

CLOSING

—
THE
—

SALE

*5 Sales Skills
to Achieving a Win-Win*

CRAIG CHRISTENSEN / SEAN FRONTZ / DENNIS SUSA

CLOSING

—
THE
—

SALE

Copyright © 2019 FranklinCovey Co.

Published by Mango Publishing Group, a division of Mango Media Inc.

Mango is an active supporter of authors' rights to free speech and artistic expression in their books. The purpose of copyright is to encourage authors to produce exceptional works that enrich our culture and our open society.

Uploading or distributing photos, scans or any content from this book without prior permission is theft of the author's intellectual property. Please honor the author's work as you would your own. Thank you in advance for respecting our author's rights.

For permission requests, please contact:

FranklinCovey Co.
2200 W. Parkway Blvd.
Salt Lake City, UT 84119
Attn: Annie Oswald

For special orders, quantity sales, course adoptions and corporate sales, please email the publisher at sales@mango.bz. For trade and wholesale sales, please contact Ingram Publisher Services at: customer.service@ingramcontent.com or +1.800.509.4887.

Closing the Sale: 5 Sales Skills to Achieving a Win-Win

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication number has been applied for.
ISBN: (print) 78-1-64250-093-6, (ebook) 978-1-64250-094-3
BISAC BUS058000—BUSINESS & ECONOMICS / Sales & Selling / General

Printed in the United States of America

CLOSING THE SALE

*5 Sales Skills
to Achieving a Win-Win*

CRAIG CHRISTENSEN / SEAN FRONTZ / DENNIS SUSA

MANGO PUBLISHING
Coral Gables



CONTENTS

The Paradox	9
Your Role	14
Skill 1: Identify the End in Mind Decision	33
Skill 2: Address Client Key Beliefs™	43
Skill 3: Resolve Objections	54
Skill 4: Prepare the Conditions for Good Decision Making	76
Skill 5: Open Purposefully, Close Powerfully	88
The Difference	103
About the Authors	110

Authors' Note

Special thanks to our colleague Mahan Khalsa for his generous contribution to the sales profession and for the important part he has played in our journey. We've been fortunate to have worked alongside Mahan as he's inspired and guided hundreds of thousands of sales professionals with his ideas and teaching, reflected in his book, coauthored with Randy Illig, *Let's Get Real or Let's Not Play*. We gratefully acknowledge his influence on our thinking and practice.

Preface

In the 25 years since my father, Dr. Stephen R. Covey, published his bestselling book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, the company he cofounded (now FranklinCovey) has become known worldwide for teaching enduring principles of leadership and personal effectiveness that have transformed individuals and organizations alike.

True to that mission, the book in your hands provides powerful sales insight from FranklinCovey's Sales Performance Practice. Quite simply, it guides you in increasing your own sales success by *helping your clients succeed*.

Craig Christensen, Sean Frontz, and Dennis Susa are superb guides, and this approach is time-tested and based on principles that have underpinned the success of both business leaders and top sales performers around the world. It has been organized into a form that is simultaneously insightful and yet immensely practical and useful—for both sales leaders and sales professionals alike.

When individuals and sales teams have consistently applied the mindset and skillset taught in this wonderful book, they have dramatically improved their ability to close sales more effectively, more frequently, and with increased predictability.

Most important, the professionals who've embraced this foundational principle have distinguished themselves as leaders within their sales organizations: top performers who create the conditions for good business decisions and win-win outcomes for themselves and their clients—the essence of truly sustainable success.

Such sales professionals come to be seen as *models* of how to truly help clients succeed and, ultimately, become *mentors* as they help others learn how to do the same. Through this inside-out approach, these influential professionals and leaders help to build an underlying sales culture within the organization based upon this simple but powerful principle of helping clients succeed.

Such a culture is ultimately transformative to the relationships of all involved—for the sales professional, for the sales organization, and especially for the clients it serves. The end result is the creation of more value, more success, more trust, and more sales...which then repeats itself, becoming a virtuous, upward cycle.

This book will help you initiate this ascending cycle.

Stephen M. R. Covey,

The New York Times bestselling
author of *The Speed of Trust*

By the end of this book, you'll
learn how to:

- Transform every client interaction into a decision-making opportunity.
- Navigate and influence the decision-making process with more precision and success.
- Create decision velocity for your clients, shortening your sales cycle.
- Use understanding and logic to resolve objections.
- Improve your Win Rate by improving outcomes for your clients.

THE PARADOX



WHAT YOU WILL LEARN IN THIS CHAPTER

- The more you focus on creating success for your clients, the more successful you will be.
- If you consistently apply the mindset and skillset in this book, you will increase your Win Rate.

What We've Learned

In 25 years of research and experience with more than 36,000 sales professionals and managers on every continent, we've found one dominant mindset to be common among "The 5 Percenters"—or the top 5 percent of the profession. The mindset seems counterintuitive to success. We call it the Paradox of Success. The more passionately and skillfully you focus on creating success for your clients, the more successful you will be.

The volume of information available today through multiple sources has dramatically changed the buyer/seller relationship. It has empowered buyers—and has diminished their reliance on sellers as information providers. This influences how they interact with sellers and has changed their expectations of what sellers should provide. Buyers now expect that sellers shift from a traditional sales role to a trusted advisor, moving away from creating dependency to creating value and fostering relationships of trust.

Increasing your own success by focusing on the success of others isn't about wishful thinking or taking an "enlightened approach" to selling, but rather a practical reality based on the necessity of creating relationships of trust and mutual value.

Our entire Sales Performance Practice has been built on the application of this extraordinary principle.

**PARADOX OF SUCCESS:
THE MORE YOU FOCUS ON
CREATING SUCCESS FOR
YOUR CLIENTS, THE MORE
SUCCESSFUL YOU WILL BE.**

And this principle couldn't be more relevant than during the "closing" in sales. Countless salespeople have been trained to think of "closing" as an event—a single meeting, presentation, or point in time where you either win or you lose. In this book, we will share a different perspective on closing and offer a new way of thinking about your role as a sales professional. We'll also share five essential skills you can learn and master to ensure that your clients (and you) succeed.

We believe that a tangible measurement of progress is essential. That is why this book is not a book about theory; it is about practical application and tools you can use immediately to gauge your success—in other words, your closing ratio or Win Rate. Although **WIN RATE** may be defined very differently from company to company, we measure Win Rate by dividing the number of wins by the number of opportunities pursued.

The question for you is *What would you be willing to do in the coming days and weeks to improve it?* Read on for the 5 Skills and tools you can apply.

It's our belief that if you focus on creating success for your clients and commit to the practice of the mindset and skillset presented in the pages that follow, you will improve your ability to close sales more frequently and with more consistency and comfort.

$$\text{WIN RATE} = \frac{\text{Number of WINS}}{\text{Number of Opportunities Pursued}}$$

YOUR ROLE



WHAT YOU WILL LEARN IN THIS CHAPTER

- Closing is a process, not an event.
- The Closing Zone is a series of incremental decisions the client makes to get to a final business decision.
- Your role is to influence good decisions to achieve win-win outcomes.

What Does Closing Mean?

Closing means different things to different people. What does it mean to you? For some, closing is a technique, a collection of things you do and say to *push* a client into signing on the dotted line. For others, it's a verb commanding you to do something *to* someone rather than *with* someone. And for others, the word signifies the *onset* of a negotiation.

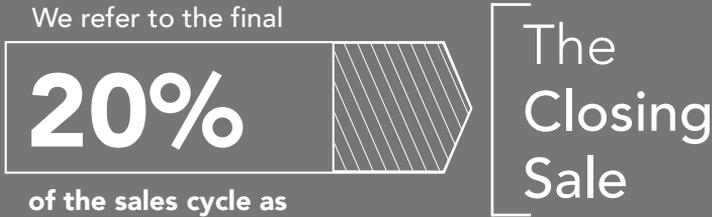
Most commonly, people tend to think of closing as an event, or the moment when the client formally commits to making a final business decision—first verbally and then on paper.

Instead, we'd suggest that closing is *the process of successful decision making* that has happened long before the day the contract is awarded or inked. And often a successful “close” is the direct result of how the salesperson has (or hasn't) added value to the decision-making process along the way.

The Closing Zone

We refer to the final 20 percent of the overall sales cycle as the Closing Zone. It includes a series of incremental decisions the client makes in order to reach the final business decision. When you move into this particular

phase of the sales cycle, there are distinct and recognizable shifts in buyer behavior that let you know you've arrived.



Not surprisingly, these shifts in client behavior will likely require you to respond in kind. The way you choose to respond in this critical selling stage will often be the difference between success and failure.

If you think of a sales cycle as you would a courtship, it may give you a clearer sense of what to expect: In the early stage of dating, it's quite common to meet and interact with many people. The attention is often not exclusive and is typically centered on some objective criteria that might help you prioritize what you find appealing in a partner—appearance, employment status, interests, etc.—and assist you in narrowing the field of potential partners from many to a few.

By contrast, in the later stages of courtship, the emphasis shifts from basic attributes (requirements) to more subjective criteria, to ensure that the right partner is selected and is capable of upholding the commitments made—serving to narrow the few to “the one.”

**CLOSING IS A PROCESS
OF SUCCESSFUL
DECISION MAKING.**

When prospective clients enter the Closing Zone, you'll start to see some telltale signs that they have done so:

1. Dialogue moves from considering as many options as possible to actively focusing on a few options.
2. The number of potential suppliers will go from many to a few.
3. Vendor credibility, capability, and compatibility take on greater importance than the solution attributes and requirements.
4. "Facts" rapidly become secondary to "beliefs."
5. Client objections and concerns are raised with more frequency and emotion.

Often salespeople don't understand these subtle decision-making shifts. They lack the skills necessary to anticipate and address them successfully. As a result, they may become fearful and defensive, trying to apply the same selling formula that served them prior to entering the Closing Zone.

In the absence of the necessary decision-making skills that lead to win-win outcomes, salespeople often resort to self-serving tactics that may further compromise their credibility and will undoubtedly reflect upon their intent.

We believe there's another way. Let's look more closely at how to positively influence this decision-making process by adopting the mindset unique to top performers.

Our years of research in the field of sales improvement point to one particular mindset top salespeople have mastered as they enter the Closing Zone: They believe that their role is to influence good decisions toward mutually beneficial outcomes—ones that benefit both the client and the salesperson (and the sequencing is critical: clients first, then salespeople).

If your role is to move clients through the Closing Zone by helping them make good decisions, you'll need to ensure that your intent is congruent with their best interest. Intent is something clients will assign to you, whether you want them to or not.

YOUR ROLE IN THE CLOSING ZONE	
Conventional Wisdom	vs. Top Performers
Produce results.	Begin with the intent to help clients succeed.
Hit the number by overcoming objections.	Hit the number by influencing good decision making on the client's behalf.
Help the client enough to meet your goals.	Be a consultant and trusted advisor to the client.

To understand the power of intent, imagine you are a buyer. Think about some significant purchases you have made.

As a buyer, have you ever:

- Been pressured to make a decision too quickly?
- Felt like you were “being sold”?
- Become confused and overwhelmed by features/capabilities that weren’t important to you?

Was the interaction all about *you* or all about *them*?

In contrast, think of a time when you consulted someone you trusted on a matter of importance—someone who had your best interest at heart.

- How did that person approach the process?
- How did it make you feel?
- How did it impact your willingness to share vital information?

You may have just thought of a friend, family member, or trusted advisor. What is it that makes it easy to have good intent with friends and family, but challenging with business associates?

The irony is, the harder you try to “sell” people, the less willing they are to be “sold.” Most people can feel when they’re being manipulated or led to your conclusion, and they will often move aggressively in the opposite direction. When people feel their choice is being restricted, they

become highly motivated to push back. It's an emotional response. When trust is compromised, the information flow from clients is severely curtailed, and you are far less able or likely to craft solutions that meet their needs.

If your intent is to help clients succeed, clients will be more likely to share their beliefs about what success is. And the better you understand your client, the better decisions your client will make.

Conversely, when clients perceive that your intent is to help them succeed, they are more likely to share their own beliefs about what success is. And the better you understand what a client wants and needs, the better the choices you can bring to the table. It is in your own best interest to focus on the interests of your client first.

Consider Your Own Experiences

Think about a solution you've sold using brute force. What happened? Was it wildly successful? Was the client truly happy? Or did it come back to bite you?

Think about situations where you were pushed to buy something you really didn't need or want? How did you feel? Who did you blame?

**THE IRONY IS, THE HARDER
YOU TRY TO SELL PEOPLE,
THE LESS WILLING THEY ARE
TO BE SOLD.**

Ever taken a solution off the table because you knew it wasn't the right fit for the client? Did you gain or lose credibility by doing so? How did the customer react?

Three Types of Decisions

When clients make “closing” decisions—whether incremental or final—they usually come down to one of three choices:

- Choice 1: Go. Proceed as suggested.
- Choice 2: Go with changes. Proceed, but with changes to the proposed plan.
- Choice 3: No-Go. Decide not to proceed.



To be successful in the Closing Zone, it's helpful to be familiar with all three types of decisions.

In the chapters that follow, we'll talk more about the importance of each of these categories, and the factors that influence the decisions you'll ask clients to make in your meetings.

But first, let's pause to consider the answer salespeople dread hearing, especially in the closing stages of a sales cycle: "No."

Most of us have been conditioned since childhood that "no" means, well, no. The word suggests a hard stop, a cease-and-desist notice, or an irreversible outcome. You heard it from your parents when you asked for candy in the checkout lane of the grocery store. You heard it as a teenager when you wanted to borrow the family car. Even as an adult, you hear it—maybe from your spouse when you do something like proposing to spend the bonus check on a hobby that suits only your interests.

In fact, hundreds of sales-training programs have developed specific language and techniques to prevent customers from saying no, and have tried slick ways to get around it or avoid it altogether. Battle cries like "Never take no for an answer," and "Salesmanship begins when the customer says no," have stuck in salespeople's heads and influenced what they believe and how they behave.

No is a matter of perspective. Some see it as a stumbling block; others see it as a stepping-stone. What if you shifted your thinking and chose to see "no" not as a rejection, but as an opportunity?

**NO IS A MATTER OF
PERSPECTIVE. SOME SEE IT
AS A STUMBLING BLOCK;
OTHERS SEE IT AS A
STEPPING-STONE.**

What if you changed your instinctive response of perceiving “no” as a roadblock and thought of it as a detour sign that served to redirect you away from a potential hazard—and onto a route that could yield a better outcome for your client and you?

Saying no is always an option for the client. Not accepting this reality only creates resistance from your client, and worse, mistrust of your intent to help them succeed. Believe it or not, affirming the client’s choice to say no can be extraordinarily powerful, and can provide much-needed insight on what it will take to get to “yes.” There is power in hearing a “no”—if you know how to respond constructively.

When you receive a “no,” you get important information. It’s a signal that tells you to begin looking for other ways to accomplish outcomes the client wants in a way they feel good about. Most people, when they feel they have the “permission” and the freedom to choose, are often more willing to commit to making a decision.

Enabling a “no” decision means you truly understand the client’s position and business needs. You’re saying, *“If this isn’t going to be what’s best for your business, then we should pursue other options.”* Consider:

- Does allowing a “no” decision increase or decrease the trust your client has in you?
- Does it increase or decrease your credibility?

- Even when the answer is no, if your intent is to genuinely help, there is a much greater chance the client may call on you in the future.

If you're like most people, hearing "no" immediately triggers an unpleasant physical and emotional response—especially if you're on the spot in an important discussion.

You bristle, your heart starts to race, and you might break out in a sweat. Meanwhile, your mind is flooded with defensive or negative thoughts, or it's busy preparing counterarguments and claims. Your ego can come to the fore emotionally. Your face can literally go red. And if your ego gets involved, you're already in trouble, because the fact is that the human brain cannot respond emotionally and logically at the same time.

Your ability to use a "no" constructively relies on your ability to process the emotions and think through potential objections ahead of time. If it comes, you're ready for it and you can respond.

Top salespeople have a practiced ability to stay centered, calm, objective, and clear-headed, even under pressure. Many have reported that through practice, their ability to maintain their composure increases in direct proportion to the degree of pressure that is being applied.

**YOUR ABILITY TO USE A
“NO” CONSTRUCTIVELY
RELIES ON YOUR ABILITY
TO PROCESS AND THINK
THROUGH POTENTIAL
OBJECTIONS AHEAD OF TIME.**

So how do you retrain yourself to move in a more positive direction and stay calm, objective, and clear-headed? One way is to rethink what no actually means.

Instead of shutting down and reacting negatively to a “no” response, *you have a chance to open up and really learn more about the client’s needs and beliefs.* And with that greater understanding, you will have more choices to respond.

Another way you can prepare for “no” is by taking on the client’s perspective. This involves thinking through potential issues or responses in advance—alone or with your team.

We like to use the term “Yellow Light” to describe a stall, a doubt, a concern, or an objection—and this symbol is also helpful in training the brain so that when you hear or feel one, you connect it with the need to slow down rather than speed up. You can exercise the choice of saying, “Okay, there may be a problem. But before I try to correct it, I need to understand it.”

Let me offer an example from our experience in the field. One client reported...

“When our group was trying to decide whether to purchase services, one team didn’t have the best offer or option, and we chose the other vendor. But we were so impressed with the first team, that we kept going back to them for

other things, and we ended up purchasing much more from them than the original deal was worth.”

Dealing With “Maybe”

A “maybe” is worse than no, because your role is to facilitate good decisions, and “maybe” is not a decision. If you reach the end of a meeting and you hear “maybe,” or “we’ll get back to you,” consider the following:

- Did you clearly state the decision to be made during the meeting at the start of the meeting (Skill 1)?
- Did you invest the time to understand the Client Key Beliefs and offer clear Proof Points to satisfy each belief (Skill 2)?
- Did you check off each client concern or objection along the way (Skill 3)?
- Did you ensure you had sufficient time to present and that the people who could actually make the decision were in the room (Skill 4)?

Try as you might to enable a decision, some clients will not say yes or no. After a certain amount of time for reasonable contemplation, it’s helpful to say to the client something along these lines: “Either this is a good investment, and every day you don’t proceed you’re losing money; or it’s not a good investment, and keeping it alive wastes time and energy. Let’s figure out a series of steps we can take

together, at the end of which you'd feel comfortable and confident saying either yes or no. And 'no' is perfectly okay."

You Might Be the One to Say No

If you determine that you really don't have the best option for the client, and you push for the business to meet your own needs, it may often result in either you or the client losing, if not both. As difficult as it may seem, always be willing to walk away if a win-win can't be achieved. What you'll walk away with is your integrity and the client's respect. The trust you create in these "moments of truth" will provide you with ample opportunities to help the client in the future.

In "Skill 3: Resolve Objections," we'll take you through a 3-Part Response you can use to encourage dialogue and help you resolve "nos," objections, and questions in a way that is both genuine and effective. But first, let's look in more detail in Skills 1 and 2 at the types of decisions you're trying to influence and the factors that affect those decisions.

WHAT TO DO

ARE YOU READY OR RISKY?

Think of an upcoming client opportunity in which you can serve in the role of influencing good decisions. The opportunity could be early, where you need to narrow decisions; midway; or advanced to the final decision. Make sure you choose an opportunity that is important enough to spend time preparing for and to win.

- Ask yourself: "How prepared am I to help my client make good decisions?"
- Go online and download the Closing Zone Readiness Assessment tool to help you answer that question for yourself. Please visit: www.franklincovey.com/closingbook

SKILL 1: IDENTIFY THE END IN MIND DECISION



WHAT YOU WILL LEARN IN THIS CHAPTER

- Each client meeting in the Closing Zone should result in a single decision that could advance to a win-win outcome.
- Good End in Mind Decisions are transparent, realistic, and appropriate to where the client is in the sales cycle.
- Organizing each client meeting around the End in Mind Decision will advance you further down the Closing Zone.

One Meeting, One Decision

To influence good decision making and advance through the Closing Zone, it's often helpful to organize each Closing Zone presentation around a single decision. Before each meeting, ask yourself the question: "What is the specific decision the client needs to make by the end of the discussion?"

In other words, at the end of each meeting, what is the logical next decision they need to make, with or without us? This is called the End in Mind Decision. A good End in Mind Decision should serve both the buyer's and the seller's interests.

Elements of a Good End in Mind Decision

The End in Mind Decision is unique to each meeting and circumstance. And it's the decision that will help both you and your client advance through the Closing Zone.

Some examples of End in Mind Decisions might sound something like this:

By the end of the presentation, you'll be in a position to decide whether or not our solution offers enough value to warrant taking next steps.

As a result of our time together, you'll feel confident that our proposal is on the right track to meet your business objectives or that it still needs work.

When we conclude our conversation today, we'd like you to decide one of two outcomes: (1) You'd like to proceed with us, or (2) You believe another partner would better serve your needs.

A Good End in Mind Decision...

FOCUSES ON A SINGLE DECISION

Things get confusing when you try to do too much. The decision should be focused on exactly what you need to accomplish in this meeting. Too many decisions move the complexity of the game from checkers to three-dimensional chess.

IS TRANSPARENT

The decision is simply a description of what you and the client need to accomplish together in the meeting in order to move forward. Ideally, you could shake your client's hand and let him or her read the End in Mind Decision you've proposed without fear or trepidation. There are no games or hidden agendas. You are there to help the client make a good decision—one way or the other.

IS REALISTIC AND ALIGNED WITH THE CLIENT'S BUYING PROCESS

The decision must be within the client's reach (they are able to make the decision).

The decision should be logical relative to the client's buying process.

IS APPROPRIATE FOR THE AUDIENCE AND TIME ALLOTTED

We also want to be aware of the people in the meeting. Are they decision makers, influencers, champions, or potential detractors? Offer an End in Mind Decision this audience can make—and sufficient time for it to be made.

MAINTAINS A CLIENT-CENTRIC INTENT

The outcome of the decision serves the client's best interest. You're focused on their needs first, then on your needs.

As you determine what you need to accomplish in each meeting, each End in Mind Decision should be a logical step in the sales process. It should be the kind of decision intelligent businesspeople would want to make. In fact, they should feel that their time would be wasted if they were not able to reach that decision.

**MANY SALESPEOPLE CREATE
PRESENTATIONS THAT ARE
INFORMATION-RICH YET
DECISION-POOR.**

Prepare for the End in Mind Decision

As often as possible, get the client's agreement on the End in Mind Decision prior to the beginning of the meeting. Doing so makes it much more likely that a decision will be made by the end of the meeting, assuming it's one that can be made among those in attendance.

Once you gain agreement on the decision to be made, you'll need to focus on how to help the client reach that decision within the time allotted.

Many salespeople mistakenly believe that the best way to get to a decision is to present the client with massive amounts of information about their company and solution. They create presentations that are information-rich yet, unfortunately, decision-poor.

By contrast, knowing and agreeing on the End in Mind Decision allows you to prepare much more carefully. You can focus all the collective energy on one decision. You can skillfully organize your time with the client and bring structure to the discussion in order to help the client be confident and comfortable making the decision.

Based on responses to an RFP sent out to more than six firms, a customer invited three vendors to deliver final presentations, and scheduled them back-to-back on the same day.

The first salesperson to present to the team opened with, “By the end of our time together, you’ll be in a position to select us,” without verifying it with those around the table—and he proceeded to quickly move to the agenda and the core of the presentation.

At the end of the meeting, he attempted to close the way he opened—“*So will you select us?*” There was dead silence in the room, until one of the clients spoke up and said, “Well, we can’t. We have two other vendors behind you.”

Tips on How to Prepare a Strong End in Mind Decision

ADD NOTHING EXTRA

When your presentation gives the client more information than what is necessary for the decision, you waste valuable time, potentially confuse the client, and risk introducing doubts, concerns, and objections that would otherwise never appear.

CHUNK DOWN YOUR INFORMATION INTO SMALL, LOGICAL PIECES

Rather than ask the client to make one big leap over a large pool of information, give them several stepping-stones (generally three to seven steps) and place them a reasonable distance apart. Include no fewer and no more

stepping-stones than are needed to get from the start of the meeting to the End in Mind Decision.

CONNECT EACH PIECE OF THE PRESENTATION TO THE END IN MIND DECISION

Make sure what you're saying allows the client to reach a conclusion that directly relates to the decision they will make at the end of the meeting.

Anticipate the questions your client may have about the End in Mind Decision, and prepare potential responses in advance. Allow the client to raise concerns, ask questions, and check things off during the meeting, rather than wait until the end to address their issues.

How Good Are You at Creating Decision-Making Meetings?

Gather 10 or more sales presentations from your organization. How many of them, right at the beginning, make it completely clear what the client is being asked to say, do, or decide by the end of the presentation?

If the answer is "very few," you're not alone. Most presentations have an agenda with some discussion of your team, your approach or methodology, your tools or skills, your experience, your price or fees, and perhaps even your understanding of the situation. The agenda may end

with “Questions?” or “Next steps.” Such presentations are usually all about pitching your organization or solution, and are not focused on the client or their needs.

In summary, if your role is to influence good decisions, commit to preparing your meeting with the End in Mind Decision. First determine, “What specifically does the client need to decide?” If the decision to be made is not clear to either you or the client, how likely is it that a decision will be made?

Then determine, “Where is my client in their decision-making process?” If the decision you ask the client to make is premature, complex, or inappropriate, you risk losing the client’s trust and slowing down your progress in the Closing Zone.

The End in Mind Decision is only one of the factors in the client’s decision-making process. Another is Client Key Beliefs. You need to anticipate and prepare for both. In the next chapter, we will explore the power of beliefs in decision making.

WHAT TO DO

SKILL 1: IDENTIFY THE END IN MIND DECISION

- Think of an upcoming meeting or presentation you're planning.
- Identify the single thing the client must be able to decide at the end of the meeting.
- Make the End in Mind Decision transparent, realistic, and appropriate to where the client is in the sales cycle.
- Test the End in Mind Decision with a colleague and get feedback.
- Prepare each client meeting around the End in Mind Decision.

SKILL 2: ADDRESS CLIENT KEY BELIEFS™



WHAT YOU WILL LEARN IN THIS CHAPTER

- Clients must hold certain beliefs in order to confidently make the End in Mind Decision.
- Asking effective questions will help uncover the beliefs clients hold.
- Appropriate Proof Points demonstrate how you and your solution can satisfy Client Key Beliefs.

Beliefs vs. Facts

Do facts determine the beliefs we hold—or do beliefs determine the facts we accept?

Research is clear that people tend to make decisions based on emotions and beliefs, then find facts that support those beliefs. So if beliefs determine the facts we accept, what's the impact of this reality on how you prepare for client conversations? In the Closing Zone, facts and requirements often play second fiddle to beliefs. Beliefs always matter, and in the final stages of an opportunity, they take on a whole new level of importance.

Facts and requirements are what got you to the table, and the solution helped to narrow the field. At this stage, you can safely assume all the vendors that remain have likely met the basic requirements. Now the client begins to shift focus from documented requirements to beliefs (which often remain vague).

The Power of Beliefs

Let's say you go to a new restaurant that's very expensive, and the food is mediocre, so you decide not to go back. What would you have to believe in order to say, "I'll give it a second chance"? Some people would need to see a two-for-one coupon. Some would need to see a sign saying,

“Under New Management,” to believe things have really changed. Others would need to hear from friends that the food is really good before they would believe that their own bad experience was just an “off” night.

Each of us has different beliefs that would convince us that it’s a good idea to go back a second time. In the same way, Client Key Beliefs drive clients’ decision making and influence their selection process.

If the End in Mind Decision is what you want the client to feel comfortable making, Client Key Beliefs are the factors that determine how the client will decide. In other words, they’re the factors the client needs to “check off” in order to make the End in Mind Decision.

While people make decisions based on what they believe to be right or wrong, valuable or not valuable, practical or impractical, understandable or confusing, these beliefs are often not explicit or organized. Clients do not hand you a sheet of paper with their beliefs. And beliefs are not always shared among key stakeholders. More often than not, it’s up to you to uncover their beliefs.

To align with a client’s beliefs, you’ll need to carefully consider what the client would have to believe (both intellectually and emotionally) before they could be in a position to make the End in Mind Decision you’ve proposed.

**PEOPLE TEND TO MAKE
DECISIONS BASED ON
EMOTIONS AND BELIEFS,
THEN FIND FACTS THAT
SUPPORT THOSE BELIEFS.**

Ways to Elicit Client Key Beliefs

As a sales professional, your power lies in your ability to enable an End in Mind Decision at each and every meeting in the Closing Zone. And your success will depend on your skill to explicitly state and resolve the underlying Client Key Beliefs that support that decision. Every meeting will present an opportunity for you to effectively uncover beliefs related to the opportunity at hand.

Finding out what your clients think and feel to be true is the essence of understanding their key beliefs. Often this can be as straightforward as asking the prospective client a simple question: *“Thinking forward to our presentation, what would you like to make sure we cover that will allow you to make a good decision, whether you choose us or someone else?”*

FIELD NOTES

We’ve heard countless stories where a salesperson arrives to deliver a presentation, only to find that the client has invited other colleagues who are new to the discussion.

The salesperson faces a rather daunting choice: “Should I proceed with the presentation as planned, or should I try to gain insight from those I didn’t expect?”

Sales professionals who understand the power of beliefs will choose (bravely) to engage those they've never met by simply offering, "I haven't had the opportunity to speak with some of those who have joined us today, and I want to use a few minutes to get your perspectives on what you'd need to see, hear, or experience during the presentation to make the best use of the time you've chosen to invest with us."

In doing so, they can determine if the presentation will be able to address those specific needs, or if organizing another meeting might be more appropriate.

Another way to elicit beliefs is to switch roles and imagine you are the client. Put yourself on the client's side of the table and imagine someone with all of your knowledge and experience presenting to you. *What would that person have to convince you of before you would award them the business?* Make a list and see how that compares to what you heard (or might hear) from the client.

There are many other questions that can serve to reveal beliefs, including:

What business issue does the solution need to resolve?

How would the client know success was achieved?

What does the client believe is the financial or other impact of the issue?

How do the client's issues tie in to the larger organizational context?

What has stopped the client from resolving those issues before?

What are client's views on the appropriate investment of time, people, and money?

When you get an opportunity to speak with key stakeholders, it's often a good practice to ask what they would need to see, hear, or experience in the presentation (or proposal) to allow them to make a good decision on behalf of their company. Get ready to take notes, because what you will likely hear will be their key beliefs.

Typical Client Key Beliefs

Client Key Beliefs often have to do with the client's perception of the seller's credibility, capability, or compatibility. Typical Client Key Beliefs include:

You (the salesperson) understand our business situation. Or you can summarize our situation as well as or better than we can.

Your solution meets our needs and/or business objectives. Or the solution does what we need it to do.

Your company has successfully implemented this solution with similar clients. Or you have a proven track record.

Our teams have good chemistry. Or we would make a good team.

Instead of organizing your presentation around the features and benefits of your offering, it's more powerful to demonstrate how those same features and benefits satisfy Client Key Beliefs.

Satisfy Client Key Beliefs With Proof Points

Proof Points demonstrate how you can prove to your client's satisfaction that their key beliefs are being met. They help the client confidently make the End in Mind Decision.

Proof Points consist of stories, data, evidence, analysis, metrics, or any other element that demonstrates your ability to satisfy Client Key Beliefs.

Some of the best Proof Points:

- Connect intellectually with the client.
- Connect emotionally with the client.

- Satisfy beliefs on both an individual and a collective level
- Provide the client with the evidence necessary to make the End in Mind Decision with confidence.

To connect intellectually, you need to make a logical case that is easy to follow, with just enough information—not too much, not too little. We strongly advise against giving clients information they don't need, no matter how impressive you feel it may be.

To connect emotionally, clients need to feel that you create a safe environment for discussion and problem solving. They must feel understood and that you're there to help them make the best decision, even if it's a "no" decision.

Make sure to organize your proof statements (your rationale and evidence, your solution demonstration, your prior experience, and your recommendations) in a way that addresses each Client Key Belief.

If your Proof Points connect with the client and satisfy each Client Key Belief, the client will feel comfortable and confident making the End in Mind Decision.

As you develop Proof Points, ask yourself:

Do I have enough proof here, or am I missing something?

Can I develop this proof better than my competition?

Have I spoken with the right people?

Do I still have some questions for the client before I present?

Remember that decisions are made based on beliefs. While clients could have dozens of beliefs, simplify them down to the few key ones; these vital few are the Client Key Beliefs in which you want to invest your time. Organize your agenda, your presentation, and your Proof Points to address these key beliefs to their satisfaction.

WHAT TO DO

SKILL 2: ADDRESS CLIENT KEY BELIEFS

- Understand what the client needs to believe intellectually and emotionally to confidently make the End in Mind Decision.
- Ask effective questions to uncover Client Key Beliefs.
- Provide appropriate Proof Points that successfully address each Client Key Belief during every client meeting.

SKILL 3: RESOLVE OBJECTIONS



WHAT YOU WILL LEARN IN THIS CHAPTER

- Being prepared for client objections helps you listen for the client's true concerns.
- Acknowledging and understanding a client's objection will help you both achieve a true win-win resolution.
- Knowing what to say and do when you can't meet the client's criteria for resolution helps influence good decision making.
- Price objections require different skills than non-price objections.

Be Present to Win

As you move through the Closing Zone, objections, doubts, and concerns will appear either when you're present and can influence them, or *after you've left the room* and have no influence. Which would you prefer?

The success or failure of huge investments of time, energy, and money can hinge on your ability to uncover objections—or what we often refer to as “Yellow Lights.” Addressing them early and often in the Closing Zone can resolve them in a logical and thoughtful way.

A sales representative from a small software company shared that he uses the number of objections as a barometer to his progress. In his words, “The more objections I get, the more I know the customer is closer to making a decision in our favor. In fact, it's the absence of objections late in the cycle that worries me most.”

It's important to keep in mind the following mindsets when approaching objections.

Resist the urge to “fix” the objection. Wait to “fix” the objection until after you “understand” it.

Don't assume responsibility for the objection. Often the resolution may have nothing to do with you. In many cases, it's for the client to resolve.

Allow the client to resolve it themselves. Clients tend to be convinced more easily if an objection is resolved using their criteria rather than yours.

Earlier in the book, we talked specifically about how to handle a “no” response. It’s important to recognize that when a client raises an objection or a concern, that doesn’t mean it’s a showstopper. In fact, that’s far from being the case. It all depends on your preparation to hear it and your response to it.

An objection is often a sign that the client is moving into the later stages of the Closing Zone. In most cases, a concern or an objection means, “I haven’t said no—I actually am still very interested, but there’s something I don’t like or understand at this point.” If we approach this correctly, it may actually help us better understand the client and progress further into the Closing Zone—or not.

Experience tells us that many objections are simply a result of inaccurate or insufficient information, and could be as simple as the client thinking you don’t provide a particular product feature or service offering, even though you do.

The true nature of a client’s concern is often unclearly worded or expressed. Many times an objection may be camouflaged as a question. If we assume or guess but don’t really understand the concern, we run the risk of answering incorrectly. Or even worse, answering poorly and introducing new concerns inadvertently.

**THE SUCCESS OR FAILURE
OF HUGE INVESTMENTS OF
TIME, ENERGY, AND MONEY
CAN HINGE ON YOUR ABILITY
TO UNCOVER OBJECTIONS.**

To understand the real issue behind the concern, one of the following questions may give you the context you need to address the real issue:

Out of curiosity, why do you feel that way?

What causes you to think that would be the outcome?

Such questions give you an opportunity to work through any points that are raised. Often these issues are easily addressed by providing information that was previously omitted or correcting facts that were simply mistaken as incorrect.

Hearing a concern or an objection is a good indication that you need to slow down and acknowledge the objection, understand it more fully, and then attempt to resolve it.

FIELD NOTES

At times it's helpful to get all the objections out on the table at once. To resolve the objection, you might pose a hypothetical question, asking, "What would have to happen...?" It could sound like:

For discussion purposes, let's say that working together, you resolve your concerns on this issue.

Where would you be?

Hypothetically, let's say the business-unit leaders do buy in. What would you do?

It might be impossible. Let's say it could get done in six months. What would you decide?

Just so I can understand where we're at, let's say you feel very good about everything we've agreed upon with the sole exception of this one issue. What would you do?

Using the 3-Part Response

Being skilled at knowing what to say when objections do arise is one of the keys to enabling good decision making. We suggest what we call a 3-Part Response. The parts are called Acknowledge, Understand, and Resolve. This response pattern effectively flips the frame of reference: If this is what you *don't* want, let's work together to articulate and get closer to what you *do* want.

When you acknowledge, you demonstrate to the client vocally and visually that you're slowing down for the Yellow Light. In order to better understand their concern, be curious. Ask questions to uncover the true nature of the client's resistance. And to resolve it, determine what the client's resolution would be from their perspective, and what would happen if the matter was (or was not) resolved to their satisfaction. This will create an opportunity to gain agreement on how to address the issue(s) at hand.

Let's examine each part more closely:

Part 1: Acknowledge

SLOW DOWN.

RECOGNIZE THE CLIENT'S CONCERN WITHOUT AGREEING OR DISAGREEING OR ASSUMING THAT IT'S YOURS TO SOLVE.

Some ways to acknowledge:

Well, let's talk about that.

I appreciate your honesty.

Tough question. Good question, just tough to answer.

Let's talk it through.

Exhibit empathy and appreciation (although not necessarily agreement) with the client's reason for not moving forward. Show a genuine desire to understand and address the concern. It may include acknowledging your willingness to be wrong.

You don't need to overthink this step. Keep it short and to the point. It's simply a general statement to acknowledge what's been said. "Thanks for voicing that concern," or even "A lot of clients probably would just move forward with that doubt and not bring it up, so I appreciate the chance to talk through it with you."

Part 2: Understand

GET CURIOUS.

ASK QUESTIONS TO CLARIFY THE TRUE NATURE OF THE CLIENT'S CONCERN.

To understand, you approach the client with a genuine desire to see the problem from their point of view. You take off your sales “hat” and get curious about how the client sees the issue. You listen carefully and try to uncover and confirm what the client’s real concern is.

Some ways to gain understanding:

Can you give me an idea about how, specifically, our solution is too complex?

When you say you’re concerned about “too much dependency”—how so?

When you say “obsolete,” what does that mean to you in this situation?

There’s often a powerful urge to skip “Understand” and move directly to “Resolve.” You may think you know “the right answer” and perhaps feel some urgency in turning the Yellow Light to green. The client punches with a hard objection and you counterpunch, almost instinctively.

Remember that the true nature of the client’s concern is often not clearly stated in the way the objection is

worded. If you don't understand the concern, don't resort to guessing or making assumptions—as you run the risk of addressing a concern they didn't raise, answering an objection ineffectively, or introducing a new concern.

Part 3: Resolve

DETERMINE THE CLIENT'S CRITERIA FOR RESOLUTION.

WORK WITH THE CLIENT TO FIND A MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL RESOLUTION.

A helpful phrase to elicit the clients' criteria for resolution is: "What would have to happen in order for...?" As a safety tip, avoid saying, "What would I have to do...?" or "What would our company have to do...?" Once again, it may not be yours (or your company's) issue to resolve.

Some ways to elicit criteria for resolution:

What would allow you to feel confident and comfortable that...?

What would you have to check off in your mind and gut before...?

What would have to be in place before...?

How would you become convinced that...?

It can be extremely helpful to invite clients to think in terms of what they would like, what they do want, and what would allow them to feel good rather than bad.

As a rule, clients tend to be convinced more easily and with more buy-in when you resolve an objection using their criteria rather than your own.

When You *Can* and *Can't* Meet Their Criteria

Once you understand the client's criteria for resolving the objection, you're going to quickly go down one of two paths: *either you can meet their criteria, or you can't.*

PATH 1: WHEN YOU CAN

If you're able to meet their criteria and resolve the objection, you can move ahead by providing the resolution criteria with facts, logic, data, stories, whitepapers, metaphors to lend clarity, and insight—anything that shows that you can do what's needed in the way the client has asked.

For criteria you
CAN
meet, use:

Facts or logic.

Data or research.

Third-party stories.

PATH 2: WHEN YOU CAN'T

The challenge is, what if you can't meet their criteria? What if, despite your best efforts to understand the criteria, you've determined that your company can't do what the client wants? The key lies in your ability to offer other options and possibly challenge the logic of a particular criterion.

For criteria you
CAN'T
meet:

Reframe the
criterion.

Change the relative
importance of the
criterion.

Show that no
one can meet
the criterion
by offering an
"apples-to-apples"
comparison.

There are three ways of responding when you can't meet a particular criterion:

1. Reframe the criterion.
2. Change the relative importance of the criterion.

3. Show that no one can meet the criterion.

Here are some examples of responses you could choose when you can't meet your client's criteria for resolving their objection.

Reframe the Criterion

They say:

I want everyone who's working on this project to have a minimum of eight years' experience on this platform.

You say:

It seems your belief is that with eight years' experience, these people would be highly competent to meet your needs. If we were able to build a guarantee of competency into specific service-level agreements, but we could not guarantee eight years' experience, would that still work for you?

In the client's mind, eight years of experience equals competence. You're offering another way to provide the competence the client requires.

Change the Relative Importance of the Criterion

They say:

We need to resolve the question of who owns the intellectual-property rights.

You say:

Let's say all the results you want are real and obtainable. You and your customers both win and the stockholders are happy. The only issue we can't fully resolve is who owns the intellectual-property rights. Would that one unresolved issue mean you would walk away from this whole opportunity?

You're saying, "Look at everything else that's going on. Is this really a deal breaker for you?" It might be. It might not. You're trying to understand and see if you can come to mutual resolution.

Show That No One Can Meet the Criterion

They say:

I want everyone who's working on this project to have a minimum of eight years' experience on this platform.

You say:

Out of curiosity, on a project of this magnitude, was any firm able to guarantee that every person working on this project had eight years of experience working in your industry?

You're checking in with the client. If the client says, "Yes, we've got someone," then you have a major objection and this may be a case where you walk away. You may first talk with the client further to confirm that this really is the case.

Resolving Objections Related to Price

Price objections are different in kind than non-price objections. So let's talk about the specifics when it comes to resolving price objections.

You can't substitute good price negotiation for bad selling. With this in mind, you should receive far less pushback on price if you've done a good job of agreeing up front on the financial value of the solution.

By now, you should have also qualified the client on the amount of investment they're willing to make to get the desired results. We consider qualifying on money (or

a range of investment) as a prerequisite for resolving pushbacks on price.

As a general rule, only negotiate price when price is the last issue on the table. Too many salespeople offer a discount and still do not earn the business. This often leaves the client with a very negative impression of the salesperson.

To find out if price is the last issue on the table, take price off the table and see what happens. You can say, “Right now we have priced the solution to get you the results you want. I’m not sure we can move the price without making some important tradeoffs. Let me understand how you are thinking about this. Let’s say we did agree on price. What would you do?”

Or if you’re in a competitive situation, you might say, “Let’s say all the prices were the same. What would you do?” In either case, if the client says unequivocally, “We would go with you,” then price is the last issue on the table, and you know you’re ready to talk about it.

If the client says anything else, then agreeing on price would not get the deal done. You might say, “Our goal is to get you a solution that truly meets your needs. It sounds like even if we agree on price, something important is missing. What’s missing?”

Remember, your objective is to resolve all non-price issues first. It makes agreeing on price easier and conclusive.

Value-Exchange Levers That Affect Pricing



You'll first need to explore whether or not there are rational tradeoffs or “value exchanges” that would lower the price, yet not compromise the solution or the margins you need to be successful.

To do this, look at what we call the “price equivalents.” Price is often a function of scope, timing, and division of labor, among other things. Scope is what you're going to do to produce the desired results. Timing is how fast it will happen. Division of labor is who does what.

If the client wants a lower price, can they still achieve success with fewer results? If doing the project faster or slower saves money, can the client feel good about adjusting the timing? Can the client take on more of the work without compromising the quality of the results?

Here are examples of fair-value exchanges:

- You and the client agree that you do not have to write a formal proposal, and therefore pass on your cost savings to the client.
- The client provides marketing and advertising value in exchange for a lower price.
- The client provides research-and-development collaboration by measuring the effectiveness of the solution. In exchange, you write the results in a whitepaper, then publish and distribute it to key audiences.
- The client agrees to purchase additional business now, and you reduce your associated business-development costs.
- The client pays early, and you reduce your accounts-receivable costs.

You can probably think of other examples. Essentially, you're looking for a line item against which you can charge the discounted price.

The 3-Part Response for Price Objections

The 3-Part Response covered earlier is effective in responding to non-price objections of all kinds. But let's

look at how the process of Acknowledge, Understand, and Resolve plays out when dealing specifically with price-related objections.

Always slow down and use the first part—Acknowledge. This lets the client know you’ve heard their concern. If you’ve listened, you already understand the objection (it’s about the price), so move on to the third part—Resolve.

For example, if the client states something to the effect that, “I want your business in our company. But I’ll give it to you straight: the price is a stumbling block. For both our sakes, what can you do for me on price?” You might respond as follows:

PART 1: ACKNOWLEDGE

I know it’s important for your company to be confident that you’re getting the best price.

PART 2: UNDERSTAND

(You already understand that the issue is price.)

PART 3: RESOLVE

We have priced this to get you a solution that truly meets your needs and produces the results you want. Taking some of those results off the table would be one way of lowering the investment. Would you like to take a look at options?

Another example might sound like this: “Everyone knows you have the highest margins in the industry. Since we will be giving you substantial business with this deal, can’t you lower the margins?” You might respond as follows:

PART 1: ACKNOWLEDGE

I can appreciate where you’re coming from. I’d want to get the lowest margins as well.

PART 2: UNDERSTAND

(You already understand that the issue is price.)

PART 3: RESOLVE

Our pricing is aggressive as it is, and if you would like to discuss further discounts, let’s figure out a fair-value exchange that would benefit both of us. We could take a look at changing the timing or scope. Would that be of interest to you?

How Top Performers Close on Price

- They select a price that’s aggressive in terms of producing a solution that truly creates value and is realistic in terms of expectations and justifications. They test the price in advance.
- They only deal with price if it’s the last issue on the table. To find out if it’s the last issue, they take

price off the table and see what happens. If nothing happens, they know they don't have a solution that best meets the client's needs, and agreeing on price wouldn't close the deal. They find out what else is missing.

- If they choose to make concessions, they first explore fair-value exchanges. Can they change the scope, timing, or division of labor without compromising a workable solution?
- They don't feel they have to resolve everything in one meeting. They keep the dialogue open and pull back to give themselves and the client more time to come up with creative solutions.

Be Willing to Be Wrong

In the end, the goal is to win the business when there's a good fit between what the client needs and what you do well. If there's a fatal flaw in the solution, you want to discover it as much as the client does. Because if the client buys your solution and it's an abysmal failure, you lose as well. So it's in your best interest to view objections as an opportunity to learn as much as you can about what the client really needs.

Salespeople who are certain they are right tend to not fully listen to what clients are saying. They fail to examine

their own assumptions. They push harder on what makes sense to them, rather than identifying and removing the causes of client resistance.

By contrast, salespeople who are willing to be “wrong” tend to view objections as a road sign to slow down and increase their comprehension of what will serve the client’s best interest. By resolving objections skillfully, top performers gain credibility, deeper understanding, and their client’s trust and eventually more business.

WHAT TO DO

SKILL 3: RESOLVE OBJECTIONS

- Anticipate client objections and prepare potential responses before each client meeting.
- Master the 3-Part Response: Acknowledge, Understand, and Resolve.
- When you can't meet your client's criteria for resolution, attempt to reframe or change the importance of the particular criterion, or show an apples-to-apples value comparison between your solution and your competitor's.
- Negotiate price ONLY when price is the last issue on the table.
- Consider tradeoffs on scope, timing, or division of labor for a lower pricing (and never lower the price without a meaningful exchange of value).

SKILL 4: PREPARE THE CONDITIONS FOR GOOD DECISION MAKING



WHAT YOU WILL LEARN IN THIS CHAPTER

- Your responsibility is to ensure that the conditions for each Closing Zone meeting enable a good decision.
- You build trust by pushing back on conditions that do not enable a good decision.

Conditions Enable Success—Or Not!

Think about your past sales experience. Have you been in a sales meeting that meanders or ends with no concrete decisions? Have you sent a business proposal when meeting in person would have been better?

Have you presented when the right people were not in the room? Have you run out of time while delivering a presentation?

What was the result?

Many times salespeople are so enthusiastic about their solution or eager to get in front of a client, that they present prematurely—when the meeting conditions are not conducive to good decision making.

Rather than work with the client beforehand to gain agreement on the conditions that promote well-informed decisions, they allow the client to dictate the conditions of the meeting. While this is fine for some meetings, it is often detrimental to win-win outcomes.

If your primary role is to influence good decision making, your responsibility is to prepare the conditions (everything and everyone necessary) for good decision making before each meeting begins.

**YOUR RESPONSIBILITY IS TO
PREPARE THE CONDITIONS
FOR GOOD DECISION
MAKING BEFORE EACH
MEETING BEGINS.**

Fight for the “Rights”

To prepare the conditions, get these four things “right” as often as you can:

1. THE RIGHT END IN MIND DECISION

Because decision velocity is critical to win-win outcomes, it is vital to gain agreement with the client—in advance of the meeting—on the right End in Mind Decision for the meeting.

In Skill 1, we said to be transparent with the client about the End in Mind Decision. Talk to them about it beforehand. Be sure the decision is logical, relative to where the client is in the buying process. And make sure it is a decision the client is able to make.

Each Closing Zone client meeting should advance the decision-making process further toward the eventual final decision—be it a “yes” or a “no.” Nothing hinders success more than a meeting that ends in a “no” decision.

2. THE RIGHT SETTING

Many clients, in the interest of saving time, will ask you to send them a proposal rather than present in person. We have a saying: “Proposals don’t sell or help clients succeed, people do.” While proposals may be appropriate

to confirm what has already been agreed upon, they generally are terrible selling vehicles.

In our experience, the need for in-person meetings increases significantly once you enter the Closing Zone. Divergent thinking gives way to convergent thinking. And this calls for a more personal and deeper-level conversation that is best facilitated by a live meeting.

Consider what we have in person that we lack in a written proposal:

Vocal cues. We can hear the tone, emphasis, pace, and inflection of language in order to interpret meaning accurately.

Visual cues. We see powerful nonverbal feedback, crucial to communication.

Interaction. We can immediately respond to questions, concerns, and reactions.

Flexibility. If something isn't working, we can change directions.

Mutual understanding. It's difficult to come to a "meeting of the minds" in a written document.

Closure. We get the opportunity to end with a decision—or know what it would take to get one.

**IF OUR ROLE IS TO
INFLUENCE GOOD DECISIONS
TO ACHIEVE WIN-WIN
OUTCOMES, THEN WE HAVE
TO BE PERSISTENT IN
ASKING FOR AND INVITING
THE RIGHT PEOPLE WHO CAN
MAKE THOSE DECISIONS.**

Make sure you match the needs of the decision to the setting chosen. If you believe that an in-person meeting is needed, then by all means fight for the right to meet face-to-face.

However, if the End in Mind Decision does not require a face-to-face interaction, then save the time and expense and choose a different setting. Virtual platforms can be a very helpful and appropriate option in many situations.

3. THE RIGHT PEOPLE

A meeting will not enable a decision if the people who can make the decision aren't present. Yet, many times salespeople present to clients who will then present to someone else who will make the decision.

It's unlikely that the people presenting on our behalf will do as good a job as we do. They won't answer questions with the same ability, authority, or credibility. It's doubtful they'll do a good job of resolving doubts, concerns, or objections.

Just as important to managing who is in the meeting is managing who isn't. Perhaps you've had the experience of having people in the meeting who shouldn't be involved—who take the meeting in a completely different direction than the one needed to move business forward.

So why have someone other than you present to the decision makers? Why be thrown off by people who show up unexpectedly? We find ourselves in these positions

because the client says that's how they want to do it, and we comply.

If our role is to influence good decisions to achieve win-win outcomes, then we have to be persistent in asking for and inviting the right people who can make those decisions.

4. THE RIGHT AMOUNT OF TIME

What is the right amount of time for a good presentation? It depends on the decision to be made. But remember, often meetings don't start on time, topics are often complex, presenters run overtime, and room for questions and answers is sacrificed. All of these factors can lead to no decisions—or poor decisions—getting made.

There's nothing worse than hearing a client say, "I apologize, but something has come up, and we'll have to cut this meeting short. I only have about 15 minutes." If you have determined that you need a full hour to enable a good decision, what do you do?

Often sales professionals try to accomplish in 15 minutes what they decided they needed a full hour to cover. This approach is not preparing healthy conditions; it is giving in to reactivity. If you could pull off the presentation in 15 minutes, why did you schedule an hour? Weeks or months may have been invested to get to this meeting scheduled. If you rush it now, try to talk fast, or skip vital information, you will sacrifice the process and fall short

of preparing the client to make a good business decision. The better option may be to reschedule the meeting for a future time.

Sometimes the client tells you ahead of time that they only have 30 minutes, and you know it will require more time than that. If you know it will take 60 minutes to enable a good decision, then fight for the 60 minutes. It is in the best interest of the client to create the conditions that will allow for a good decision.

One final thought on timing. It seems the default time for meetings in the business world has become one hour. Challenge yourself to think through the least amount of time you feel is necessary to accomplish your End in Mind Decision. Executives appreciate efficiency, and most meetings are inefficient because the sales professional has not preconditioned the End in Mind Decision or the agenda in advance. If you can accomplish your agenda in 30 minutes, then do so. It will build credibility and trust with your clients.

So How Do I Push Back?

You might be thinking, “This all makes sense. I just can’t see myself actually pushing back on my client.”

In “Skill 3: Resolve Objections,” we taught you the 3-Part Response: Acknowledge, Understand, and Resolve. Let’s review each briefly:

PART 1: ACKNOWLEDGE

Slow down.

Recognize the client’s concern without agreeing or disagreeing.

PART 2: UNDERSTAND

Get curious.

Ask questions to clarify the true nature of the client’s concern.

PART 3: RESOLVE

Determine the client’s criteria for resolution.

Work with the client to find a mutually beneficial resolution.

Now, let’s think about how this 3-Part Response may apply to preparing the conditions.

Let’s say you have been meeting with a client for some time. You have progressed in the Closing Zone to a final presentation, and your belief is that all the key stakeholders need to be present at one meeting. In planning for this meeting, your client says to you, “I don’t know if we can get all the stakeholders together at the same time.” Do

you give in, or do you push back? Here is one way you may choose to respond:

ACKNOWLEDGE

I understand. If I didn't think it was so critical, I wouldn't even ask.

UNDERSTAND

Based on the impact to your organization, these people would have to meet multiple times in addition to this one meeting if a bad decision is made. And if we set up multiple meetings, we'll have to coordinate questions and conclusions back and forth. It becomes much more difficult and time-consuming to reach a conclusion for everyone involved.

RESOLVE

We'll do anything we can to help. How can we set this up?

Go back and read through those three responses again. Internalize what is happening. The client is telling us that something can't happen, and we know that something must happen to enable a good decision. Do you allow them to dictate a condition that is not going to enable a good decision? Or are you going to push back and develop your skills in learning how to help them help themselves be successful?

WHAT TO DO

SKILL 4: PREPARE THE CONDITIONS FOR GOOD DECISION MAKING

- Examine the last five meetings you have held that were in the Closing Zone. Identify the conditions that were not prepared to enable your client to make a good business decision.
- Influence good decision making during the Closing Zone by pushing back on any logistics that would not allow your client to make a good decision.
- Remember to push for:
 - The right End in Mind Decision.
 - The right setting.
 - The right people.
 - The right amount of time.

SKILL 5: OPEN PURPOSEFULLY, CLOSE POWERFULLY



WHAT YOU WILL LEARN IN THIS CHAPTER

- A purposeful opening is clear, client-centric, and proposes the End in Mind Decision.
- A powerful close includes a brief summary of how you will resolve each Client Key Belief and executing the End in Mind Decision.

Clarity, Language, Flexibility

If you have successfully prepared the conditions for good decision making before the meeting, you are in a great place to open the meeting purposefully. Top performers draw on the right clarity, language, and flexibility when delivering opening statements.

Clarity. Make it crystal clear what the client needs to decide by the end of the meeting.

Language. Include language that opens clients up to the process rather than causing them to close down or resist. As discussed earlier, include a “no” version of the decision so that clients are invited to make a free and unforced choice.

Flexibility. Be ready to change the opening to adapt to what is actually happening in the meeting rather than what you imagined would happen.

Balancing clarity and nonthreatening language is an artful combination. If, in an attempt to be considerate and polite, you’re too soft, fuzzy, or confusing in what you’re asking for, agreement will either not happen or will be meaningless.

On the other hand, if people perceive that you’re being pushy or manipulative, they can start resisting. As discussed previously, they want to freely decide, not feel as if they’re

being led to a predetermined decision. That's why working on your opening statement and practicing it out loud can be so beneficial. You can work until you get the right balance.

Even if you've worked hard to get things just right, for whatever reason, sometimes things don't go that way. When that happens, it can be very tempting to keep pushing forward as practiced. You might feel like you know you're right and eventually the client will "get it," or shame on them if they don't. Of course, it's really shame on us for not being flexible and ready to change to meet what's actually happening versus the scenarios we played out in our head.

When clarity, language, and flexibility are skillfully combined in an opening statement, people will often willingly collaborate with you. Of course, you still have more work to do to influence good decisions, but delivering a strong opening statement gets you off to a good start and makes the task that much easier.

Four Steps to Open Purposefully

The opening statement should briefly set the tone and agenda for the meeting. If you get it right, you'll set the tone for everything to follow.

**WHEN CLARITY, LANGUAGE,
AND FLEXIBILITY ARE
SKILLFULLY COMBINED IN
AN OPENING STATEMENT,
PEOPLE WILL OFTEN
WILLINGLY COLLABORATE
WITH YOU.**

To open purposefully:

1. State and gain agreement on the End in Mind Decision.
2. State and gain agreement on the agenda.
3. Briefly summarize the client's current situation and challenges.
4. Connect your solution to the client's challenges and beliefs.

Typically, in the opening statement, you are asking clients to buy in to the End in Mind Decision and agree with the proposed path to get there.

If you've preconditioned the meeting and gained agreement on the End in Mind Decision and ensured the right decision makers are present, you're likely to get their buy-in. You're well on your way to enabling a good decision. If you open well and the client doesn't buy in, at least you know up front and can adjust.

Within the opening statement, a good End in Mind Decision sets forth a decision or an action in a way that seems natural—an outcome a good businessperson would expect to see in a productive meeting.

Likewise, the agenda or path to reach the End in Mind Decision should sound logical and concise—something that, if you were the client, would make good sense to you.

**IF YOU'VE PRECONDITIONED
THE MEETING AND GAINED
AGREEMENT ON THE END
IN MIND DECISION AND
ENSURED THE RIGHT
DECISION MAKERS ARE
PRESENT, YOU'RE LIKELY TO
GET THEIR BUY-IN.**

Let's assume you're in a final presentation where you're the only company being considered. In this situation, the four steps to open purposefully might sound something like this:

1. STATE AND GET AGREEMENT ON THE END IN MIND DECISION

I appreciate the opportunity to be here today. Both of our companies have put in a lot of good work to get to this point. We both want the same thing: a successful initiative that produces the results your company needs and expects. We're here today to present what we feel is a solution that meets those objectives. We invite you to push hard against our thinking. If there are any flaws, we want to identify them and correct them as much as you need. As we think about the end of the meeting today, we want to reach one of three decisions:

- 1. One, everything looks good to go. Let's move ahead.*
- 2. Two, we're ready to move ahead as long as we make sure the following concerns are taken care of.*
- 3. Or three, there seem to be some fatal flaws in the business case. It simply doesn't make sense to move ahead now or in the future.*

Does making one of those choices seem to be a good goal for the time we spend today?

If you have agreed to the End in Mind Decision, move to the next step.

2. STATE AND GAIN AGREEMENT ON THE AGENDA

We have an agenda we sent out in advance to help us make one of those three decisions. If you don't mind, let's quickly review it together and see if you would suggest any changes.

We put ourselves on your side of the table and asked, "What would they have to demonstrate to us before we would be comfortable deciding to move forward?" Here's what we came up with:

Do they understand our situation?

Does the solution address our business opportunity and help us achieve the results we expect?

Are the economics compelling?

Clearly, there are many details under each point. However, the points seemed to address the biggest issues. How about from your perspective? Would this path allow you to make good, well-informed decisions, whatever they might be, or would you like to suggest some changes?

The client may accept the path, and you're ready to go. In fact, if you mutually agreed on the agenda before the meeting, then the opening statement might just confirm what has already been agreed to.

Make sure you build in to your opening statement a chance for clients to agree or modify what you propose.

Surprisingly, we have watched many presenters just state the objectives and agenda, and then march forward without any feedback from the client.

Once you've agreed to the End in Mind Decision and agenda, you can move on to steps 3 and 4.

3. BRIEFLY SUMMARIZE THE CLIENT'S CURRENT SITUATION AND CHALLENGES.

Give a brief overview of your understanding of the business challenges the client is facing. Being able to state their situation in their own words builds trust and credibility right from the get-go and opens the client up for great discussions during the meeting.

4. CONNECT YOUR SOLUTION TO THE CLIENT'S CHALLENGES AND BELIEFS.

Map your solution directly to the client's issues. Don't leave this to guesswork. Make the connections directly

with a perspective of how their situation could improve with adoption of what you are proposing.

Practice Your Opening

We have all been in a situation where the opening of a meeting did not go as well as we wanted it to. Organizing the steps to a purposeful opening in your head is a good start, but writing down what you want to say before the meeting is even better. And practicing it beforehand will ensure that what's in your head and written down will come out of your mouth—correctly!

Good preparation leads to good opening statements, and good opening statements lead to—or are at least a good start toward—good decision making.

FIELD NOTES

A sales manager from a Web-design firm said, "Most of our team used to treat opening statements as a monologue and not a dialogue. We gathered our internal team together to practice opening statements that focused on increasing our touchpoints with the client throughout the opening."

Each team member agreed to “dry-run” an opening statement for an upcoming meeting they were planning. We had the rest of the team hold up their hand when they felt the presenter might benefit from pausing and asking for client buy-in. We had our salespeople slow down and start to use questions like:

Does that make sense?

Would you add anything?

Does that seem like a good use of time?

Is that the right direction?

Feedback from our salespeople suggested that the exercise helped take the pressure off them and helped them achieve a better balance and confidence that they were on the right track with their audience. This small shift made a huge difference in our connection with our audiences.

Three Steps to Close Powerfully

Top performers close powerfully by getting a decision. It's that straightforward.

It doesn't mean they always hear a “yes.” In fact, they may not like the decision. But closing powerfully certainly means a decision is made and that the next steps are clear to all.

**TOP PERFORMERS
CLOSE POWERFULLY BY
GETTING A DECISION. IT'S
THAT STRAIGHTFORWARD.**

Meetings usually end with some version of “Well, we’re almost out of time. Any questions?”

This is exactly what we’re trying to avoid. The most important part about asking for the decision is that you do it!

When closing is done poorly, it usually means the meeting has been stuffed with too much content and you’ve run out of time, typically at the expense of the Q&A.

When this happens, the very understanding you were looking for is cut short. There’s hardly any back-and-forth discussion, and there’s certainly no decision making. Often in this scenario, the salesperson is talking at clients instead of exploring with them the decision they need to make.

The closing should clearly and succinctly summarize the events of the meeting. At this point, the clients should be fully aware of the End in Mind Decision and prepared to make it.

TO CLOSE POWERFULLY:

Summarize the storyline of your presentation.

- Slow down and restate the End in Mind Decision.
- Review the resolution of each Client Key Belief.

Call for the End in Mind Decision.

- Remember that not making a decision is your biggest competitor.
- Influence the client to make a good business decision— with or without you.
- Trust that calling for the End in Mind Decision is in the best interest of all parties involved.

Propose next steps.

- Be prepared to offer your expert opinion.
- Determine the logical next steps for the “yes” and the “no” response.

Let’s remember your intent: You’re trying to help people and organizations be more successful and make decisions in a way they can feel good about. You’re presenting what you feel would help them achieve that goal.

You need their honest feedback about what they think will or will not work. If it really won’t work, you don’t want it any more than they do. If there are doubts or questions or concerns, put them on the table, talk them through together, and come to some reasonable conclusions.

Support your intent by asking for decisions in a way that’s straightforward, genuine, and nonthreatening. Make it as easy as possible for clients to accurately express what they think, feel, and believe to be true at that moment.

WHAT TO DO

SKILL 5: OPEN PURPOSEFULLY, CLOSE POWERFULLY

- Practice your opening statement before each client meeting.
- When opening, state the End in Mind Decision, summarize the client's challenges, and connect your solution to those challenges.
- When closing, summarize how you will resolve each Client Key Belief, and ask for the End in Mind Decision.

THE DIFFERENCE



WHAT YOU WILL LEARN IN THIS CHAPTER

- The best way to improve sales performance is to practice consistently and deliberately.

Reinforce Your Practice

So you've learned how to identify a good End in Mind Decision, address Client Key Beliefs, resolve objections, prepare the conditions, and open purposefully and close powerfully. Hopefully, you're excited about it and thinking, "That was some great stuff." You may be wondering, "Now what do I do?"

Research shows that within a few weeks of learning a new skill, many people lose up to 85 percent of what they learned. Instead of losing it, you naturally want to accelerate what you've learned.

Research also shows that without practice and a routine—and an expertly designed system that you're disciplined enough to use—performance doesn't increase sustainably. You might get a blip in improvement, but you're not going to see continued performance increase.

The Secret Sauce of Top Performers

In our years of research into the art of selling, part of our obsession has been to ask, "How do people really get good at something?" And not just sales. We've looked long and hard at the science of developing performance improvement in any field of endeavor, whether you're a world-class chef or a ballerina.

From our own studies and those of others across many fields, the one factor that explains the most (though not everything) about expert performance is the quality and quantity of practice.

Because the nature of the practice that leads to expert performance is so substantially different than what most people consider “practice,” experts in the field of top performance refer to it by the term “deliberate practice.”

From our experience, the sales professionals who make the greatest improvement in their skills engage in routines of regular practice. They find a colleague to serve as a coach. This is usually someone who can provide accountability and feedback on performance.

Dedicating as little as 60 minutes a week implementing the 5 Skills we have discussed will make a significant difference in your “Win Rate.”

In Review

Intent. Remember, selling is about helping clients succeed. Top performers prepare and create the conditions for making good decisions—decisions that serve the client’s best interest.

Mindset. Your role as a salesperson is to influence decisions to achieve win-win outcomes.

**SALES STOP GROWING
BECAUSE SALESPEOPLE
STOP GROWING.**

Skillset. In every client interaction, use the following 5 Skills:

1. Identify the End in Mind Decision
2. Address Client Key Beliefs
3. Resolve Objections
4. Prepare the Conditions for Good Decision Making
5. Open Purposefully, Close Powerfully

To access the tools discussed in this book that can help you implement these 5 Skills, please visit: www.franklincovey.com/salesperformance

Grow Sales by Growing Your Sales Team

Over the past quarter of a century, we've witnessed the transformation of tens of thousands of salespeople as they have put these skills into practice. Seeing this transformation continues to ignite our passion for our clients' unparalleled success.

Following are a few examples of the kind of success your organization can see:

Over a one-year period, we worked hand-in-hand with the sales leadership and sales force at a global systems integrator to install new operating

mechanisms and skills. We worked intensively to build their anemic pipeline and win business as well as to train and develop their staff. As a result:

- The pipeline increased 46% from \$2.5 billion in January to \$3.65 billion by July.
- The Win Rate improved from 38% to 45% (14% higher than the corporate average).
- Sales reps selling greater than \$5 million over the prior year increased 30%.

We worked closely with sales leaders and account managers at an industrial technology company to help them develop a demand-creation culture within their sales team. This culture is enabling sales professionals to increase the number of qualified new opportunities in their pipeline and the dollar value of closed business. As a result:

- The company is achieving nearly \$2 billion in sales.
- 74% of the sales team achieved quota, up from 23% the year before.

An integrated marketing company needed to increase the percentage of the sales team achieving quota and the volume of sales per salesperson. After we worked with the company:

- Total contract value sold overall went up 35%.
- Total contract value sold to new logo accounts went up 154%.
- Total contract value sold add-on increased 133%.
- Total number of sales went up 14%.
- Average deal size went up 18%.
- Key deals over a million dollars increased by 33%.

If you're a sales leader and you want to transformation to your organization's capability, please get in touch with us to learn how FranklinCovey can help you integrate a system of practice that builds great sales performers.

Through consulting, training, and coaching, we can help you commit to a system of sales success. We use training as part of a process and not a standalone event, engage in an ongoing process of deliberate practice (designed and implemented by experts), and build a supportive environment.

Please visit:

www.franklincovey.com/salesperformance

or call **1-800-707-5191**.



About the Authors



A committed long-distance runner and father of six, **Craig Christensen** knows all about endurance. Since earning his M.B.A. at Harvard, Craig’s career has included previous responsibilities as a Wall Street banker, commercial developer, and leading organizational consultant. He is a cofounder of Ninety Five 5—a sales transformation practice on the “Inc. 500 Fastest Growing Companies in America” list—which was acquired by FranklinCovey in 2013. He is now Global Practice Leader of FranklinCovey’s Sales Performance Practice. Craig helps clients succeed by winning more profitable business, combining the best of leadership development, behavior change, and sales management into measurable results.



Sean Frontz has taught leaders and managers worldwide in the principles of effectiveness since earning his master's degree in psychology from Loyola University in 1996. Over the past seven years, he has specialized in understanding what makes the best salespeople the best. As a Senior Consultant in FranklinCovey's Sales Performance Practice, Sean has helped design practical tools and pragmatic systems that both sales professionals and leaders use to increase their sales performance. Father to five children, Sean lives in Charleston, South Carolina, where his family enjoys boating and outdoor activities.



Dennis Susa has played nearly every role in the areas of sales, consulting, and field marketing. A writer, outdoorsman, amateur archeologist, and married father of three boys, his personal interests are as wide-ranging as his professional background. He earned a B.A. at Hillsdale College in Michigan. Prior to joining FranklinCovey's Sales Performance Practice, Dennis held a number of sales leadership positions for over two decades with IBM and Microsoft. Today, having developed and delivered sales transformation programs across a wide spectrum of enterprises and industries, Dennis's core expertise is building, coaching, and managing sales and consulting teams in complex selling situations.

FranklinCovey **ALL ACCESS PASS**[®]

The FranklinCovey All Access Pass provides unlimited access to our best-in-class content and solutions, allowing you to expand your reach, achieve your business objectives, and sustainably impact performance across your organization.

AS A PASSHOLDER, YOU CAN:

- Access FranklinCovey's world-class content, whenever and wherever you need it, including *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People[®]: Signature Edition 4.0*, *Leading at the Speed of Trust[®]*, and *The 5 Choices to Extraordinary Productivity[®]*.
- Certify your internal facilitators to teach our content, deploy FranklinCovey consultants, or use digital content to reach your learners with the behavior-changing content you require.
- Have access to a certified implementation specialist who will help design impact journeys for behavior change.
- Organize FranklinCovey content around your specific business-related needs.
- Build a common learning experience throughout your entire global organization with our core-content areas, localized into 16 languages.

Join thousands of organizations using the All Access Pass to implement strategy, close operational gaps, increase sales, drive customer loyalty, and improve employee engagement.

To learn more, visit

FRANKLINCOVEY.COM or call **1-888-868-1776**.



© Franklin Covey Co. All rights reserved.



FranklinCovey is a global, public company specializing in organizational-performance improvement. We help organizations and individuals achieve results that require a change in human behavior. Our expertise is in seven areas: leadership, execution, productivity, trust, sales performance, customer loyalty, and education. FranklinCovey clients have included 90 percent of the Fortune 100, more than 75 percent of the Fortune 500, thousands of small and mid-size businesses, as well as numerous government entities and educational institutions. FranklinCovey has more than 100 direct and partner offices providing professional services in over 150 countries and territories.

FRANKLINCOVEY ONLEADERSHIP

WITH
SCOTT MILLER

Join FranklinCovey's executive vice president Scott Miller for weekly interviews with thought leaders, bestselling authors, and world-renowned experts in the areas of organizational culture, leadership development, execution, and personal productivity.

SOME FEATURED INTERVIEWS INCLUDE:

STEPHEN M. R. COVEY
THE SPEED OF TRUST®

SUSAN CAIN
THE QUIET REVOLUTION

TODD DAVIS
GET BETTER

SETH GODIN
WORK THAT MATTERS FOR
PEOPLE THAT CARE

KORY KOGON
THE 5 CHOICES®

LIZ WISEMAN
MULTIPLIERS

HYRUM SMITH
THE 3 GAPS

DR. DANIEL AMEN
CHANGE YOUR BRAIN,
CHANGE YOUR LIFE

Join the ongoing leadership conversation at
FRANKLINCOVEY.COM/ONLEADERSHIP.