

Trial Closing Questions...

... tell you when to ask for a decision

By D. Forbes Ley

In today's competitive marketplace, the salesperson's responsiveness to a prospect often determines whether the sale is made or lost.

There will be no sale if...

- The prospect does not trust you
- The prospect is not excited with your solution to his or her problem
- The prospect cannot see what is in it for him or her
- The prospect does not accept your solutions and benefits, or
- The prospect cannot clarify the pros and cons.

The trial close is your test

Trial closing questions can help you test your prospect's reactions at any time during the sales process. They can help you find out what they think and feel about your product or service – and how to adjust your presentation so you can make the sale.

Unfortunately, trial closing is one of the most underutilized strategies in selling... even though it is one of the most powerful. It can tell you when to ask for the decision.

Opinions signal decisions

A trial close is any attempt to start closing the sale before the completion of the selling process. Exactly what the name implies, a trial close is a test to see how near the prospect is to buying. And it may be used any time prior to the close.

Trial Closing Secrets

- Trial closing is a valuable, low-risk strategy.
- A trial close asks for an opinion; the close asks for a decision.
- The trial close measures the temperature of the prospect's desire.
- A trial close will tell you what you need to adjust to get the sale.
- Trial closing is the best diagnostic tool the salesperson has.
- Trial closing gives you more control over the interview.
- A trial closer is more successful than a good closer.

Adapted from The Best Seller, which the American Management Association calls "...the finest book ever written on selling!" ISBN 0961331925. The author, D. Forbes Ley, MBA, is Executive Director of the Sales Success Institute.

The trial close is an *opinion*-asking question:

- "What is most important to you about our product or service?"

While the close is a *decision*-asking question:

- "Would you prefer the... or...?"

Without the risk of a final "no", a trial close is like a report card that tells you how prospects are accepting your solution to their problems.

Why a trial closer is successful

Often a salesperson experiences new objections when trying to close the sale. This is usually because the prospect wasn't encouraged to express his or her feelings about the product or service during the discussion. Trial closes can help you elicit comments with the use of questions:

- "What do you think of (benefit)?"
- "How would that affect your...?"

A trial closer is usually more successful than a good closer because this type of questioning can flush out prospect's thoughts and feelings. You get a reading of how

"A trial closing question asks for an opinion; a closing question asks for a decision."

much they want your product or service. This is valuable information that allows trial closers to plan their way through a successful conclusion.

Trial close on buying signals

Buying signals are the prospect's way of showing interest in your product or service. Buying signals can be a change in his or her questions, actions, expressions or comments, such as when the prospect:

- changes attitude, warms up
- leans forward
- changes tone of voice, up or down
- changes expression, eyes light up, or
- asks questions about the product.

When you spot one of these buying signals, you need to be aware that the prospect is signaling a degree of interest. This is your clue to trial close.

A low-risk strategy

At first it may seem uncomfortable to ask prospects how they feel about your product or service. But remember, you run little risk with trial closing. However, *closing* on a buying signal can get you in trouble. There is little penalty for getting a cold response on a trial close; it is only an opinion.

Timing your closing

The trial close can be used any time during the selling process to test the waters. The purpose of the trial close strategy is to help you know when to close the order. Sometimes the answers you get are so strong that you won't have to close at all - you'll just naturally write the order.

But if you're not trial closing, you may try to close before the prospect is ready to buy. Once a negative response is given, people can feel compelled to defend it and you're now stuck with a premature objection.

Closing too late, on the other hand, can be as big a problem. You have overstayed your welcome and perhaps missed your opportunity. An attempt to close too late is likely to get a negative or stalling response.

The solution

The best solution is to trial close early and often, rather than too little, too late, so you don't miss your prospect's peak desire.

Don't be afraid of finding out what the prospect is thinking and feeling. If you can successfully bring your prospect's opinions out into

“You run little risk with trial closing questions – you are only asking for an opinion.”

the open early, you've given yourself an opportunity to adjust your presentation and greatly increase your chance of closing the sale.

If you use trial closes throughout the interview, chances are you will have learned long before the close just what the prospect wants, thinks and expects of you. When you know when the prospect is ready to make a decision, the close can become the logical end of the discussion.

“Contrary to popular opinion, customers like to be sold if, and when, they get in the hands of an authoritative salesperson who shows an understanding of their needs.”

- Stanley Marcus
