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# NEWSFLASH

the source of your obstacles isn't your customer  
— IT'S ACTUALLY YOU!

EDITORIAL | DAVE KAHLE

I just received an email from a frustrated salesperson. His problem? He found it extremely difficult to “pick up the phone and call a prospect.” Ruminating in the email, he shared this thought: “I think part of my problem is I don't like telemarketers. I always thought to myself, ‘If I want something, I'll call you. Leave me alone!’”

It is easy for us, on the outside, to see the root of his problem. He doesn't like

telemarketers. He projected that attitude onto his customers, assuming that they thought just like him. Since he didn't like telemarketers, his customers must not like them either. So, he didn't want to be seen as a telemarketer because, after all, his customers don't like telemarketers.

The source of his problem is inside him — his attitude — not anything that the customers did or did not do.



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Yesterday, we had a bit of an issue with a client of ours. They wanted us to *not* charge for one of their managers who attended an entire two-day sales training seminar. In the client's mind, since the manager had a different title than most of the participants, he should be free. Three weeks ago, that same client called and wanted us to discount the fee for sending two people to one of our open-enrollment seminars. As we looked back on previous conversations with this client, we concluded that almost every conversation was about some request for a discount.

**The Low-Price Concern**

Interestingly, one of the major training issues that the CEO asked us to address was how to get away from having to be the low price. I suspect there is a connection between the attitude of the client and the problems of the CEO.

In both of these cases, the individual's behavior was an expression of a deeper attitude and set of values. The frustrated salesperson had identified the issue: He didn't like telemarketers. The discount-requesting client hadn't yet seen the obvious source of his behavior — a deeper value which held that nothing is worth the price — that everything can be discounted. The subconscious thinking goes like this: If nothing I buy is worth the price, then that must be true for my customers as well.

These deep-set values turn into attitudes, and the attitudes express themselves in innumerable ways. And one of the most important of these expressions is the habit that we all have of projecting our values onto our customers.

Since we don't like telemarketers, we subconsciously project that attitude onto our customers, and can't bring ourselves to make cold calls. Since we think nothing is worth the stated price, we subconsciously project that attitude onto our customers, and find ourselves constantly discounting.

The source of our difficulties is not the customer — it is us!

Here's the way this works:

- ✘ We develop a deep-seated value.
- ✘ That value colors our behavior and eventually ingrains itself into an attitude. (An attitude is merely a habit of thinking.)
- ✘ That habit affects our actions in all sorts of subtle and not-so-subtle ways.
- ✘ Our actions get reactions from our customers.

The most common expression of this process that I see revolves around the common complaint — “Why do I always have to be the low price?”

Before you start blaming customers for holding out for a lower price, ask yourself what you might have done to instill that idea in them. Reflect on your attitude and your values and see if the root of the problem isn't there.

If for example, you:

- ✘ Purchase everything at the discount stores.
- ✘ Continually beat up your suppliers for discounts and concessions.
- ✘ Don't invest in improving yourself.
- ✘ Refuse to spend money on your customers.

You probably have a deep-seated value which holds buying cheaper is a higher value than investing in value. And since that's what you believe, you find it difficult to expect anything other than that behavior from your customers.

I often respond to a salesperson who asks, “Why do I always have to be the low price” by asking this question, “If I'm one of your customers, why should I pay more to buy it from you?”

The overwhelming majority of the time, the response I get is silence. They can think of no reason someone would pay more to buy it from them. They see no added value to their company's offering. And, since they don't believe that they have added value, they certainly can't convince their customers of something they don't personally believe.

**As long as you don't stretch your thinking to take in new ideas, you'll be forever locked within the confines of your legacy beliefs.**

## “Reflect on your attitude and your values and see if the root of the problem isn't there.”

The root of the problem of having to be the low price is, then, very commonly, inside the belief system of the salesperson.

### Rising Above Beliefs

I've found it to be very difficult for someone to rise above their beliefs unless they first challenge and modify those beliefs. I suppose that's why, in a whole different arena, it's impossible to reason with a terrorist. Their actions are entirely consistent with their beliefs. They won't modify their actions until they change their beliefs.

I don't mean to suggest that the actions of a salesperson in dealing with price issues is in the same league as the actions of a terrorist. But the principle that your beliefs influence your actions is the same.

Change your beliefs, and you'll change your actions. Change your actions, and you'll see different reactions on the part of the customer.

That brings us to this point: How do you change your beliefs? While I don't propose to have the final word on this, I have made some observations over the years. Here are two suggestions:

**Remember the direction of the Apostle Paul to first century Christians: “Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”** If you are going to transform your beliefs, you must start by choosing your thoughts. In practical terms, that means that you intentionally inject positive and different thoughts into your head. If you are going to change your beliefs, you must expose yourself to ideas and thoughts other than your own. You must break out of the world defined by your information sources and associates.

Buy positive books and read them. Buy positive CDs and listen to them. Find a local group and join it. Attend seminars. Surround yourself with intelligent, thoughtful people

who can challenge you. As long as you don't stretch your thinking to take in new ideas, you'll be forever locked within the confines of your legacy beliefs.

The first thing that every cult attempts to do is separate its members from others who think differently. Whether it be fundamentalists like Jim Jones or extremists like Osama Bin Ladin, other ideas are thought to be a threat. That's because, thoughtful people will, upon exposure to other good ideas, accept some of them and change their beliefs. Since changed beliefs equals changed behavior, you can't control someone who has access to other ideas.

For us, the opposite is true as well. If you want to break away from beliefs which hinder you, you must expose yourself to other ideas.

Break out of your routines. Rub shoulders with new people. Take in new and positive ideas. You'll find that new and different ideas inevitably nudge you to modify your beliefs.

**Examine yourself.** Ask yourself questions, and thoughtfully consider the answers. Why do you hold this belief? What is the basis for you thinking this? Was it some emotional experience from years ago? Was it a case of repeated experiences that ingrained themselves into your psyche?

As you challenge your own beliefs, you may find that some of them are irrational and based on incidents or information which is incorrect.

If that's the case, then the belief which resulted from those incorrect pieces of information must also be in error. You can reason yourself to different beliefs.

So many salespeople lament the customer's actions without realizing the root cause of the problem may very well be the salesperson's attitudes and beliefs. Before you next complain about price issues, look inward to see if you are part of the problem. 