

You Need to Be Able to Close

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

The ability to “close” and get the sale is the most important skill in selling. It’s something that few people know how to do. Many people can get a consumer, an employer, or others to the cusp of making a purchasing or a hiring decision; however, it’s the final “push” that makes all the difference.

It takes a tremendous amount of skill to sell yourself and [get a job](#). It takes a tremendous amount of skill to go from someone who a potential employer will consider for the job to someone who is hired. Your job in getting hired, in getting a better job and when [looking for a job](#), is to push the employer over the fence and make them hire you. This is all there is to it. You need to get hired.

There is nothing wrong with developing the skills of a master salesperson and “closer” in order to get the best job you can. The desire to get a good job and “close” the deal is a desire for employment, which leads to a richer and more abundant life and the desire to better yourself is praiseworthy. If you don’t desire to have a better job or to [find a job](#) when you’re unemployed, you’re not living up to your full potential. It’s absolutely essential that you give your best efforts to “closing” and getting a job when you go out on interviews and apply to jobs. If you neglect to do this, you aren’t fulfilling your duty to yourself to be everything you’re capable of being.

When I was around 18 years old and starting the asphalt business, I did what anyone in the business was doing at the time. I drove around and put fliers in all of the mailboxes in front of every house with asphalt that I could find. Once I did this, the next step would be to wait for the phone to ring. I would put around 100 brochures in mailboxes for every phone call I received.

Once someone called me I went out and gave them an estimate. I would have to drive to a home at an appointed time, measure their asphalt, and write up a complicated one or two page estimate describing all of the work I was going to do. For twenty minutes or more, the person wanted to stand on their driveway and talk about what might happen were I to do the work. After I gave the estimate, I hoped the person would chose me out of the three or four other estimates they might be getting. Since the work was rarely more than \$300, a few dollars here or there could make the difference as to whether or not I actually got the work. I would then wait some more for the person to call me. Under this business model, someone in the asphalt business spends most of their time driving around, giving estimates, waiting for the phone to ring, and spending very little time doing work.

When you’re waiting for the phone to ring, you’re not working.

At some point, I decided this didn’t make any sense. I wanted to make money and I didn’t want to have to sit around not working. I needed to be able to “close” people and I needed to be able to close people on the spot.

Instead of waiting for the phone to ring each day, I changed my approach. I decided I would only try and sell a homeowner on asphalt service once each year. I would go down a street and knock on every single door and announce that I was going to be on the street the next day, and the next day only. In return for allowing me to do the work the next day I would charge them half of my normal price for the work. I would also leave them a bill and they could send me a check if they were satisfied with the work. This method of closing worked incredibly well

Here is what I did. I didn’t measure the driveway. I drove down the street around 6:00 to 8:30 pm when everyone was home and stated the following when someone answered the door:

“Hello. My name’s [Harrison Barnes](#). I come down this street once a year doing asphalt work and because I do several driveways at once, I typically save homeowners at least 50% over what they would pay if you called me and I had to come out and give an estimate. I’ve looked it over and your driveway is something I would normally charge \$300 for. I will be on your street tomorrow and will do it for \$150. I’ll leave an invoice and you can send me a check when you get around to it.”

Here is what 95% of the people said in response to this:

- “Sure”
- “Yes.”
- “Go ahead.”
- “Please do it.”
- “You’re hired.”
- “Great.”
- “Excellent.”

I was always paid and I never spent more than 5 minutes at each house “[selling](#)” and “closing” the homeowners. Since the product I was selling was my labor, and the stuff I put on the driveways cost only a few dollars per house, my profits were great no matter what I charged.

I went from doing one or two houses on a street each year to doing virtually every single one of them. My business boomed and I’m confident I became the largest residential asphalt sealing contractor in Michigan almost overnight. Each night, I’d come home and there would be so many checks in my mailbox the postman had to secure them with rubber bands.

None of this would have happened if I hadn’t developed the ability to “close,” push homeowners over the fence and turn them from casual snoopers into buyers.

This is about the ability to “close” and get the sale. In your business, the most important ability you can have is the ability to

"close." Without the ability to close, very little is likely to happen. You will be on the sidelines and will be hired instead of you.

It's easy to get in the door anywhere. Getting in the door, however, is only 1% of the battle. The most difficult thing to do once you get in the door is to close the sale and move the employer from a "browser" to a buyer.

In a poor economy, the price of things typically starts coming down. The reason for this is stores and other merchandisers are doing everything within their power to "close" you and get you from someone who may not purchase something to someone who will. A short time ago, a local Ford dealership in Los Angeles discounted a bunch of new Ford Mustangs by around 50% to move them out quickly. This gimmick works. When I drive down the street in Los Angeles these days I see people standing on corners promoting incredible "going out of business" sales at various locations, offering 90% off of retail price in many cases. Low prices are a very effective tool for closing consumers.

One of my favorite scenes from the 1970s movie, *Kramer v. Kramer* highlights the incredible importance of closing. The protagonist, Ted Kramer, is going through a divorce and is unemployed. He wants to get custody of his son, but his wife is about to tell the judge in an upcoming hearing that he's unemployed and she should be granted custody. Ted has to get a job immediately. He first goes to an employment agency and finds the only job available in the entire city, but the recruiter tells him that now is not a good time to set up an interview. Ted fights with the man in the employment agency and finally manages to coerce the man into setting up a very quick interview. Ted manages to get a few minutes with some hiring personnel while they are having a Christmas party on the Friday before Christmas. He goes into the interview and knows this is his one shot. Here is the dialogue from the movie script:

91 INT. OUTER OFFICE, J. WALTER THOMPSON - LATE AFTERNOON The large room is crowded with secretaries, junior executives, researchers, editors, ad-men, etc., etc. They all have drinks in their hands and there is a good deal of kissing and general conviviality going on. THE CAMERA TRACKS WITH ACKERMAN as he steps out of his office, closes the door behind him and makes his way across the room to MR. SPENCER, the Advertising Director. At the moment, Spencer stands with his coat over one arm and a drink in his hand talking to a very pretty young woman. Ackerman approaches him, whispers something in his ear. Spencer shakes his head and points to his watch. Ackerman says something else and finally, with a look of weary resignation, Spencer excuses himself from the pretty young woman and follows Ackerman back to his office. THE CAMERA FOLLOWS THEM. As Ackerman opens the door to his office, THE CAMERA IS ANGLED so that we can SEE past them, into the office where Ted stands waiting. ACKERMAN (as they enter) Mr. Spencer, Mr. Kramer. SPENCER (not wasting any time) So you're the go-getter. All right, you've got ten minutes. As the door closes behind them, blocking our view, THE CAMERA PANS UP to a clock over the door. It reads five-fifteen.

MATCH DISSOLVE TO: 92 INT. ACKERMAN'S OFFICE - LATE AFTERNOON ON A CLOCK--which now reads five twenty-two. THE CAMERA PULLS BACK TO REVEAL Spencer, now sitting in Ackerman's chair, his feet on Ackerman's desk. Ted has just finished his pitch. SPENCER (sipping his drink) That's very interesting, Mr. Kramer. I must say, it's very interesting. Let me think about it. I'll let Jack... (indicating Ackerman) ...know and he'll get in touch with you. Spencer gets to his feet, starts to retrieve his coat. ON TED--as he decides to take a gamble. TED Excuse me, I believe you said I had ten minutes. ON SPENCER--almost at the door, looking around. SPENCER Well? ON TED--checking his watch. TED That means I've got two minutes left. I understand you're paying twenty-five. Spencer nods. TED (a deep breath, then a real huckster) All right, I'll tell you what I'm gonna do--I'll take the job at twenty-two-five. Now, that's twenty-five hundred less than you're offering. The only thing is, you have to say yes right now. Not tomorrow. Not next week. Not after the holidays. It's worth it to me for a yes right now and I'll take twenty-five hundred less. There is a long beat of silence as Spencer and Ackerman look at one another. They were clearly not prepared for this. TED (watching them) Today only. One day only. Twenty-two five. SPENCER Mr. Kramer, can we talk privately for a moment? TED Certainly.

CUT TO: 93 OUTER OFFICE - LATE AFTERNOON ON TED--as he steps out of Ackerman's office, sits down. Now, all of the fear, all of the anxiety that he has been fighting down comes welling up. What if he pushed too hard? What will he do if he doesn't get a job? If Ted could fall to his knees and pray, he would. CROSS-CUT WITH THE CHRISTMAS PARTY-- that swirls around him. We notice in particular, one very pretty young woman flirting with a number of men. She is wearing a dress with straps, one of them has broken and she has patched it with a piece of masking tape. Finally the door to Ackerman's office opens and he steps out. ACKERMAN Mr. Kramer? Ted jumps to his feet, starts into the office.

CUT TO: 94 INT. ACKERMAN'S OFFICE - LATE AFTERNOON ON SPENCER--He looks at Ted carefully for a long time, then: SPENCER (grins) Welcome aboard, Mr. Kramer. C.U. TED--There is an instant of relief, then, with astounding cool: TED Well, gentlemen, I'm pleased to be with you. ANOTHER ANGLE--as they shake hands, say their good-byes. THE CAMERA TRACKS WITH TED as he makes his way through the Christmas party that is still going strong. Then, suddenly, as he passes the very pretty woman we noticed earlier, he turns and kisses her.

This is one of my favorite scenes from the movie because it shows the absolute power of "closing" in getting a job. In this particular example, Ted used money to close. He also used the power of a deadline. This is similar to what I did in the asphalt business by telling the homeowners they had to make a decision "right now" and not later. The ability to pressure people to make decision now, and not later, is one of the most important things you can do in "closing." However, it's not something that's always going to work in getting a job like it did with Ted.

I would like to tell you a quick story about how I once hired someone and how this person "closed" me to get a job. It's an unusual story but it's something that taps into something that I believe is one of the more powerful methods out there of "closing" to get a job. I used to work in downtown Los Angeles and worked in a building called the Oviatt Building, which was directly across the street from the Los Angeles Athletic Club. The Los Angeles Athletic Club is a nice club, however, anyone can join for the most part. I believe at the time it cost \$500 to join the club and then cost around \$100 a month to keep your membership. This is in contrast to several other "downtown" social clubs which could cost \$30,000 or more to join and sometimes require years of evaluation and references from other members in order to be accepted.

I was perfectly happy with the Los Angeles Athletic Club but the longer I was around people in Los Angeles and got familiar with the scene downtown, the more I realized there was a giant pecking order among clubs. In fact, the people who were from the oldest families and were the more prestigious people in terms of their professional accomplishments and so forth tended to belong to these more prestigious clubs. The situation was compounded by the fact that you had to be invited to the more prestigious clubs by a current member, then they introduced you to current members, and a board would vote on you after a certain length of time. One day, I'd been with a recruiter of ours from Texas and we walked into one of the more prestigious clubs to see what it was like and how to join. We were kicked out of the club and they threatened to call the police since we had come in from off the street. It was at that point I realized there was an entire subculture in my midst of

extremely private and exclusive clubs in downtown Los Angeles. They were far different than the Los Angeles Athletic Club. One day, I was interviewing a man a few years older than me for a position in our company and the interview ended about 5:00 pm. The man was from an old WASP sort of Los Angeles family and was pretty classy and well spoken in all respects. Generally, if an interview ended around 5:00 p.m. I'd take someone out for drinks or to dinner, but on this occasion I simply asked the man if he had plans. He told me he was going to his club to exercise and I asked him which club. He informed me that it was the same club I'd been kicked out of with the recruiter from Texas just a few months previously. He then did something extremely smart:

"Would you like to come to the club with me and have a look around?" he asked.

This is something I was definitely interested in. He took me to the club then proceeded over the next few weeks to introduce me to other members. In the process, I ended up hiring him. While he was very qualified for the job I hired him, for at the time, I'm not sure if from an economic standpoint he was someone that made sense for me to hire. He was a great guy, but at that point, the company simply was not at the level where it needed him. In retrospect, and this is a sad thing to say, I think a part of me hired him because I had a desire to belong to his group.

This brings me to you, "closing," and getting a job. When someone is hiring you or making a decision about whether or not they should hire you, one of the things they ask themselves is "What's In It For Me"--or WIFM. You need to look at getting hired and getting a job from your perspective, and from the perspective of the person who is doing the hiring. I once heard a well-known [copywriter](#), Ben Mack, say something along these lines. I wrote this down so these are probably not his exact words, but I wanted to share them with you because they are so powerful:

People will follow you anywhere to the extent you encourage their dreams, justify their failures, allay their fears, confirm their suspicions, and help them throw rocks at their enemies.

For the past several years, a great deal of my time has been spent interviewing and working with the very best educated attorneys throughout the United States. One of the things you'll find in the résumés of attorneys who went to [law school](#) from the 1990s onward is if they went to most of the top 10 law schools, they generally have an extreme amount of liberalism in their background. By this I mean they are extremely liberal politically and were involved in very liberal organizations in college. They generally were the head of these liberal organizations. Why this is relevant is due to the fact that most of the administrators and admissions officers at top law schools around the United States are extremely liberal as well--I don't know why this is, but it just is. I know this because I have met most of them. It probably has something to do with the fact that a good portion of these admissions officers were student activists during Vietnam. If the admissions officers are young, their predecessors were probably activists during the 70s and hired their replacements based on having similar views.

When these liberal [admissions officers](#) are making admissions decisions for top law schools, they are faced with an overwhelming number of highly qualified applicants. Accordingly, they need to "look beyond the numbers" when they are making admission decisions. What I believe happens is that they do everything they can to admit people who share their same ultra liberal views and this is what their "looking beyond the numbers" means. Admitting ultra liberal students:

- Encourages their dreams of a liberal society
- Helps confirm their belief that social action is necessary
- Helps them "throw rocks" at their conservative enemies.

These are the people who ultimately "get the job" and get into many of the best law schools. This same thing also occurs at most top colleges throughout the United States. Admissions officers are seeking to admit the most liberal people they can among a pool of similarly highly qualified candidates.

I once worked for a very conservative federal judge. Most of the people that he hired to work for him were also extremely conservative. I once worked in the office of a [law firm](#) where almost everyone was Catholic. What ends up pushing many employers over the fence is a powerful group affiliation.

Why does this occur and what does this mean for your [job search](#)? People who are offering you a job want to hire people they believe are part of the same group as them and confirm the way they feel about the world. It's incredibly important to your potential employers if you are able to identify with a particular group or cause that is important to them. They will be more likely to hire you, and you will be more likely to "push them over the fence" and close the deal because of this.

When I was in high school, I remember being invited to a college to spend the night there as a prospective student. Something very strange happened when one of the hosts (who was a college student) came up to me and said: "You seem too white bread and boring. This school wants people with passion."

Actually, I am the opposite, but I was acting very subdued because that is what I thought it took to fit in. When you're yourself and have passion one way or another, that's something that often closes the deal. The student who told me I was "white bread" was right in many respects because he was pointing out that the more normal we seem, the less likely we are to influence people one way or another.

Pushing an employer over the fence to make a hiring decision is no easy thing to do. There are a million closing techniques that I could write about, and a discussion over every closing technique could compose a 1,000-page book. I think you have the ability to close because we all do. Your ability is instinctual. What you need to do is tap into your instinctual closing ability and push employers over the fence to make them hire you. You need to push employers that little extra bit to ensure you get the job. Anyone can go out on an interview, but only the most talented can actually close the deal.