionately believe in. Marketing and selling them is something we have to do but it isn't always where we have much personal experience.

After many years in marketing, sales and senior management roles I set up the Ascent Learning brand under our company Pure Potential to share the experience and knowledge I have with others who want to grow their own businesses.

On the [Ascent Learning](#) website you will find free articles, videos and downloads relating to marketing and selling your products and services. There are also online courses which you can purchase and learn more about marketing and selling at your own pace with my virtual support when you need it.

I also run open workshops and provide consultancy services if you would prefer one to one or group support to develop marketing and sales strategies for your business.

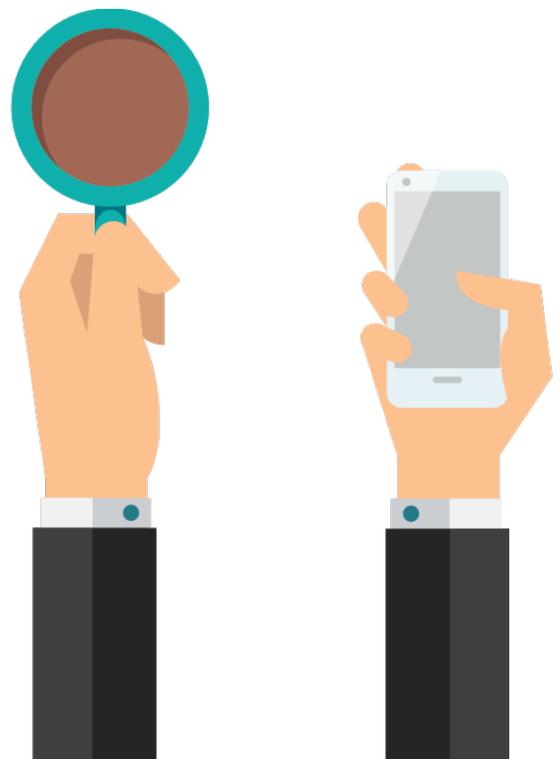
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