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Wed, Aug 11, 2004

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How to Identify and Overcome Objections

An Edward Lowe In-Depth Business Builder

People in sales expend a lot of time and effort to find prospects that need your product or services. Yet, no matter how compelling the need or precise the market definition, prospects will have objections, concerns, and requests for additional information. You should welcome objections because once answered, they give you the potential energy to close the sale.

WHAT TO EXPECT

As a salesperson, you will put in a lot of time and effort to ensure that your product or services are needed by your prospect. Yet, no matter how compelling the need, no matter how precise the definitions of what is desired and required, prospects will naturally have objections, concerns, and requests for additional information. Nevertheless, you should welcome objections because once answered, they give you the potential energy to close the sale.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW BEFORE GETTING STARTED [top]

In selling, one definition of an objection, is "a reason given by the prospective customer why they are not ready to buy your product or service." Sales courses teach you that an objection is an obstacle to be overcome. They also teach that every objection can be answered. Many people use objections to avoid making decisions or commitments and not necessarily because they don't want to buy what you are selling. However, when your prospect doesn't have any objections, you might be facing your most difficult close. Your success as a salesperson will depend on your ability to anticipate and handle a prospects objections. No matter how good or thorough you may think your presentation is, at some point, your prospect may throw an objection at you, and how you handle it will make the difference on whether you close the sale or not.

ANTICIPATING OBJECTIONS [top]

New salespeople dread objections because they are not sure they can find convincing arguments to counter them. However, seasoned sales veterans have learned how to take the prospect's objection and turn it around in order to close the sale. As a sales professional, you will probably put a lot of time and effort into developing a winning presentation to ensure that your product or service is needed by the prospect. Yet no matter how precise your presentation and no matter how compelling you have presented the prospect's need for your product or services, there might be objections, concerns or necessity for

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additional information.

An easy exercise for you to do before you make your presentation is to review it in detail. When you get to a point where you think there might be a customer objection, write it down on a separate sheet of paper. Continue doing this until you have reviewed the entire presentation. Once you have finished, give your presentation to a friend, asking him to give you any objections that come to his mind. You might find other areas of objections to work on before delivering your presentation to a prospect. When you think you have exhausted all of the possibilities where objections could originate, continue to work on the solutions. Practice your answers. You may not be able to come up with all of the answers to make your presentation "objection proof," but you will surely have a handle on the presentation and be loaded with answers in the event the questions do come up.

The ability to anticipate an objection is very important but not nearly as important as developing the skills necessary to overcome your prospect's concerns. No matter how hard you try to list every possible objection a client may have, there will still be those times when the prospect will have an objection that you never considered.

THE INNER WORKINGS OF AN OBJECTION [\[top\]](#)

The term objection has an additional meaning to the one given earlier. As used here, an objection refers to "any hindrance voiced by the prospect which prevents you from moving to the next step in your presentation or closing the sale." The key word here is "voiced." Later on we will discuss "unvoiced objections." Usually a lack of understanding on the part of the prospect is the reason for the objection. Luckily, objections have a structure which can enable you to analyze them, determine the cause, minimize their occurrence and deal with the effects that arise. It is important to work with the prospect to understand the exact character and extent of his objections. Using a client-centered approach where you provide all of the facts necessary will work well in overcoming the objections. When you welcome objections you are communicating to the prospect that his needs are important and will be addressed.

Examples of this approach would be:

"I understand what you are saying. Another client asked the same questions. Here's how I worked with him to satisfy his concern..."

Or

"If we could make sure the product will meet your specs, would there still be a problem?"

Or

"I'm glad you mentioned that because it gives me the chance to show you how our product will solve that problem."

Honesty will take you far in your sales presentation. Don't tell the prospect what you think they want to hear. Today's prospects are far better prepared and more practical than in the past. If you listen to the prospect and acknowledge his objections as being valid, you will be offering additional justification for the prospect to buy into your product or service.

There are five steps in dealing with objections:

1. **Expect them and allow the prospect to express them freely.**
2. **Welcome them when they occur because they indicate an interest on the part of the prospect.**
3. **Affirm the objection by restating it in the form of a question to be answered. "So what you are saying is that the delivery schedule is a concern to you, isn't it?"**
4. **Give complete answers to the objections. Draw upon testimonials, past experiences or whatever relevant information you have.**
5. **When the prospect presents an observation that's perceived as a real drawback, present an offsetting benefit such as, "Your concern about our plant location is justified, but we have air freight service to this area every day. Your orders will be delivered on time."**

Do not respond immediately to a prospect's objection. Very often he will continue talking to clarify his position or to offer more information. When this happens, wait a few seconds and think about what he has said. Your pause shows a level of respect for what the prospect said.

One of the definitions of an obstacle we gave is, "...not ready to buy." Another we gave is "...any hindrance..." Look at objections as being a prospect's request for more information. In order to close, you must give him the information he seeks. When you approach objections as requests for more information, your discussions will move smoothly, the objection will be handled effectively and you'll move closer to a buying decision.

THE "BIG THREE" [\[top\]](#)

Objections which face salespeople the most are:

- A. Skepticism
- B. Misunderstanding
- C. Stalling

The best way to handle objections is to appear as a knowledgeable, interested salesperson whose mission is to help the prospect achieve his objectives and goals. Respond to objectives positively and respect the

prospect's actions as legitimate concerns.

A. Skepticism

If the prospect seems skeptical about your presentation or your ability to deliver, it could come from one of the following situations:

- I **Promising too much.** If you promise too much too soon or trivialize the uniqueness of the prospect's situation you will surely lose him.
- I **Failing to gain a rapport.** You must listen and respond effectively. If the prospect thinks you are patronizing him or saying what you think he wants to hear, his interest in you will diminish rapidly. Learn to listen and respond effectively.
- I **Not asking the right questions.** Know enough about the prospect's needs to be able to ask probing questions. Asking good questions is just as important as giving good answers.
- I **Not fully answering questions.** The prospect's questions are real. Try not to think that any of them are "dumb questions," and do not avoid a question because you think it is trivial. By not answering all questions, the prospect could think you are trying to hide something.
- I **Coming off as defensive.** If you appear to be defensive to an objection, you might turn him off completely. Given a choice, you should choose to be responsive. Always respond enthusiastically, not defensively.
- I **Not client-centered.** If you speak in general terms and do not address the specifics of the prospect's objection, you have not given him the answer he is looking for.
- I **A perceived lack of time.** If you rush through your presentation or do not give enough consideration to the prospect's concerns, you could make the prospect feel uneasy. Don't linger endlessly on any one point, but don't give any quick answers either.

B. Misunderstanding

These objections fall into three categories:

1. **Inadequate definition of the need.** A good salesman has the ability to define and solve problems. By understanding the prospect's situation, you are better able to offer the help or answers he needs. Take the time to get the facts and offer the solutions necessary to close the sale.
2. **Inadequate goal definition.** You have to know what the prospect's goal is before you can try to suggest a path. If his main concern is to produce 2000 units in a month and your product is a

critical part in the units, speak in terms of providing the parts to do that. Don't try to improve his procedures. Help him to hit his goal.

3. **Inadequate definition of benefits and features.** You must provide specific examples of how the prospect will benefit from your product or service and your proposed solution to his objections. Do not give global answers to specific problems

C. Stalling

If the prospect seems to be stalling, the reason might be one of these:

- I **He is not the decision maker.** If this is the situation, find out who the decision maker is and ask to meet with that individual. This can be done by asking the prospect himself or trying to gain the information from the receptionist. A simple question, such as, "Mrs. Smith, I sell color copiers. Can you tell me who the person is that is in charge of specifying and buying color copiers?"
- I **He's not sold on your product.** Ask probing questions to determine what the problem is. "Are you not sure about our pricing?" "Is it your concern about our ability to deliver?" "What is holding you back in making your decision?"
- I **He wants to get other proposals.** Find out what his criteria are in the proposals. Also, see if you can determine what kind of information he is looking for. Ask if the project is going to be awarded on a competitive bid basis only. Try to be the last bidder to present.
- I **He's too busy to talk right now.** Ask him what his schedule is and when you can return or call him back. Also, it might be good to find out if the project is a reality and not just a fire drill.
- I **The project is not budgeted.** An excellent chance for you to show him cost benefits and be willing to adjust your scope of work to fit his time frame. "You have told me that his project has not been budgeted for this quarter. However, I can see that you need our products. I have spoken to our financial people and we are willing to invoice you at the start of the next quarter if you agree to receive a shipment within ten days."

UNVOICED OBJECTIONS [\[top\]](#)

In section III we spoke about voiced objections. An obvious question you might ask is, "How can I deal effectively with objections that have not been presented." If you anticipate concerns based on the information you have gathered about the client and spent enough time on your sales presentation analyzing problem areas, you can get a handle on this and develop strategies to handle these objections.

Start a discussion when you feel these objections are present. You can

start by asking the question, "Is there anything else you would like to ask me?" or, "Are there any other questions I can answer for you?" A good salesman will keep probing until all of these questions are out on the table and dealt with.

Here are some examples of unvoiced objections:

1. "You can't possibly understand my business because it is unique."

Answer: Stress your experience in the industry and how you have been able to help other clients in similar situations.

2. "Why should I do business with your firm?"

Answer: Tell the prospect how you have helped other companies in the industry and be ready to offer testimonials.

3. "Is the timing right for a change in suppliers?"

Answer: Focus on the cost advantages and other benefits of doing business with your company.

4. "Why are you calling on me at all; I already have a supplier?"

Answer: "With our knowledge of the industry and ability to help companies increase production and maximize profits, we feel that we could be of benefit to you."

This will also give the prospect a new level of confidence in you because you were not avoiding any of the issues he was holding close to the vest. Whenever it appears that the prospect has an unvoiced objection, that's the time to probe for information. For example, "George, it appears that you have a question about what I just said. Am I right about that?"

HANDLING OBJECTIONS [[top](#)]

We already stated that the best way to handle objections is to anticipate what the objections will be and to answer them before they are asked. However, for those objections that "come out of the blue," and catch you off-guard, there is a list of "don'ts" that you should consider. These are common sense items, but nevertheless, you'd be surprised how many sales people fall into these traps:

- I Never knock the competition. That takes the focus off of you and your company and you never want to do that.
- I Never say anything negative about your company.
- I Never say anything negative about your product or service.
- I Never tell the customer that they are wrong.
- I Never tell the customer that "you don't understand."

- I Never argue with a customer.
- I Never lie to a customer. Long term relationships are built on trust and honesty. It is far better to say, "I don't know, but I'll find out and get right back to you."
- I Never be defensive. That's not a positive approach to an objection.
- I Never lose your cool with the customer.
- I Never let an objection go by without an answer.

And now, some very important "do's":

- I Always maintain a positive attitude and be enthusiastic.
- I Always remember that objections are a natural part of the sales process and should not be considered as a personal affront.
- I Always maintain good eye contact, even when under fire.
- I Always listen closely to an objection.
- I Always acknowledge the objection and then give your point of view.
- I Always be prepared to prove your position with testimonials, references, and documentation.

SOME OF THE MORE COMMON OBJECTIONS AND HOW TO HANDLE THEM [\[top\]](#)

Following is a list of some of the more common objections. One simple exercise to try is, take three index cards and on each card write a common objection that you have received from prospects. For each objection, list several responses. Commit these to memory and practice your presentation.

1. "Your price is way out of line."

This is by far the most common objection and perhaps the most difficult to handle. Often, prices, for the most part, are "cast in concrete," and not easily changed. You must go to a benefit-oriented solution to the objection or offer some service to offset the difference in price.

2. "We don't have it in the budget."

Not quite the same as your price is too high. The customer may have the money but is not convinced that your product or service is worth the price you are asking. A good answer to the objection would be, "O.K., tell me what your budget is and let me see what

I can do for you in that price range."

3. "I can get it cheaper some place else."

This is different from 1 and 2 since the client is saying, "I have the money, but you are not worth the difference in price." Two good answers to this objection are: "I understand what you are saying. But have you ever chosen the lowest price in the past and have been disappointed?" Or, "Is your primary goal price or are you also interested in service, quality, reliability,....?"

4. "I don't have the time to discuss that right now."

This may be a reality, but only up to a point. It is reasonable to respect someone's busy schedule, however, it's just as reasonable to ask when they will have the time to discuss the situation.

5. "We don't have the need right now."

The obvious answer is, "May I leave some literature with you and get back to you later?"

6. "My superior has to approve this."

One way to avoid this objection is to be sure you are dealing with the decision maker. Not having done this, the natural response could be, "O.K., when will you be speaking to your boss?"

7. "I already have a vendor for that product (service)."

Your job here is to convince the prospect that even though he has a supplier, you think you can do a better job and ask him to hear you out.

8. "You only offer one part for my solution, I also need..."

One solution is to tell the prospect that you have a company in mind that supplies the other part and you would be happy to coordinate the situation for him.

9. "We can't use you now because our deadline is coming up on us."

You have three choices with this objection. First, pass this one by and ask for the opportunity to bid on the next job. Second, try to get the prospect to ease his deadline so that he can take advantage of your product or service. For example, you might say, "Mr. Gibbons, I know that you said you had to get your order filled by November. However, if you could put that off for one week, I know I can save you money." Third, be sure that you can fit into his deadline and offer that possibility.

10. "Your product (service) is not exactly what we are looking

for."

Ask the prospect where you are lacking. Once you have that information, you can then address the objections.

11. "How long has your company been in business?"

If your company has a proven track record, present it for the prospect's review. Show testimonials, awards, printed recognition in the form of articles or press releases.

Do whatever you must to build a comfort level between you and the prospect. If, on the other hand, you don't have a proven track record but have the confidence that you can handle his needs, you might want to ask the prospect, "I know you have been in the business for a long time. I am willing to bet that you have seen many people who have been around for quite a while that will not give you the kind of service we will!" Or, "Yes, we are a young business with a limited customer base, but you can be sure we treat our customers as people who are very, very special."

See how many other answers you can develop to handle these common objections. Chances are, as a salesperson, you will not close every deal. Some will fall by the wayside. You have no real control over that. However, you can minimize those situations by preparing yourself in advance. Have a great presentation. Know it inside and out. Practice it in front of others. Be relentless in identifying objections within your proposal. And then, go out there and give it your best shot. You will win some and you will lose some. Just remember this little equation developed by Robert W. Bly:

$$SWL + SWL = SW$$

meaning, "Some will like you; some won't like you; so what?"

RESOURCES [\[top\]](#)

Books

Million Dollar Closing Techniques. (Wiley, 1999). Chapter 4: "Anticipating and Handling Objections."

AMA Handbook for Successful Selling by Bob Kimball. (NTC Business, 1994). Chapter 7: "Objections are Your Friends."

Close More Sales! Persuasion Skills that Boost Your Selling Power by Mike Stewart. (AMACOM, 1999). Part VII: "Handling Objections Properly is Usually the Bridge to the Close."

High Efficiency Selling: How Superior Salespeople Get that Way, 2nd ed. by Stephan Schiffman. (Next Step, 2000). Chapter 10: "Your Personal Prospecting Plan" and Chapter 20: "What Do You Do when the Prospect Objects."

Selling Your Services: Proven Strategies for Getting Clients to Hire You (Or Your Firm) by Robert W. Bly. (Henry Holt, 1992). Chapter 9:
"Handling Objections."

Professional Associations

American Marketing Association (AMA)

Marketing Research Association (MRA)

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