

## Overcoming Objections

We've talked a lot about gradually closing a prospect throughout the sales presentation so that the experience is very natural and seamless from start to finish. But what about when you get a prospect who has concerns s/he just can't seem to get past? The first thing is to be aware of what the most likely objections will be so you can handle them before they even arise. What are the most common objections to your product or service? No matter what you're selling, all objections can fit into one or more of the following categories:

1. Fear of failure—"Can I do this? Will this really work?"
2. Lack of support—spouse, parents or friends unsupportive
3. Can't make the commitment—don't have time, conflicts with existing obligations, childcare concerns, etc.
4. Not enough motivation—the discomfort of the prospect's current situation is not great enough that s/he wants to make changes
5. Financial concerns—fear that the prospect can't afford it or will be extremely stretched trying to. Is it worth the investment?

Notice that I listed financial concerns last. Cost is often the first objection that is put up, but usually it's not the true reason, deep down, for rejecting a product or service. I'll explain more about this topic later. With an idea of where objections stem from, let's talk about *when* the optimal time is to handle them. As I already mentioned, the ideal scenario is for all your prospect's questions and concerns to be answered as a natural course of your exchange—*not* after you've gone through your entire presentation. Nothing de-energizes your persuasive efforts more than lingering doubts and concerns that remain unresolved in your prospect's mind. When you are "interviewing" your prospects, use your open-ended questions to help them open up and shed light on any possible areas of concern. With this approach, you are opening the door to bring up and cover such issues

on *your* terms. This persuasive strategy is not a matter of manipulation; by virtue of the roles you each play—you as the one offering a solution and the prospect as the one seeking a solution—it is more practical and effective for both parties to get what they want.

There are two challenges at play when, *after* you've gone through your presentation, a prospect still voices concerns. First of all, you did not discover enough information to accurately anticipate and diffuse concerns while they were still seeds in your prospect's mind rather than rooted plants. Secondly, if *the prospect* has to bring it up and begins questioning *you*, merely by nature of the dialogue, you are now on the *defensive*. This flipping of roles will never place you in a strong persuasive position. Worse, if you *do* project even a hint of defensiveness or insecurity toward your prospect or product, that in and of itself can breed more doubt in the prospect's mind than perhaps the original concern did. How awful to lose a sale based on mistaken perceptions! And yet, these details make or break sales all the time.

Let's talk about price for a moment. It seems to be everyone's top concern, doesn't it? Independent researchers found that 68 percent of prospects admitted that price was not the determining factor, but they also admitted that they knew by experience that stating that the price is too high is the best way to get rid of a salesperson. Price, in fact, is seldom the sole reason for buying or not buying something. When asked the reasons why they *did* buy something, 94 percent of interviewed customers mentioned non-price issues as being the most important factor for their purchase. If you think about it, it doesn't make sense to buy something *just because* the price is good. What if it's not something desirable, useful or necessary? Would you buy it just because of its price? When you do a good job of helping people see how your product will improve their lives, change their lives or move them from their current situation to their desired situation, price is usually the least of their concerns. It all goes back to the emotions—the pain of their current situation sharply contrasts with what they want and hope for in the future and is thus the *true* motivator. At that point, you could name almost any price and they would buy. I say

this not to suggest in any way that you should take advantage of that psychological tendency but simply to underscore that price is not the issue.

Now, let's look at the worst-case scenario: Even after the best presentation you could muster, your prospect still has issues. If you ever find yourself in this situation, there are a number of considerations to bear in mind. First and foremost, ask yourself if this is a conflict you can even resolve. Suppose you find out the *real* reason why your prospect is hung up on the price is that s/he just declared bankruptcy. In that case, obviously, no matter what you do or say, you have no control over the situation. If it is an issue that is solvable, however, then let your prospect talk. Just hearing her/him out will diminish her/his need to contend over price. Conversely, if you become upset, impatient or condescending, you will just make your prospect cling to the price issue.

Always remain calm and empathetic in the face of resistance. This behavioral strategy will come across as more professional, credible and trustworthy. A calm and caring demeanor also gives your prospect room to save face if s/he changes her/his mind. Never back your prospects into a corner. It's a good idea to start out at square one and review with your resistant prospects the many different ways in which your product meets their needs. Help your prospects step back again and see how your product will move them from their current situation to their ideal situation. If, in the end, they remain adamant, never close the door. Extend to them the opportunity and invitation to come talk to you again should they ever change their mind or have further questions. And lastly, don't beat yourself up. There are those people who are just going to resist, even if you said and did everything perfectly. This rejection is usually based on their own past experiences and perceptions, so don't take it personally.

How do we handle those common put-offs like "I need to think this over," "I need to sleep on it," "I have to talk to my wife first"? If your prospects are insistent, respect their wishes, but be sure you're following up again within twenty-four hours—forty-eight hours at the absolute most. If you let too much time lapse between your initial encounter and your follow-up, you communicate to your prospects that it's not important. Then they

feel like they're off the hook. If you're not the one calling them, it is very likely you'll never hear from your prospects again. A key thing you have to remember when following up is that the emotion of the original dialogue has dissipated. You must bring it back in order to close the deal. This is why sales that aren't closed at the first meeting are harder to close down the road. It's somewhat of an irony, but the shorter the sales time, the better. The longer a prospect has to "think about it," the less likely it is that you'll have a deal. So remember that, when following up by phone, you're going to have to exert that persuasive energy all over again to recapture your prospect's excitement and enthusiasm. Moreover, you will no longer have the advantage of being able to do so in person. Also, you have less time to do so since your conversation by phone will generally be shorter.

One effective way to minimize the likelihood of sending someone home who still hasn't made a decision is to make a very clear "qualifying statement" right up front. A qualifying statement occurs when you define at the outset exactly how you are going to spend your time together. Additionally, you define what your expectations are for each other and what you hope to get out of the meeting. In essence, you are "qualifying" your time together and how it will be spent. An example of a qualifying statement would be: "Mrs. Smith, what I'd like for us to do today is find out exactly what you're looking for, get all of your questions answered and see if this is a good fit. If we both feel good about it, we'll get the ball rolling for you. If it's not a good fit, we'll be up front about that, too, and maybe I can make some other recommendations for you."

Qualification is an excellent approach because it disarms your prospects. You've told them exactly what to expect, so they can relax. They won't be caught off guard when you begin asking lots of questions because they'll understand why you're asking them. Also, using the word "we" is often helpful instead of "I" and "you" so that your prospects feel like you're collaborating together. By using the "we" voice, you will come across as more of an advisor than someone who is trying to sell your prospects something. Most importantly of all, this approach is designed to give you an answer, one way or the other, in that very same meeting. In other words, there won't be any loose ends remaining when you and your prospect walk away from each other. Here is another example of a

qualifying statement: “Let’s make an agreement, Mr. Jones. I’m not a high-pressure consultant, so you don’t have worry about me trying to get you involved with anything you don’t want. All I want to do today is show you how to increase your income in your business and how it will work for you. Please do me a favor and let me know today if this is a good fit. Fair enough?”

© 2009 Kurt Mortensen