



Step By Step

Closing a sale is critical to the success of every business. However, many Business Development professionals focus too much on closing the sale quickly, rather than moving prospects and customers through their sales process or sales pipeline. Each step of the process is movement towards a sale. Your challenge is *not* to immediately close the sale, but rather move people through the process, which naturally results in a sale.

Establish a sales process that works for you and make it your goal to simply get prospects into the next step and not to jump ahead too early to the close. The sales pipeline begins with a clear understanding of your target market and hard data telling you whom to contact. The goal is to begin making introductions that will lead to relationships.

The more you can develop relationships the better chance you have of moving a greater number of people into your sales pipeline. The first step in building a relationship should be to get to know the person - not to sell during your first meeting. Be the best listener your prospect has ever met and evaluate their level of interest in your offering by asking questions. It's a conversation, not a one act play.

Your next major step in the sales process is to bring unexpected value to the table. This could happen by offering a low cost or even free "mini project" which addresses (or begins to address) a problem the prospect has shared in your initial meeting(s). The key here is to identify something you can do to generate good will and trust that, if successfully completed, has a natural next step attached to it.

Assuming successful completion of the step above, it is time to ask trial closes, prepare a contract or proposal, negotiate terms and fees and shift the focus to closing. Many times it will happen easily as the prospect discovers their true needs and logically assumes you're the guy or gal to help. Other times you will need to put people into a stay-in-touch program or move them into other parts of the sales process because it is too early to close.

A Stay in Touch program should be a part of your sales pipeline. People who fall out of the process will need follow - up to keep your firm in a "top of mind" position. The best method is a series of emails offering topical information of value to your audience. Remember, many people simply need time before they can move forward. If you're not in their consciousness a competitor may be.

Take a few minutes to clearly outline the steps of your sales pipeline, including your stay in touch program and other follow-up activities. Here is a sample to do list you can use in developing your sales pipeline. Adapt it to fit your unique situation.

1. Develop a list of your target market and how to qualify prospects	2. Determine how to best introduce yourself and company (your Elevator Pitch)
3. Prepare a list of questions to memorize to ask at meetings with prospects	4. Determine the extra value you will provide
5. Rank the interest levels of your potential customers	6. Prepare a list of trial closes
7. Establish a stay in touch program	8. Close sales and create active, repeat customers

Identify where your prospects fall in these categories and focus intently on moving prospects through each step of the sales pipeline. The reward will be happier customers who perceive greater value, fewer sales objections and more closed sales for your business.