

Dealing with Acceptance and Rejection

By Dr. Tony Alessandra

Throughout the sales process, you should always be listening to the questions prospects ask you. They are clues to what the prospect is thinking. The questions salespeople love to hear are the ones that signal an intent to buy including: What credit terms do you offer? Can I try it one more time? How much lead time do you need? How does the installation process work? How soon could training be started?

When you hear these musical questions, your response will lead into a natural process of taking care of the sales logistics ... order forms, contracts, checks, and so on. If you've developed a good solution and you've established that it's within their price range, the buying commitment should be a natural outcome.

However, sometimes the positive buying questions don't come and your client starts to back away from the process. There's something wrong ... either the prospect isn't giving you complete information or you've missed something along the way. What do you do? ... back to the questions! Candidly ask what's blocking the decision. The collaborative sales process isn't designed to put pressure on your customers. It's designed to solve their problems or help them to take advantage of opportunities. It's what you've done up until now that will make or break the sale. If your customer isn't sold by now, more pressure won't do it. What's needed is more specific communication about what they need, or what you have to offer. That's why we ask open-ended questions like "Where do we go from here?" or "How should we proceed?" and "What do you see as our next step?" You're asking the customer to tell you what else he needs in order to move the process forward so you can implement the solution you've created *together*.

The sales process we're showing you is a very natural process of two, or more, people sharing their information to develop a solution to a problem or need. It requires trust, respect and open communication on both sides. You can't work as partners through all the stages of the sale and then at the end, try to use a manipulative closing technique to clinch the deal. It doesn't make sense.

One of the reasons a traditional close sometimes works is that the constant pressure on the client forces him to tell you what's really holding up the sale. But if you can get the same information by communicating openly and honestly, there is no need for the pressure. Getting acceptance for a sale means you've done a good job of collaborating. You can go on to assuring—the final segment of the sale. What happens when you don't get an unqualified YES at this point?

It's possible that you may have to prod your customer to tell you what's really blocking implementation of the solution you've worked out together. Don't be afraid to ask for open honest communication about what's happening. The client promised honesty and full participation in the beginning, remember?

In traditional selling, the salesperson asks "closed" questions meant to force the prospect to say, "yes," such as the forced-choice or the sharp angle close. The salesperson tries to take complete control of the situation and the customer at precisely the time when the customer most wants her autonomy. She wants the right to make her own decision without being railroaded into a decision by the salesperson ... even if it was the decision she was already going to make. Pressure creates problems in the sales relationship. To reduce the pressure, the prospect may create a smoke screen.

A smoke screen is something that obscures the relationship or the decision-making process. Common ones are "Your price is too high," and "I want to think about it." Both may indicate that your customer is uncomfortable communicating their uncertainty — they're avoiding telling you their true feelings and thoughts. Your customer may also engage in the "objection game" where they try to think up more

objections than you can possibly overcome. This is a “no win” game and a signal that there is a problem with the relationship. A thousand closing techniques won’t help you here. They’ll only irritate your customer and destroy the trust and respect you’ve built. And listen to the way it sounds when you say you are going to “close” your customer. How would you like to be “closed?” It sounds like it’s the end. Instead you should simply change focus. Using our marriage analogy, the previous stages represent the courtship ... confirming is the marriage ceremony. That’s the point we’re at now. Assuring, which we’ll discuss in upcoming chapters, is what we’ll do to make sure we’ll stay together long-term.

When you get a yes, you should always review the solution and its benefits ... develop a complete implementation schedule... and clarify the customer’s expectations and success criteria. This covers things like terms and financing options, payment schedules, delivery schedules, training dates, warranty periods, servicing procedures or anything else that might not have been covered when the prospect was selecting options. The prospect has now become a customer. You want to welcome him into the family and help him learn how to use his new product or service to his best advantage, and how to get help if something goes wrong. You want him to know that you will be there for him.

By the time a salesperson gets to this stage using the process we’ve discussed, there is a high probability that the proposed solution will be accepted. However, there are also some reasons why it might be rejected. We live in a rapidly changing environment — priorities change, people move, people lose their jobs or suffer a sudden loss in the stock market. Companies merge, go out of business, and change directions ... sometimes overnight. The person who had the authority to purchase your product yesterday may be in a different division tomorrow. What all this change means is that in some cases, by the time you get to the end of the sales process, you may find that there is no longer a need. In others cases, you may find that you have to start the

whole process over again from the beginning. But most of the time, if you've done a good job of exploring, creating and selecting options, you'll find that things go just as planned and you'll be settling the details and beginning a new customer relationship.

In those rare cases when you do lose the sale, you'll want to make sure you don't lose the relationship. If things fall apart at the last minute, you can express your disappointment at not getting to work with the client, and support him as much as you can in whatever decision he makes. Even if he's buying a competitor's solution, offer to give him whatever help you can. The competitor's solution may not work and the customer may come back to you later for help. Let them know that you will be staying in touch.

Use the final minutes of the call to pave the way for the next call, if there is to be one. Note any commitments you made such as price quotes, delivery dates or terms discussed. Above all, be sure to let the client know that you want to maintain the relationship. Ask him for a post-sale analysis of specifically what you could have done better. You will impress him with your seriousness about being able to offer better service.

If you consistently ask for a post-sale analysis, you can begin to catalog the answers and spot trends or problems that you can avoid in future sales. Make notes following each call so you can evaluate your performance. Doing that after confirmed sales would point out your strengths. For lost sales, you will discover your weaknesses by evaluating what transpired, how it affected the outcome, and how it differed from your success pattern. When you get back to your office be sure to enter the follow-up date in your tickler file, write a thank you note, and put this customer on your mailing list.

At the end of your day, sit in a quiet place, reflect on the call and use a visualization process to improve your performance. Run the "tape" through in your mind and envision what you did. Then imagine the scene again, but this time see

yourself doing everything perfectly. Imagine the prospect's reaction to your new behavior. And remember, it's essential to finish by visualizing a successful outcome. Let go of your mistakes. Trial and error is how all human progress is made. Focus on and hold a picture of yourself successfully completing each sale.

Visualize your successes often. By doing so, you will reinforce the successful and effective things you do. Your mental repetition of productive behaviors will create strong working habits.