

# Closing The Sale

By Ramona Creel

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So -- you've just gotten off of the phone with a potential client. You've explained what you do and how you can help them -- and they still didn't end up hiring you. Where did you go wrong? You are EXPERIENCED, you are professional -- and yet you seem to have a hard time turning those leads into paying clients. Perhaps you are approaching the situation from the wrong perspective. Maybe you are focusing too much on the sale and not enough on the potential for a RELATIONSHIP with this person.

Your goal during the "selling" phase is not to show off how wonderful you are -- it's to develop a rapport with the other person, to express some EMPATHY for their situation, and to help find a SOLUTION to the problem at hand. And along the way, you will need to educate the client about the benefits you have to offer if you ever hope to make a sale. So let's focus on a few tricks for making yourself seem valuable to the client (the only way I've found to really "sell" yourself). I'd like to share some of the techniques I use to close a sale, from the perspective of professional organizing:

## PRACTICE TELLING PEOPLE WHAT YOU DO

When I first started talking to clients, I was TENTATIVE and hesitant about my abilities -- I came across as unsure about what I had to offer. But I joined a networking group and found that I was expected to give a short speech each Friday morning describing what I do and how it helps people. I also hosted booths at a couple of business expos, which allowed me to INTRODUCE myself and my services over and over again to a number of different people.

The more comfortable you can get with saying, "This is what I do and here's how you will benefit and here's why I'm different than the rest," the more you sound like you know what you are doing. Start out with a one-minute "elevator speech" -- what you would say to someone in an elevator when they ask, "so, what do you do for a living?" Say it over and over again until it's second nature. And then work on a second one that focuses in on a different aspect of what you do. And another. And another. Keep going until you can stand up in front of any potential client and comfortably spout off why they should hire you.

## GIVE A FREE IN-HOME / IN-OFFICE CONSULTATION

I don't know if you do this -- but as a service provider, I found it essential to building up my client base. Some people will tell you to CHARGE for a consultation -- but why would I pay you to find out if you are worth hiring? Some people will tell you to do a PHONE consultation -- this is fine for some potential clients, but other folks want the reassurance of meeting you face to face.

As a professional organizer, I've found that some people want to show me their stacks and piles and have me say that it's not the worst I've ever seen. I think of a consultation not as a time when I can plan out what I'm going to do for the client -- because honestly, I've seen their problems a million times before and it's not that different from client to client. But it's a time when I can AUDITION for the client -- build some rapport, show off my fabulous personality (!!), dazzle them with my expertise and professionalism, and explain the way I work. But most importantly, it's a time when I can sit in front of them, pen and contract and calendar in hand, and say, "When do you want to get started?" Much harder to turn me away, then. And you've made a personal connection like you just can't do over the phone.

## DON'T BE IN A HURRY TO TALK ABOUT WHAT YOU DO

Get the client to talk first. If you immediately start telling the client all of the great things that you do in your business, you will lose them in the first 5 minutes. You have to let them begin by telling you where the PAIN is. I encourage my clients to tell me how badly life sucks because they are disorganized. I empathize, saying things like, "that must be frustrating," I rephrase their pain (when they say, "I feel so overwhelmed," I say "It can be hard to stay on top of it all"), and I share stories of other clients who have gone through the same thing -- but I don't solve their problem yet.

You want to do two things here -- first, let them know that you REALLY understand; and second, you want them to FEEL the reality of their situation so much that you will look like a superhero when you tell them how you can take that pain away. Once you've gotten them to pour it all out, talk about how their lives will be better once they hire you. Don't talk entirely about techniques and systems -- talk about feelings. I find myself saying things like, "And once we get your filing system straightened out, you'll be able to find anything you need in 3 minutes or less -- won't that take a lot of stress off of your shoulders?" -- and the answer is always a grateful "Yes!"

## BE PERSISTENT

Some clients need a lot of FOLLOWING UP before they are ready to hire you -- especially if you offer a service that deals with a difficult or overwhelming problem like disorganization. I've contacted clients for a year and a half before all of the planets aligned -- and their calendar, wallet, and willingness to change matched up -- and we started working together. When a client says he/she wants to work with you but doesn't have time right now, say, "Well that's no problem. I certainly understand when your schedule gets overloaded. How about if I call you at the end of February to see how things are going?" Not, "I'll call sometime down the road," but I'll call at a SPECIFIC time during a particular month. Many times they'll say, "Well actually, you can call me in a week and I should be ready then" -- or they might say February is too soon, call me in June.

But you have done two things -- you've kept the line open and you've taken the RESPONSIBILITY for initiating action off of them (which most clients really appreciate). Many times, I'll do this over and over again, calling every few months ("Hi, you had asked me to check back with you about doing some organizing in February, so I'm just giving you a call. How's everything going?") until they are ready. Persistence is the key.

## ASSUME THAT YOU ALREADY HAVE THE SALE

When you finish your spiel with a client, don't ever say "do you want to set up an appointment?" -- instead say "WHEN do you want to get started?" Don't give them the OPTION to say no. I always ask people, "So what's your time frame for getting started?" That makes them think a little differently than saying, "When do you want to set up an appointment?" Or say, "Well, I've got Tuesday afternoon and Friday morning free next week -- which works for you?" Be in charge of the situation

and you'll see a lot more leads become clients.

These techniques will in no way guarantee that every potential client who crosses your doorstep will become a paying customer. And remember, marketing and running a small business is a numbers game. The more people you contact, the more people will turn into clients. But you increase your odds greatly when you give each person the full and complete attention he or she deserves -- and when you use every weapon in your arsenal to convince them of your professional value.

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