

OVERCOMING OBJECTIONS

By Joseph C. Ellers

Professional salespeople have the ability to close a sale when the price is initially too high or the show is not exactly what the customer thinks they want. Order-takers reduce the price or walk away. What kind of sales force do you have?

The pace of business creates a climate where it is easy for salespeople to get into bad habits. One very bad habit is to fail to respond professionally when an objection is raised. If your salespeople are in a "dialing for dollars" mentality where they expect to burn through ten or twenty prospects to make a sale, they will gladly write-off a customer objection as a "no" and move on to (hopefully) greener pastures.

Instead of accepting objections as "show stoppers," you need to work with your salespeople to create professional responses that will convert some of these objections into orders.

To do this, you need to do a little diagnostic to understand which salespeople have problems—and what kinds of problems they have.

1. Do your salespeople believe in the value of your product or service?
2. Do they present value in their communications with prospects?
3. Do they have answers for FPOs (Frequent Prospect Objections)?
4. Do they use them?

Let's take these one at a time. *Do your salespeople really believe in the value of your product or service?* Too often, managers assume the salespeople believe in what they are selling. What kinds of feedback do you get from your salespeople? Do they often tell you they think there are problems with the product or service? Do they often come to you and ask for permission to discount some part of the sale?

These are indications your people do not really know/believe what they show has value. If this is the case, you had better do some educating quickly because people that do not believe in a product cannot sell it. (They can take orders from customers that want to buy, but this is not selling.)

Do they present value? The best way to understand your salespeople's approach to this question is through role-plays. Create some prospect profiles that mirror different parts of your potential customer base and do role-plays with your salespeople. If they truly sell value, they will ask probing questions to clearly understand the business and then present the products or services in ways that respond to prospect needs. If they are adding value, they will also make slight modifications to their presentations from one prospect to another. Listen for salespeople who try to sell "price" as a benefit. These are salespeople that do not attempt to sell value. This makes them more susceptible to price objections.

To solve this problem, you need to reassert the value proposition of your products and services. Put it in writing if you need to give them a "cheat sheet."

Do they have answers for FPOs (Frequent Prospect Objections)? As you are doing the role-plays, try out a few normal objections such as, "Your prices are too high," and listen to their responses. Because this is a "regular" objection they normally face, they should have good

answers readily available. Listen to how well they respond to these comments. Do they have answers? Are they the right ones? Do they counter objections with "value" statements? One good management activity is to generate a list of FPOs and their counters and make sure everyone understands it.

The final question is, *Do they use them?* Most people can ultimately come up with the right answers if they have some time to prepare. You want to know what is happening on the floor. Next week, pull up a chair next to one of your salespeople and listen to what they actually say in customer situations. Do not warn them and do not ask them to script a day, just sit down and listen. A professional will try to present value on every call.

One other important piece of information is an objection is always a sign of at least some prospect interest. When a prospect tells a salesperson something is wrong (price or product), they are giving you a chance to fix it. Work with your salespeople to recognize objections as opportunities rather than rejections.