

# The Four “PRE’s” Of Sales Success

by Megan Senger



## Personal Trainer Entrepreneur: Make sales consultations more comfortable, and learn to close the deal.

Whether you sell facility memberships or your own training services, at some point you'll be asking a potential customer for money. Yet you may find yourself racked with stress about conducting such consultations, the thought of closing the deal bringing more sweat to your brow than your last blast on the cardio machines.

Nevertheless, these make-or-break meetings are the axis of your future success as a fitness entrepreneur. To really help people and earn the income you deserve, you must have sales confidence. Read on for key techniques that will make the selling process open and easy for both trainer and future trainee. Boost your sales-savvy with these four progressive “PRE” strategies, and prepare for smooth sales-ing.

### PRErehearse Client Consultations

**The Concern.** Do you fumble for words when offering your services to new clients? Does the thought of “selling” make you downright nervous?

**The Solution.** Practice makes perfect—and profit. Unless you **PRErehearse** your sales technique, you won't find the right words with real live customers, says Donna Hutchinson, fitness business coach, author of *How-to Guide to Starting Your Own Personal Training Business* and owner of On the Edge Fitness Educators, based in North Vancouver, British Columbia.

Seeing that you're nervous or embarrassed during their new-client consultations is a huge turn-off for potential trainees, Hutchinson notes. And the more uncomfortable a fitness pro is with sales, the more uncomfortable prospects will be.

**PREpare for Success.** Set aside regular time to PRErehearse sales meetings with friends or colleagues. Go through all the steps you normally take to present your services—including asking for payment. Write out the most common objections you hear (“That’s expensive,” “I have to think about it,” “I have to talk to my husband/wife/friend/cousin/cat”), and practice several responses to each. Then, ask your role-play partner for brutally honest feedback.

“You need some sort of strategy,” says Hutchinson. “You can't just wing it when meeting people; otherwise the prospect will be confused and have a difficult time making a buying decision.” Plan and PRErehearse trainee meetings to ensure that sales conversations stay on track.

### PREconfirm The Sale

**The Concern.** Have you ever gotten to the end of a client consultation only to feel embarrassed or hesitant to ask for money? Are you concerned with seeming pushy or giving a “hard sell”?

**The Solution.** At the start of the conversation, **PREconfirm** the goal of the client meeting: making a decision about whether or not you will work together. After all, it's obvious that you offer fitness services in exchange for pay. Banish the awkward elephant from the room by explicitly outlining what you and the client will cover together and how this will take place.

**PREpare for Success.** Early on in your meeting, state your intention:

“Today my goal for us is to take a look at why you're here, what you want to accomplish and what your health needs are. I'll give you some feedback about what kind of program will help get you to where you want to be. After our discussion, I'm going to ask you *to make a decision* about whether or not you think I'm the right person (or: this is the right facility) to guide you to your fitness goals. Fair enough?”

Note that the customer will not be asked “to sign up for personal training,” but simply to make a decision one way or the other. Clearly framing the outcome as the client's choice will allow her to feel comfortable and empowered throughout your conversation. Remember, it won't feel “pushy” to ask for new business if you PREconfirm early on what you are both there for.

### PREclear Objections Before They Arise

**The Concern.** Have you ever given a great consultation, only to have a client take the wishy-washy way out? Do you hate hearing vague objections like “I have to think about it”?

**The Solution.** If you get this type of question, then you haven't done a great job up-front, says Casey Conrad, a Wakefield, Rhode Island–based fitness sales consultant of 25 years and author of *Selling Personal Training and Selling Fitness*. Instead, use probing questions to find information that can **PREclear** common concerns. Conrad notes that asking the right questions will allow most objections to surface long before they become a point of confrontation.

Exercise entrepreneurs should proactively tackle client doubts as soon as they arise, agrees Alex McMillan, the co-recipient of the 2006 IDEA Program Director of the Year, fitness business coach and owner of ALX Fitness studio in Vancouver, Washington. “Every objection can be dealt with—before you ever ask for the sale,” he says.

**PREpare for Success.** To PREclear an objection like “I have to talk to my spouse,” try McMillan's approach and ask this question early on in your meeting:

“Besides me, what other people are supporting you and benefiting from your choice to make fitness a priority now?”

Suppose the client's husband is enthused about her gym-based efforts. If so, remind her of this later on—before asking for the sale. (“We've talked about how supportive your husband is of your workouts and your desire to increase your fitness level. Now let's talk about how we're going to get you there.”)

Conversely, you may find that the trainee's spouse does not encourage any exercise ambitions. This information is most useful early on, when you still have time to gradually address the concern. (“Since you're kind of doing this on your own, do you think having the backing of a personal trainer will be helpful?”) It's better to PREclear the objection and discover key information at the beginning of the meeting—rather than be surprised at the end.

### PREclose With Trial Questions

**The Concern.** Do you dread asking clients to sign up with you (the “money question”) because you are unsure of what the answer will be?

**The Solution.** Asking for payment will feel natural and comfortable if you successfully **PREclose** the sale by using small “trial” questions designed to smoke out and satisfy any lingering customer concerns. These step-by-step mini-closes ensure that you and the potential trainee are on the same page. PREclosing is like taking the customer's buying temperature midway through your conversation. You can pose such questions throughout your consultation. Some examples:

“Besides the money, is there anything that would prevent you from training with us?”

- “Based on what we’ve talked about today, is there anything else that may get in the way of us working together?”
- “What else would you need to see to make it easy for you to work out at our studio?”

**PREpare for Success.** To PREclose, Conrad suggests asking clients, “What do you see is the biggest roadblock to your training success?”

She explains how this example could play out: “When the potential trainee answers, ‘Sticking with it,’ the fitness pro should reply, ‘Do you believe that making the commitment to train will help you overcome that?’” When the customer says yes and verbally agrees that personal training will get him past his biggest obstacle to success, you have effectively PREclosed the sale.

A lot of little “yeses” add up during a selling consultation. Before you ask for the big yes—that is, for someone to become a training client or gym member—PREclose to confirm that all smaller details are in place.

## Easy Does It

A sales consultation should be a fun, comfortable experience for both trainer and potential trainee. You should feel good about the level of your expertise, the advice you give and the value of your time, says Conrad. “Sales is nothing more than educating prospective customers about your product or service and then finding out if what you have to offer meets their needs and wants.”

Understanding what you have to offer and how you are unique is key, says Hutchinson. “‘Sale’ is not a bad, four-letter word. It’s the attitude and preparation of the fitness entrepreneur that makes the difference.” Preempt selling-jitters, practice the four “PRE’s” and then prepare for sales success.

## SIDEBAR: Ask Questions, Get Clients

Sales are made when you ask the right questions. Yet many exercise entrepreneurs are uncomfortable asking direct questions because they see the questions as “pushy,” says Casey Conrad. “But what they really are is ‘probing.’ There is a big difference. Probing comes as the result of wanting to help customers reach their goals with a service you believe is in their best interest.”

“Fitness pros should think of their role as more of a life coach versus just a trainer,” says Alex McMillan. He shares more of the key questions he uses to guide trainees toward life-long fitness:

- “Why are you doing this now versus making excuses as to why you can’t do this now?”
- “Why are you choosing to spend your time and money on fitness now in your life versus later in life?”
- “How long have you been thinking about taking action on these great goals?”
- “Is this what you’re looking to see happen?”



**Megan Senger**

IDEA Author/Presenter



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Megan Senger is a writer, speaker and fitness sales consultant based in Southern California. Active in the exercise industry since 1995, she holds a bachelor’s degree in Kinesiology and English. When not writing on lifestyle trends and business opportunities for leading trade magazines, she can be found in downward-facing dog becoming reacquainted with her toes. She can be reached at [www.megansenger.com](http://www.megansenger.com). [less](#)