
Knowing How To Handle Objections

by MICHAEL E. REGA and LISA M. CLAYTON

What is an insincere objection? It is a deceptive attempt to terminate the conversation before it can be started. Some typical insincere objections are the “time put off, too expensive, it is against company policy,” etc. How can you tell if the prospect is serious? We were in a prospect’s office recently when the phone rang. He picked it up and was on the line no more than 30 seconds. He quickly terminated the conversation by saying, “Really, our present plans don’t call for that, but thank you for calling,” and he hung up. After he hung up, we asked him what the person was selling and, to our surprise, he could not tell us. He explained that he had salespeople calling him all the time and he just did not have time for all of them. Therefore, he found that he had been able to develop several pat objections that seemed to hold off most of them. He said, “We have already fully committed this year’s budget,” or “We explored an identical proposal several years ago and found it completely unaccept-

able,” or “We are perfectly happy with our present supplier.”

These seemed to put off most salespeople rather nicely. However, tossing out insincere objections is a bad decision. That phone call might have meant thousands of dollars to his company and he did not have time to listen.

This situation is unfortunately all too common. A buyer must have hundreds of salespeople calling each month. Because of this, it has become necessary to develop defensive techniques; one being the insincere sales objection. Yes, we have found that there are actually two types of sales objections — sincere and insincere.

Categorizing Objections

When in doubt, we suggest you

treat the objections as insincere. If you were to treat it as sincere, you would be wasting the prospect’s time and yours and answering a question of little importance. Typically, when an insincere objection is answered, it leads to another insincere objection, and another. This game results in a never-ending spiral that accomplishes nothing.

Why then does the buyer pose insincere objections? In many cases, the company or job description may demand that they see all salespeople. On the other hand, the prospect may just be a nice person who understands some of the problems of being in sales and does not want to hurt your feelings. It is really a socially acceptable way of putting you off without rejecting you or hurting your feelings.

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The prospect may feel it is actually a favor to the salesperson to meet with no intention of buying. No one could ever accuse this buyer of being rude to a salesperson. The buyer is partially right.

It is unrealistic to spend unlimited time with each salesperson; work would never be accomplished. Further, when a buyer initially sees a new proposal (salesperson, product, service or idea, recommendation), the first reaction is one of resisting change because change means cost, both emotional and financial. A sale is made when in the mind of the buyer, the value of the sum of the benefits in the proposal outweighs the cost of obtaining the proposal.

Establishing Value

To minimize the potential for insincere objections, try to establish value before cost. Almost instinctively when the buyer hears the cost, he immediately associates it with the small amount of value that he currently knows and understands. Therefore, if the cost comes out too early in the presentation, the buyer may develop a mental block. You will be battling a closed mind, and all the additional benefits you may bring out may never get a chance to be weighed fairly on the balance scale. The more value you can build before sharing the cost, gives you more chances to justify the cost/value relationship.

When you recognize that the prospect is voicing an insincere objection, we recommend the following techniques for handling it:

- Smile it away — Keep going; just pass it off with light humor. “Mr. Jones, you ask why our prices are so high? How else could the company afford to buy me a new

car every year. Seriously though, let me illustrate how I think my company can be of benefit to you.”

- Ignore it — Do not acknowledge the objection. Do not smile this time. You do not believe it is serious; keep going.

- Tactfully question the source — “Tom, that’s the third time you have mentioned delivery problems. May I ask where you heard that? Oh, the Brand X salesperson told you, now I understand.” In many cases, if the objection was insincere, the prospect may say “Forget it, it’s not important.” However, do not be surprised to hear a specific case that would then make this a sincere objection, which should be handled accordingly.

- Firmly ask for proof — This technique is used only as a last resort. Usually the above technique will end the objection, but if necessary, you may have to say, “Tom, I am concerned about your comment concerning our past delivery. Can we pull orders so I can look at them and get a handle on our total performance?”

Any time you hear an objection, you can treat it as sincere. It is only when you believe it to be insincere that we recommend the previous steps.

Warming Cold Feet

In some cases, as you get closer to the closing step in the sale, the prospect may get cold feet, that is, afraid to commit with no apparent reason. When this occurs, you may notice that you are greeted with several insincere objections. It is difficult at times to determine whether the objection is sincere. At this time, you may consider “Isolating the sole

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objection.” The steps in this technique include:

- Repeat the objection in a manner that feigns defeat — “Oh, you are concerned because you feel the part will not be compatible.”

- Pose other objections, not as problems, but to remove any other objections before answering the first one — “You do see how the additional machine life more than offsets the slightly higher prices?”

- Obtain a hypothetical commitment. The prospect must feel on top at this point and may come across as very reassuring. Remember, your posture is one of complete sincerity, almost naïve innocence. If anyone, it is the prospect who is manipulating — “If you weren’t concerned about the compatibility problem, would we have a deal?”

- Answer the objection as though it were sincere. You may discover that the prospect balks at step three. At this point in time, consider asking what the real problem is in order to bring out the real objection: the sincere objection.

What really is a sincere objection? Webster defines objection as adverse reason, argument or charge, fault found. The sincere objection is a roadblock to action. In the mind of the prospect, something is questionable or

flawed in your proposal. There is a sincere reason why your idea should not be accepted.

Getting to Sincere Objections

Some typical reasons for sincere objections are poor past performance, misinformation, does not really meet specs, non-competitive price or inadequate information. The dilemma for you, the salesperson, in facing a sincere objection, is that the prospect has just made a charge, a strong statement in the form of a sales objection. The secret to handling objections is to change the prospect's mind gracefully without losing face. It is actually a two-fold dilemma; prove your point, yet do it in such a manner that the customer saves face and does not appear or feel stupid. We recommend the acknowledgement of the objection as an excellent method of overcoming the sincere objection. This four-step application is best addressed by using some statements that are empathetic and help clarify the real objection so both of you can deal with it.

- "I certainly understand how you feel." — Recall that part of the definition of objection, 'argument or charge.' The prospect has just made a defiant statement and is prepared to defend it. You want to say, "Relax, I don't want to fight." By acknowledging that there are two sides to the story, you are avoiding a confrontation.
- Suggest it as a question — "I've had a lot of people ask me how I can get away with a price 10%

higher than the market. It is a fair question which is deserving of an answer." This creates comfort and security. It is not a stupid question. It is saving face.

- Confirm that it is a question — "Really George, I guess the onus now falls on me to demonstrate that the use cost justifies the differential." This now takes the statement that was blurted out defensively and converts it to a logical sounding question.
- Answer the question — "You know George, I was concerned

about this myself when it first came out, but it has been my experience that our product has 33% less maintenance problems, which more than offsets the additional cost."

The real key to handling objections is in understanding the psychology behind the technique and adapting it to our own personalities. Have prospects changed their minds gracefully without losing face? The beauty is that both you and your customers win — nobody loses. □



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