



## **From Poser to Closer by Aaron Crowley**

I've never publicly admitted this before, but two years ago, in October of 2007, I had an out of body experience. No, it wasn't an alien abduction or a religious experience.

It actually occurred at an industry trade show where I was presenting a workshop on how to build a system that would "increase sales in a competitive marketplace". Somewhere around the midway point of the presentation I began to sense from the audience, mostly male business owners and most all of them my elders, a growing skepticism about my qualifications to conduct such a workshop.

As time wore on, I felt the mood changing from skepticism to hostility as their suspicions were confirmed and their faces were saying, "I paid \$175 dollars to hear some wet behind the ears charlatan pontificate about a subject he clearly knows nothing about[!]?"

It was at this point, I found myself gracefully floating up to the ceiling, peering down on a rather pathetic figure in a new blue suit willfully resisting the temptation to flee the stage and desperate to maintain his composure long enough to finish the talk.

Looking back on that experience and my power point presentation notes, I see that they were right - I had no idea what I was talking about. I was presenting a system for successfully "taking orders" in a sellers market, not a system for "increasing sales in a competitive marketplace".

It was only a month later that we experienced a measurable decline in our orders and all of a sudden my order taking process wasn't so successful.

So as not to repeat that embarrassing episode by proffering a smug little "increase your sales in a recession" article, I will merely explain how our process for quoting and closing a customer has evolved since that experience.

First of all, the cookie cutter scripting and pricing is no longer a universally effective approach to closing sales. In the old days we quoted every single job with the same parameters and used a rigidly scheduled and scripted follow up call to ask for the sale.

Now we ask very in-depth needs-analysis questions and actually attempt to understand what the customer wants so we can tailor the quote accordingly. We follow up by first asking them how and when they would like us to contact them to answer their questions. Then we ask for the sale.

Secondly, we listen to what the customer wants instead of telling them what we're going to do for them - We used to tell customers that they wanted New York Strip Steak and, that's what they would buy. But over time, customers have trended more towards hamburger and seem to be resistant to the prime cut no matter how many times we tell them it tastes better. Now, when a customer tells us they want hamburger or pork chops, we wrap it up for them with a smile on our face like Sam the butcher from the Brady Bunch.

And finally, we no longer lump all quotes into the same category of customers. Instead of ignoring the individual needs of our customers, we now rate them on two scales: First of all, we take their temperature. In the old days, we'd hound customers who were merely collecting information and then neglect those who were ready to move forward. Now we assign the hot, warm, cold designation to every quote so our sales team can follow up in a more appropriate manner.

We then assign one of four personality types to every customer - Winter, Spring, Summer, Fall. In the old days, we used a one size fits all approach for radically different personalities. Now, when we have a Fall, analytical type come through the door, our sales staff works to provide them with an abundance of technical data using the soft sell so they can absorb the information with out any pressure. If we have a hard charging type A Winter personality, we just give them the facts - "Here's the price and here's the dates, when would you like us to schedule the template?" For the Spring and Summers, we'll take them out for coffee and peruse the slab suppliers' warehouse together chatting it up the whole time.

It will be a long, long time before I attempt to present a workshop on successful selling and probably longer before someone will hire me to do so. But in the mean time, I will continue to make the transition from order taking poser to professional sales closer, if for no other reason than I don't like heights.