

Sales Objections - good or bad?

by Kurt Newman

Sales Consultants Pty Ltd

Let's face it: no one likes to hear sales objections. No one likes to feel rejected. Yet in the selling profession it comes with the territory. So what can you do? How do you cope?

What is a sales objection?

Let's begin by identifying what a sales objection is. A sales objection is an explicit statement made by the client that is a barrier between their current situation and one that could be. The situation that could be is the one where the client is using and experiencing the value of your product or service. When an objection is spoken there is a degree of frustration or even anger felt by the client that also needs to be addressed by you.

The old school of selling, for those who can remember, taught that sales objections were an indicator of a client's interest. In fact, they believed that the more sales objections you attracted the greater the chance of securing the sale. This is completely false. Sales objections impede sales and can stifle client relationships.

What can you do?

Sales objections can, to a large extent, be prevented through better implementation of the sales process. I am not talking about a rebuttal which happens during the first few moments of connecting with a client. An example of a rebuttal is, "*I am too busy.*" Sales objections usually occur at the later stages of the sales process, often after the presentation. For example, a poorly qualified prospective client can lead to a myriad of objections ranging from "*it's too expensive*" to "*I want to think about it.*" But the truth more than likely is that they don't have the authority to proceed.

Sales objections are an indicator that one or more skills within the sales process were poorly applied or applied not at all. If the sales person didn't style shift, that is adapt their selling style to the client's buying style they can expect a sales objection. (Refer to our blog Sales Style – do you know your sales style and what it means?) Whilst you may feel uncomfortable hearing an objection it does give you the opportunity to put the situation right. Objections should be seen as a temporary business refusal and not as personal rejection.

Sales objections given in succession are a warning that something major is wrong. For example, the client may not be interested in what you have to say because you have not asked enough questions to uncover the real problem. A post sales review of how you applied the sales process and how you style shifted will identify the cause and pinpoint when the sales objection was created in the client's mind.

Salespeople don't overcome objections per-se. The client does. It gets down to how the sales person applied their skills and helped the client overcome the objection.

How to handle sales objections

Focusing on addressing only the logical side of a sales objection tends to create more objections because the client's feelings haven't been considered or adequately considered

There are many methodologies for overcoming a sales objection but the one we have road tested for well over a decade and with great results for our clients is ARQA – FM. This is an acronym for Acknowledge, Repeat, Question, Answer, Feedback and Move on.

Acknowledge

It's important when you first hear an objection to offer no resistance verbally or non-verbally; in fact what you need to do is acknowledge it. By acknowledging you actively listen and respond to the client. This can be done through use of positive language such as "*I see*"... "*I understand*" and/ or non-words "*aha*"... "*hum.*" Positive body language can be the nod of your head, good eye contact or a slightly slight forward lean. This kind of communication will let the client know that you understand and can be the beginning of turning the situation around.

Many salespeople react to an objection and show their disappointment by becoming tense. Responding by acknowledging will give you the time to decide how you are going to think and act. You will also project confidence.

One last point about acknowledging: don't begin with the word *but* because it can be interpreted as dismissing what the client has just said. For example "...*but we provide better service.*"

Repeat

Repeat is to restate the client's objection using their words. This is particularly valuable when you are given a set of multiple or lengthy objections. When you repeat the objection change the client statement to a question to imply that you are asking for more information. Do this by using an uplifting vocal tone at the end of the statement. This will actively involve the client and ensure that you have fully understood the objection. For example the client might say "*You are too expensive!*" and you can respond with "*We are too expensive?*"

If you have missed any information or facts when you do repeat the objection the client will correct you. It is advisable to lead into the repeat, particularly with a lengthy objection, with the use of survival phrases. These will also project warmth and caring. For example: "*Sandra, to make sure I understand...*" or "*Please correct me if I have missed anything...*"

Because the client has been encouraged to correct you it is not uncommon for them to expand on the initial objection. This will provide you with more information and is the beginning of addressing the emotional side of the objection.

Question

This is where you can make huge inroads into not only fully understanding the objection but also allowing the client to vent any build up of frustration. Always begin by asking if you can ask questions. For example: "*Do you mind if I ask you a few questions to clarify my thinking?*" This is polite and will show that you respect the client's concerns. Ask mainly open questions so the client speaks freely and you will be able to isolate the real and related problems. Don't interrupt or anticipate an answer because you won't be actively listening. Once any frustration has been released the client will feel better and be ready to listen to your answer.

Sometimes the real objection can be only 2 or 3 questions deep. Through use of survival phrases you can accelerate the process. For example "*Would you mind if I ask why you see it that way?*"

Answer

Now that the client is receptive to your answer you must resolve the problem. With a multiple set of objections such as delivery, price and invoicing you may need to summarise the objections and again use survival phrases to ensure the client knows and feels you understand. Choose your answer carefully and aim to keep it brief.

Price objections can be challenging to answer. Whilst price is important it is not often the deciding factor. According to a recent survey in the US 14% of respondents put price first. Factors that rated higher and more important were confidence in the salesperson, product quality, selection and service.

A client will become agitated if you say things like, "*you only get what you pay for*" or "*quality costs more.*" These are clichés and annoying so focus on the price difference between your product and service and that of your competitor's. This is so the client's thoughts are directed to the smaller amount – the difference. For example the cost unit could be dollars per day. Alternatively you can compare results and/or quality; discuss potential drawbacks of the cheaper alternative; compare with the more expensive brands or quote additional value. Always know why your product is worth the price.

Feedback

Feedback is a respectful way of asking the client if they agree and are satisfied with your answer to their concern. For example "*Have I answered your question completely... Does that satisfy your concerns?*"

Move on

Once the client has stated that they agree and are satisfied with your answer it is time to move on to the next most logical action in your sales process. This could be to write the order details or conclude the sales interview and set a date for another appointment.

So: are sales objections good or bad? Well they are good in the sense that they help us to become better salespeople and bad because they can affect client relationships. Remember the next time you hear a sales objection don't take it as personal rejection but as a business refusal. Use ARQA FM to turn the situation around. And finally whether you have won or lost the business, review how you applied the sales process and how your style shifted. Seek constant improvement.



Kurt's expertise is in sales strategy, sales management development; group structured sales training and infield sales coaching. As a sales person he has successfully sold products and services in 4 major market/product segments: new product sales, consultative sales, relationship sales and retail. During his selling career he created sales records for three companies in two industries and won many other sales awards for outstanding performance