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# HANDLING OBJECTIONS



**Salespeople hear “no” all of the time, but the difference between failure and success is the salesperson’s ability to finesse the prospect closer to a “yes.”**

BY DAVE KAHLE



Prospects don’t always say yes! That might be the very first thing you learn as a salesperson. As a matter of fact, “no,” in all of its various forms and expressions, may be the one word that salespeople hear most often. It’s amazing, then, that so few of us are equipped to effectively handle it.

I teach a two-step process: first you finesse the person, then you handle the idea expressed by that

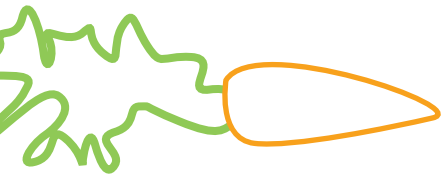
person. Every salesperson should become adept at what I call “finessing” the person, but what do you do when the customer says “no”?

### **Step One: Empathize**

Begin by empathizing with your customer. This takes some of the tension out of the situation, defuses any defensiveness on his part and builds a positive atmosphere. Empathizing

requires you to do two things. First, make a statement indicating that you understand how the prospect thinks or feels. Second, support that statement with some proof.

Here’s an example. Let’s say your prospect has said, “I want to think it over.” You respond by saying, “I know how you feel.” Then, as proof, you say, “Many of my other customers responded the same way when



# what do you do when

they were first presented with this concept.” Your proof shows them that you really do understand how they think or feel.

Another example: again, the prospect has said, “I want to think it over.” You don’t argue with him; you don’t confront him; you don’t sulk. Instead, you say, “I can understand that.” (That’s your empathizing statement.) “When I first saw it, I wanted to think about it a bit as well.” (That’s the proof you give the prospect to believe your empathizing statement.)

When you do this – empathize with the customer – it puts you squarely on the customer’s side. You’ve set the stage to move on to the next step.

### Step Two: Probe

Once you’ve empathized with your customer, ask questions.

questions, therefore, should be of the type that requires your customer to think more specifically. You must guide his answers with open-ended questions that reveal his specific hesitations. You can’t respond to a vague comment, but you can address a specific one. The primary tool for moving your prospect from general to specific thoughts is a good question.

Back to our example. After you’ve empathized, next ask, “When you say that you want to think about it, what specifically is it that you need to consider more deeply?”

Notice the question asks the prospect to move from the general to the specific. When you phrase these questions, add the words “specifically” or “exactly” somewhere in the question, and make it as non-threatening and open-ended

thinking or feeling. Now you have some better information with which to deal.

### Step Three: Verify

When he answers, you then rephrase the answer and feed it back to him, confirming that you really understand him. Back to the example again. Let’s say he explains, “Well, John, I’m not sure about the price. It’s more than we had planned in the budget. I’m not sure we want to pay that much.” That would be a great answer because it reveals the exact issue that is bothering the prospect.

Your skillful empathizing and questioning has uncovered the real problem. Now, you just rephrase it and ask for him to confirm what you’ve said. Your response could go like this. “OK. So, in other words, you’re concerned about how you can

**You have changed the emotional environment from tense, negative and confrontational to relaxed, positive and collaborative.**



Generally, when you’re responding to an objection or evasion, the issue is too general to deal with effectively. Often your customer hasn’t accurately articulated his thoughts. Your

as possible. Your tone of voice should be inquisitive, not confrontational.

If you have done this well, your prospect will talk a bit and share more specifically what he/she is

pay for it when it’s more than what you had budgeted. Is that right?” He responds, “Yes, that’s right.”


When your prospect confirms it, you have successfully probed and

# the customer says “no”?

clarified his evasion or objection, moving from the general to the specific. Now, you can deal with it.

As long as he maintains that he “just wants to think about it,” there is little you can do to move the project forward. But now that you understand exactly what the issue is, you can respond to the objection.

Notice also the very last thing that has happened in this exchange. He said “yes.” You have changed the emotional environment from tense, negative and confrontational to relaxed, positive and collaborative.

That’s why you do it. You finesse the person before you deal with the objection that person has expressed. Now that you have influenced the atmosphere and clarified the objection, you can respond to the idea. 

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