



Sales Quest

By Jason Pappas
for SmartCEO

As you look to build, rebuild or grow your sales force, conventional wisdom says that you need a closer. Sure you do. If a closer simply means someone that can draw the word “yes” out of a prospective client, you certainly need someone who can do that. But remember, this is a sales person, and the fact that they can get to “yes” more often than not has to be a given. Wouldn’t it be better if you had someone who has developed the habits of mind or mindset to be thinking about today within the context of tomorrow, and the day after that? The best sales people don’t focus on *closing* or convincing their clients, they *enroll* their clients in their products or services, and then they enroll with their clients as well.

The most successful sales people are visionaries who recognize shifts in the marketplace and accompanying buying paradigms, whether on a micro level (how one or two clients are changing their buying habits) or on a macro level (where the whole economy is changing the sales paradigm). In the 1980s you needed a closer. The entire business generation was about the transaction and what the seller got from the transaction. It was a

seller’s economy, because sellers controlled the information that was available to the buyer – it was a presentation-based sales economy. The Internet changed that, and with it changed the economy from a selling economy to a buying economy. In this economy, the buyer rules.

What that means is that your prospects are getting buying information from many sources. They know what they want, and they may contact you directly. Wholesalers, e-commerce and buyer aversion to being sold lessen the need for sales professionals. So, if you go into a meeting focused solely on the close, you are essentially an order taker. While that may satisfy both you and your new client’s short-term need, it does little for either of you in the long run. A closer’s value is diminished as soon the transaction is complete. The closer is constantly trying to close and re-close his or her clients again and again in a quest for repeat business. It is a vicious and stressful cycle. In this model, closers have to prove their ability to solve another tactical problem in order to continue to be of value to the client’s organization. Closers may get to “yes” early and often, but they miss out on future opportunities to serve their clients

Enrolling Versus Closing

An alternative sales model leaves the door open for future business

and ultimately rob the company of a sustainable revenue stream.

Instead, consider the following possibility, based on the enrollment model. When a client enrolls with you, they are enrolling in your vision, knowing that you have enrolled in and are committed to theirs. In a sense, closing clients is a means unto itself – enrolling clients is means to an end. A much larger end.

Enrollment means being a partner, an educator, a consultant and a confidant to the client – not an order taker. You facilitate the transaction at hand, and do it well. That is what’s absolutely necessary to win the day – but you recognize that this is just one solution of many, all designed to achieve the client’s end goal. And you understand that goal, because you take the time to identify the need before you identify the solution.

You can recognize an enroller at a distance because, whereas the closer says, “Are we ready to do this?” usually without fully understanding the context into which the solution should fit, the enroller says, “Why do you want to do this?” As an enroller, you genuinely want to know the client’s game plan and strategy, and how your product or service potentially fits, or doesn’t fit. You want the client to recognize that

you know why he or she needs what you are selling. Enrollers think strategically with the client, knowing full well that only the client can make the decision. When a choice is made, the two of you own the success or failure of that solution within the context of a strategy to which you both buy in.

The enrollment philosophy is a reciprocal relationship. It is built on the promise and delivery of ongoing solutions, based on real understanding of the client’s business needs. It assumes successful outcomes through tactical problems, and it constantly considers the long-term investment in each other. Deals definitely get signed, but no one feels like they have been sold. And nothing is ever “closed.” By closing the deal, in the sense that we’re using it here, you’re also closing the door. When you walk out of a prospective client’s office, you want to leave the door open because you’ll be back. You’ll walk through that door again because you both understand the remaining challenges ahead and you want to solve them together.

Jason P. Pappas is the CEO and co-Founder of EntreQuest, a Baltimore-based sales and leadership development firm focused on productivity and profitability.