

Chapter 64

Sales Techniques That Help Close the Deal

As we discussed in Chapter 48, techniques that are primarily associated with the discipline of sales can be very effective when applied to customer service. It helps to think of the word sales broadly. In a general sense, you're always selling something. For example, if there's a difference between what the customer wants and what you can provide, you're selling him on a solution. It stands to reason, then, that if selling is part of customer service, some of the techniques that are effective in the sales process might also be useful to customer-facing reps. So let's take a look at two sales techniques that are extremely effective in customer service: asking closing questions and isolating the objection.

Closing techniques are tactics that are designed to close the sale, to reach agreement and finalize the discussion. They're intended to end stalling on the part of the customer and to either make the sale or discover what objections the customer has. In customer service, the use of closing questions accomplishes essentially the same purpose: to get agreement on a resolution of the issue or determine that you're not there yet and need to understand better what the customer wants.

Here are some closing techniques and how to approach them:

- **Concession Close.** Here you are offering the customer a concession and asking if that will satisfy her. You can generally use some version of the following: *"If I could __, would that __?" "If I could apply a credit for the difference to your account, would that work for you?"*
- **Trial Close.** Trial closes are small closes you use along the way that lead to the final close. In larger

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sales processes, the salesperson is looking to get a certain number of “yes” answers to get him to the final “yes.” In customer service, you’re testing the waters to see if you’re heading in the right direction. *“If I could ship the dress to you on your trip, is that something you would be interested in?”* Or you can ask more general questions. *“Are we heading in the right direction?” “How is this sounding so far?”*

- **Choice Close.** Sometimes in a challenging customer service situation, the customer wants Solution A, but all you have is Solution B or C. When these conversations stall out and continue to go in circles, the “choice close” can help you force a decision. *“I apologize, Ma’am, but we simply aren’t able to do that. Would you prefer _ or _?”*
- **Directive Close.** This technique involves taking an assumptive approach with the customer. You’re assuming she is ready to be closed and using language that directs her toward your desired end result. *“The next step is for me request the return authorization. Would you like me to email you the number or give you a call?”* Only use this closing technique if you’re in a positive place with the customer but can’t seem to get her to make a decision. Do not use this technique if the customer is upset at all, as it will seem pushy.
- **Ultimatum Close.** This technique is an absolute last resort for when you’re simply stuck, have tried multiple options, and the customer will simply not be satisfied. You’ve decided that it’s time to move on, one way or another, so you give the customer an ultimatum. *“Sir, I’m really at the limits of what I can offer. Is the option I presented acceptable to you?”* If the customer says no, my favorite line to follow up with is, *“I wish I could do more, but that’s as far as I can go. How would you like to proceed from here?”*

Another powerful technique from sales is isolating the objection; in our case, it’s isolating the solution. In sales, the goal is to remove all other objections by getting the customer to agree that he has only one objection remaining. This is done using the framework, *“If I can*

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(handle the objection), then will you (close the deal)? “So Mr. Jones, let me ask you: Your real concern is the length of the warranty, correct? So if I can make this warranty work for you, are you ready to buy today?” If he agrees, then the salesperson simply has one objection to contend with, and she makes the sale.

In customer service, this works when you have a customer who can't seem to stick to one issue. Of course, many customer service issues are multidimensional, but you've been working with him awhile and have used all the standard processes and language. Yet it seems that every time you get close to a solution, he brings up another minor detail or goes back to ground you thought you'd already covered. If you feel you've done all you can to acknowledge him and understand his concerns, then you should be at a point where you can focus the conversation by isolating the objection. “*Sir, I know your time is valuable, and I want to help lock down a solution that will make you happy. I've already reversed the credit card charge; now, I want to focus on getting you a trainer that you'll love while Beth is out on maternity leave. If I can help schedule you with the right trainer, will that work for you?*”

As you can see, these two techniques can be extremely powerful when applied to the right situations. No technique is a match for every scenario, however, and it's important to pay close attention to the situation and the customer's state of mind before using either of them. Context is everything. But if you can learn to read the customer and to apply the right technique at the right time, you'll find these approaches can help resolve your customer interactions more efficiently and more effectively.

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