

# Getting to “Yes”

## Closing the enrollment interview with comfort and confidence

by Julie Wassom

If you climb a flight of stairs, but do not take the last step up, you have spent a lot of effort to get to the next level, but you don't actually get there. Closing the sale — asking your qualified prospects

to visit your center or to enroll — is like the top step on a flight of stairs. If you do not take the final step in the inquiry call or visit, chances are good you will not reach your enrollment goals.

Closing is one of the most neglected or mistreated techniques in enrollment building. Yet those directors who close well consistently convert more calls to visits and

visits to enrollments than those who educate their prospects well, but who do not ASK them to take action. **YOU MUST ASK OR YOU ARE NOT CLOSING.**

Some directors don't ask closing questions because they feel it's too pushy. Others are not confident in just how to

ask. Some expect the prospect to take the initiative. Others just feel uncomfortable with that part of the enrollment building process.

One of the best ways to gain comfort and confidence in asking prospects to visit, and then to enroll, is to think of what “selling” really means in the early care and education industry. First, toss away the image in your mind of you as the door-to-door salesman selling your prospects something they do not really want or need. Instead, recognize that your prospects have already contacted you with an interest in your center and services. They have called or e-mailed you, seen you at an event, or dropped by your center for a visit because they want to.

With these prospects, your sales role is two-fold. First, you need to help them make a good buying decision. Second is to get them to **act on your recommendation**. When your other marketing efforts have positioned you as a knowledgeable, professional resource with a quality program, it is only natural for your prospects to expect you to help them buy the best early care and education services for them. And believe it or not, **they like you to ask them** if they are ready to commit to a visit or enrollment.

A good closing question asks your prospect for a decision that is based upon all the educational information you have given them, the exposure to your center and staff, and the benefits to them of enrolling there. You want a singular response to your closing question, that being “Yes.” Here are five different ways to comfortably ASK your prospects to act on your recommendation.

### Alternate choice method

This is the easiest kind of closing question to ask and the most comfortable for your prospect to answer. Your question offers a choice about the visit or enrollment, and either answer means you have just scheduled a center visit, or secured the enrollment.

Sample: *“Would you like to schedule a center visit on Tuesday at 10:30 or would Wednesday be better for you?”*

### Direct method

The prospect who is very forthright and direct in his or her communication with you will not cower at your asking a direct closing question. Neither should you. This type of question is brief and to the point. Once answered, the decision is clear.

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Sample: *"Do you want to go ahead and get Eric enrolled now?"*

## Assumptive method

When your prospect gives you buying signals that indicate he or she is really ready to make a decision, you can easily use what is called an assumptive closing question. This method assumes the prospect is ready to make the choice you want, and merely asks them a question that deals with the details of that positive assumption.

Sample: *"Would you like some privacy here in my office to fill out the registration papers?"*

## Impending doom method

This closing method uses a series of statements to remind your prospects of their expressed desires and plays upon their fear of loss. Your statements must be honest. You cannot say this is the last toddler space you have when there are really four more openings.

Sample: *"We have only one infant space left in this room. With the high demand we have for infant care, I doubt it will be available for long. I'd hate for you to lose it. Would you like to go ahead and pay the registration fee today to hold that place for Emma?"*

The last sentence of this and the next sample dialogue are the actual closing questions. Remember, for your prospects to make a buying decision, you must end your recommendation comments with a question. **You must ask, or you are not closing.**

## Contingency method

This type of closing question allows the prospect's response to be contingent upon another factor, and is very reassuring to those parents who need a little extra time and the confidence that they

can trust you. If the response to a contingency closing question is positive, you have just secured the visit or enrollment. If not, the conversion is not necessarily lost. You can still take the initiative to get permission to follow up with that prospect at a later date, thus giving you another opportunity to help the prospect make a good buying decision and act on your recommendation in the future.

Sample: *"I know finding the best early education and care for Hannah is important for you and your family. Let me give you our center folder that includes information on our center, an explanation of the room she will be in, and a list of what to look for in quality early care and education. The folder also includes information on our web site, where you can learn more about us. How about if you go ahead and give me the registration fee for Hannah's enrollment to hold a place for her here, and I'll just hang on to it while you and your husband have a chance to look all this over and give this decision some additional thought? Before you go, let's schedule a time next week when you can come back to the center, and we can then confirm your enrollment. How would that be?"*

The contingency close usually requires several recommendation statements, so it's important to remember to follow those recommendations with a final question that asks for action toward the achievement of your goal.

Because you know closing is a critical skill for converting more prospects to enrollees, it is very tempting to dance around actually asking the right questions and still call it closing. For instance, making a recommendation without asking for a commitment is NOT closing.

As nice as it may sound, a statement such as, *"It looks as though Mike really does not want to leave the activities going on here in the classroom. I think he would*

*really enjoy our center. We would love to have you join our center's family. Why don't you give it some thought and let me know,"* is NOT closing. It's a great recommendation, but you had an enrollment bird in hand that you let fly away to another center where a director who asks may get the enrollment you could have had.

You can turn this recommendation into a valid closing by asking a question like this . . .

*" . . . I think he would really enjoy our center. Since he seems so comfortable, you could leave him for a free day today and on your way out, we can go back to my office and complete the necessary paperwork. Would you like to do that?"*

This of course assumes you have the room and the policy of free days in your company. When your prospect answers, "Yes," you can then take her to your office to fill out enrollment paperwork, and arrange a time to call her to tell her how Mike is doing.

This "soft sell" approach is still not closing for a commitment to enroll unless and until you add that final question such as, *"Would you like to do that?"*

Extending an invitation to an upcoming event at the center is also NOT closing for a scheduled center visit or the enrollment. Is it a good idea to invite prospects to center events? Absolutely! Is this the question that asks for the visit or enrollment? No! An example of a question that invites but does not close for the privately scheduled center visit is this:

*"We are having an open house next Thursday to give our parents a glimpse of what our summer program will be like. You are certainly invited to attend. Would you like to come and bring Samantha?"*

Granted, prospects might enroll after

they attend such an event, but this dialogue is not closing for the center visit while on the phone. Nor would it pass for closing if you extended this invitation during a center visit, but did not also ASK for the enrollment.

It would be a closing question if you said it this way . . .

*“ . . . You are certainly invited to attend. When you come in for a center visit, I will give you all the details for this upcoming event. Would it be better for you to stop by for your personal visit on Wednesday morning or is Thursday better for your schedule?”*

During a center visit, this invitation could lead to an actual closing question by saying . . .

*“ . . . what our summer program will be like. It would be an ideal first parent event for you and Samantha to attend once you have enrolled. If you would like to go ahead and give me your registration fee today, I'll make sure you are on the list for those who receive a special invitation to this open house. **Would you like to do that?**”*

Closing is asking a question the answer to which is a commitment for your goal achievement, which is either a center visit or an enrollment commitment. If you have not asked for this specifically, you are not yet really closing, and your conversion ratios will reflect it.

Here's a little trick to help you remember to ask a closing question, not just to invite or recommend. Put five pennies in one pocket at the beginning of the day. Every time you talk to a parent or give a tour of your center and you REALLY ASK A CLOSING QUESTION, move one penny from that pocket to the pocket on the other side of your skirt or slacks. Be honest about this. Don't move the penny unless you asked a question that will give you an answer directed at your goals of center visits or enrollment.

When you have all five pennies moved over, give yourself a point on a chart. Then move the pennies to the other side the same way, always giving yourself a point for every five closing questions you ask correctly. Even if the prospect's answer is not yet “Yes,” you still ASKED a closing question, so you get the point. Once you have ten points (for 50 closing questions), reward yourself! You deserve it.

No matter what your personal reward, the reward that will really make your center shine is that you will see your conversion ratios gradually getting better, your follow up calls reducing, and your enrollments climbing like a rocket!

Closing well is a skill that can significantly increase your enrollment building performance and help you achieve your capacity goals for your center. Using these methods of closing can help you become more successful at converting prospect inquiries to center visits and visits to enrollments. They also work when asking for permission to follow up with those prospects who are not yet ready to visit or enroll.

Closing questions will be easy and comfortable for you to use if you practice them. Try them on your spouse, your children, your colleagues, and friends. Imagine every answer you could possibly get from your prospects, and realize that your enrollment goals will be met ONLY if you ask a closing question in each and every qualified inquiry conversation or center visit.

As my colleague speaker and *Chicken Soup for the Soul* series co-author, Mark Victor Hansen, says, “You've gotta A-S-K to G-E-T!” To reach your enrollment conversion and center capacity goals, take that last step, and ask a closing question. When you do, you'll find that getting to “Yes,” is easier than you think.