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Ask. Then Shut Up.

by Keith F. Luscher
Author, *Prospect & Flourish*

Not too long ago, a very close artist friend posted a question on Facebook: “Does anyone have any suggestions on how to close a sale?” Apparently, she had been experiencing some frustration with prospective buyers “dancing” around the notion buying her paintings—and not being able to get them to cross the finish line, so to speak.

It reminded me of a tip I received not long before from a senior colleague at Principal, as we were about to go into a closing meeting with a business prospect: “There may be a point when I place our solutions in front of him, and ask him to make a decision,” Mel said. “At that point, there may be an awkward silence...”

“...In other words,” I said, completing his thought, “At that point, you want me to keep my mouth shut.”

“Uh.....yeah,” Mel replied, realizing that he did not have to worry about hurting my feelings. He emphasized that there comes a time when the information is presented, the questions have (hopefully) been answered, and there is only one step left in the sales cycle: You ask. Then shut up.

For many of us, especially when we are still building our own self confidence (Could it be that we have not yet sold ourselves...?), this silence that can occasionally follow is unnerving. Many of us feel as though it is a void that must be filled with our mouths moving, still trying to “make the sale.” That is where many of us can fall into the trap of “buying it back.”

In his classic book, *How to Win Customers and Keep Them for Life*, author Michael LeBoeuf, Ph.D. “retells” an experience from Samuel Clemens (aka Mark Twain), who listened in awe to a preacher at a mission gathering. Clemens was so inspired by the speaker, he was ready to contribute five dollars to the collection plate—up from his usual one dollar donation.

However, the preacher continued talking, apparently enjoying the sound of his own voice. Clemens’ inspiration soon gave way to frustration; when the collection plate came by, he kept his five dollars, and instead removed a dime!

What do we learn from this story? Know when to let the silence do the talking, so you don’t buy the sale back.

While “closing” a sale is not something I tend to write or speak about that often (largely because it is something I am still learning to do myself), the truth is as we advance a relationship (business or personal), we are always “closing” one step to get to the next. It is simply a natural progression of things.

As the Philosopher says so well in Ecclesiastes 3:7 (NIV), there is “...a time to be silent and a time to speak.”

On that note, I think it is time for me to shut up.