

What Successful Sellers Know - Others Don't ... The Subtle Art of Closing

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Ask any salesperson, "At what point in the selling process does the 'Close' take place?" Eight out of ten will answer, "at the End". To be fair, they are not totally incorrect but they are, nevertheless, more wrong than right proving in principle and in practice, Perado's Law: Twenty percent of the sales force make eighty percent of the sales and profitability.

The questions that should then be asked are, "Why it is so many professional sellers have it wrong?" and, "What is right?"

For decades salespeople were [and still are] taught certain accepted selling fundamentals; the best being Dale Carnegie's 5-Steps to a Sale: Attention, Interest, Conviction, Desire and Close. Perhaps a little ahead of his peers, Carnegie's formula has certainly stood the test of time and continues to work. On the other hand, selling, like so many other disciplines, has many subtle layers that color the process, especially as it relates to the Close and like the 1/100th of a second that can separate a Gold Metal winner from Silver, the outcome in sales is equally dramatic.

The 'No Close' Know-Nots!

The last couple of decades spawned some major changes regarding how sellers were to sell and redefined some of the rules of engagement. It also produced new selling gurus convinced in theory that the 'Art of Closing' was no longer in fashion. Things like their new Funnel approach all but eliminated the need to understand and hone closing techniques of any kind. History demonstrates that convincing though they were, in practice, they were dead wrong.

Regardless of whether one is selling pens, mufflers, computers or airplanes, customers still possess an innate psychological need to have what is often a new direction [the decision to buy] validated. Asking for the order and reaffirming the decision-to-buy a good one, does this and yes, it takes place at the end of the selling encounter. Not surprisingly, however, what transpires at the 'Front-End' of the sale - the point successful sellers know the art of the close actually takes place - is what allows this process to transpire.

From another perspective, we can draw parallels of closing-strategies to that of the last war in Iraq. Long before the firing of the first bullet or cruise missile launch, specially trained soldiers [Special Ops] had already been in Iraq for months covertly uncovering strategic information to send back to the invasion architects.

War experts agree and it's been well documented, the job the US and British Special Ops did was so exceptional it all but captured victory before the war in the Middle East ever took place. Interestingly, those who have read Tzu Sun's book The Art of War, would understand the uncanny parallels of the Iraqi campaign to his conflict strategies - conscious too of how he [Tzu Sun] would have certainly been impressed.

What, though, should we glean from this example? An overview of the battle strategy for the

Iraq war clearly demonstrates the success of the campaign was front-end loaded: first understand the enemy. Learn its strengths, weaknesses. Uncover - ahead of time - what challenges may be faced. Then and only then, develop 'Practiced Strategies' expressly designed to overcome any such resistance. Simply put, the Iraq war was won in the quality of its Preparation - in keeping with Tzu Sun's mantra: The war is already over before the enemy believes it has even begun.

Drawing our parallels from this to selling, customers, although not our enemy, nevertheless put forward unique challenges [real or otherwise] requiring first, an intimate and compassionate understanding of their needs BEFORE the implementation of a strategy/process using proven/practiced skills designed to garner customer Trust, Rapport and Satisfaction [the Close] ever takes place.

The Bottom Line:

Successful sellers continue to hone their closing skills ever mindful of the importance closing and the 'Ability to Close' has to the success of the sale. The difference for them, however, is they see the art of closing from a point most others can only see through their rearview mirror.

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