signals by closing then.

- It is important to take the *buyer's perspective* in closing ... by communicating and delivering value to the customer and to ...
- Based on the above, salespeople must understand and be able to use different approaches to closing.

CLOSING METHODS

There are many ways to close the sale. No salesperson can rely on just one or a few of them. Successful salespeople learn how and when to use many different approaches to closing so they can apply each appropriately in different situations. Just as you learned in chapter 7 that memorized or "canned" sales presentations have major limitations, canned approaches to closing do not give you the ability to adapt to a particular sales situation. It is critically important that any closing technique be customized to the particular buyer and situation. Like many aspects of selling, doing this successfully takes practice and improves over time.

A common theme of sales success that was discussed in chapter 7 is the need for salespeople to develop and practice *active listening* skills. In the context of closing the sale, active listening refers to carefully monitoring the dialogue with the customer, watching for buying signals, and then picking just the right time to close. Only when you listen actively will the buyer have the chance to register verbal and nonverbal buying signals that tell you it's time to close.

Another closing tool is **silence**. When you close, you have just put the ball into the prospect's court. It is now time to sit back, be quiet, and let the customer talk. Research indicates that effective use of silence in closing separates high-performing salespeople from the other kind.[2] Make no mistake, silence can be challenging to use in a sales call. If you bounce the ball to the prospect through a close and the prospect doesn't pick it up and run with it by either providing objections or making a commitment to buy, seconds of silence can seem like minutes (or hours!). However, try to resist jumping in. Give the prospect the maximum leeway to respond to your close.

The seven closing methods here are a sampling of some of the most used approaches. Examples are provided for each. However, remember that good salespeople adapt closing techniques to particular buyers and particular selling situations.

Assumptive Close

In a way, salespeople always assume they are going to close. Otherwise, they would be hard pressed to justify time spent on a prospect. The **assumptive close** allows the salesperson to verbalize this assumption to see if it is correct. Examples:

- "Ms. Buyer, we've agreed that our product will substantially upgrade your technical capabilities, allow you to attract new business, and all the while save you money over your current system, isn't that right? (Buyer agrees.) Given your timetable for implementation, let's go ahead and place the order for one of our systems today. We can have it delivered in two weeks and I will have my service technicians out then to begin training your staff on using the system. (Silence. Wait for response.)"

Balance Sheet Close

The **balance sheet close**, also sometimes called the t-account close, gets the salesperson directly involved in helping the prospect see the pros and cons of placing the order. In front of the customer, take a piece of paper and write the headings "Reasons for Buying" on the top left and "Remaining Questions" on the top right. (Don't put the word "Objections" on the top right; it sounds too negative.) Your job is to summarize the benefits accepted in the left column and use the right column to find out what is holding the prospect back from buying. You might set up the exercise like this:

- "Mr. Buyer, let's take a few minutes to list out and summarize the reasons this purchase makes sense for you, and also list any remaining questions you may have. This will help us make the right decision. (Pull out paper. Have a dialogue with the buyer to develop the points. When finished, use an appropriate closing method.)"

Buy-Now Close

The **buy-now close**, also sometimes referred to as the impending-event close or standing-room-only close, creates a sense of urgency with the buyer that, if he or she doesn't act today, something valuable will very likely be lost. In professional selling, manipulative closing techniques are strictly taboo, so you have to be *honest* here. That is, the reasons you set forth why the buyer will benefit if he or she doesn't hesitate must be *real*. Examples:

- "We have a price increase on this product effective in two weeks. Orders placed today can be guaranteed to ship at the current price."
- "My company is running a special this week. This product is currently 20 percent off the regular price."
- "Orders placed by Thursday receive an extra 30 days before the invoice is due."
- "I'm almost out of stock on this product in our warehouse."

In Closing, Practice Makes Perfect

There are many other forms of closing. In his book *The Art of Closing Any Deal*, James W. Pickens lists no fewer than 24 techniques he calls "the 24 greatest closes on earth."[3] However, not every closing technique you may read about is really appropriate. The above seven approaches are tried and true ways to move your buyer to commitment without resorting to unnecessarily tricky or questionable tactics. As a salesperson you will become more and more comfortable with using the different closing methods as you have the opportunity to practice them.

DEALING WITH REJECTION

In chapter 6 you learned that an important aspect of prospecting is qualifying the prospect and the better job a salesperson does of qualifying prospects, the more likely those prospects will eventually turn into

- "I can ship it to you on Monday. I'll go ahead and schedule that."
- "Let's get this paperwork filled out so we can get the order into the system."
- "You need Model 455 to meet your specifications. I'll call and reserve one for you."

Obviously, you are looking for the buyer to just naturally move along with your assumption. If he or she doesn't, as with any close you will likely uncover some additional objections you need to deal with.

Several of the other closing methods are assumptive in nature. In fact, it is generally favorable to handle all communication with the prospect with the attitude that he or she will ultimately buy. This creates an atmosphere in the sales call that supports the concept of moving to win-win solutions.

Minor Point Close

In the **minor point close**, the salesperson focuses the buyer on a small element of the decision. The idea is that agreeing on something small reflects commitment to the purchase, and the salesperson can move forward with the deal. Examples:

- "What color do you prefer?"
- "Do you want to use our special credit terms?"
- "When would you like our technical crew to do the installation?"

Alternative Choice Close

Usually the **alternative choice close** also focuses the buyer on deciding relatively minor points. This approach simply adds the twist of giving the prospect options (neither of which is *not* to buy at all). Focus on making the choice between *viable* options—options the prospect is most likely to accept. Examples:

- "Which works best for your application, Model 22 or Model 35?"
- "Would you like this delivered tomorrow, or would Monday be better?"
- "Do you want it with or without the service agreement?"

Direct Close

This approach is most straightforward. With the **direct close**, you simply ask for the order. Although simple, this close can be highly effective when you get strong buying signals and your buyer seems to be a straight shooter. Such buyers often appreciate the direct approach. Examples:

- "It sounds to me as though you are ready to make the buy. Let's get the order into the system."
- "If there are no more questions I can answer, I would sure like us to do business today. What do you say?"

Summary-of-Benefits Close

Throughout the sales process, you and the buyer have (we hope) found common ground for agreement on a variety of points. The **summary-of-benefits close** is a relatively formal way to close by going back over some or all of the benefits accepted, reminding the buyer why those benefits are important, and then asking a direct closing question (or perhaps ending with a choice or some other method). Example:

The

customers. Prospecting is in many ways a numbers game. The more leads you can qualify as prospects, the more customers you develop, and ultimately the more sales you close.

Many times a salesperson can do everything right and still not get a customer to close a deal. It is important for anyone in the sales profession to reflect on this fact and to understand at a deep human level that failing to get an order or close a deal is not personal **rejection**. A salesperson's measure of accomplishment and self-worth should not be controlled by what someone else does or fails to do. Nobody can make you feel inferior without your permission!

It is one thing to be disappointed by not getting an order or closing a particular sale, and it is perfectly reasonable (and wise) to step back and analyze what might have caused this outcome and what you might do differently next time. This is simply learning and growing professionally. But successful salespeople never construe such business decisions by customers as personal rejection. They maintain their positive attitude about their job, their company, and their products and move on to the next customer.

Tom Reilly, a well-known authority on professional selling, developed five tactics for dealing with rejection, which he has used in successfully training salespeople for many years:

1. *Remind yourself of the difference between self-worth and performance.* Never equate your worth as a human being with your success or failure as a salesperson.
2. *Engage in positive self-talk.* Separate your ego from the sale. The prospect is not attacking you personally. Say to yourself, "This prospect doesn't really even know me as a person. The refusal to buy cannot have anything to do with me as a person."
3. *Don't automatically assume that you are the problem.* The prospect may be an intimidating, self-serving individual with some deep personal problems that cause the behavior you see. The prospect may be just having a bad day or may be like that all the time. You are not to blame for any of these possibilities.
4. *Positively anticipate the possibility of rejection and it will not overwhelm you.* Expect it, but don't create it. That is, think in advance what your response to rejection will be if it occurs. (Note: This does not conflict with an assumptive close approach.)
5. *Consider the possibility that not buying is a rational decision because of underlying reasons.* Possible reasons are bad timing, shared decision making, or budget constraints that truly do prevent purchase. The prospect may not feel comfortable revealing these reasons to you.[4]

The preparation you learned in chapter 8 for anticipating and handling buyers' objections will help buffer you against taking rejection personally. If you do a great job during the preapproach of researching reasons a customer might not buy and then planning appropriate responses for dealing with the objections, at the end of the day if the customer does not buy you can look at yourself in the mirror and say, "I did everything I could." This is a sign of professionalism in selling.

Excellence in call preparation yields a confidence and professionalism that cannot be equaled. This is why sales executives often call the preapproach the single most important stage in the selling process. (Interesting, isn't it, how this runs counter to the stereotype that the most important step is the close?) If, despite your preparation and presentation, the customer still doesn't buy, know when to pack up graciously and leave the door open to sell to this client another day.

Attitude Is Important

Books on successful closing agree that a critical determinant of whether or not a salesperson closes customers is attitude.[5] **Attitude** represents the salesperson's state of mind or feeling with regard to a person or thing. Everything else being equal, salespeople who believe in themselves and their product or service, show confidence, exhibit honest enthusiasm, and display **tenacity** (sticking with a task even through difficulty and adversity) will close more business than those who don't. Attitude is infectious. Customers pick up on a salesperson's attitude and outlook on life right away.