

OVERCOMING Sales Objections



By C.W. Miller

How important are your customers to your business? This sounds like a silly question because most of us understand that without customers, we have no business. So, it follows that the “sale” is critical to our business as well since the sale is what turns the average passerby into one of our customers. There are more books and articles available on sales today than you could absorb in a lifetime of study. Nearly every one of those will, at some point, discuss strategies for overcoming objections. Brian Tracy has said that “there is a key objection to every sale” that you must discover and overcome in order to make the sale. (Tracy 2004) Rather than providing a list of possible objections and responses, it is most important to examine how we might uncover that one key objection. In addition to uncovering that key objection, it is equally important to consider the relationship we form with potential customers and how that might impact the sales of today and those in the future.

Take the Continuing Education Quiz on page 61.

Peddler or Partner

Suppose the opening question was asked differently: Which is more important to you and your business, the sale or the customer? This question creates a bit of a paradox; for it seems there could not be a customer without the sale. However, placing the sale ahead of the customer often impedes the building of trust, stimulates objections, and actually undermines our ability to close the sale.

For years, I have heard and used the phrase “be a partner, not a peddler.” The premise of this approach is to focus more on building the customer relationship than on securing the sale. This in no way means that you do not need to know your product. It simply points out the need to connect with your customer. Some have argued

that relationships do not pay the bills and that is true. However, the income you seek to pay those bills can only come through a relationship with a customer. In fact, before you can influence or impact someone in any way, you must connect with them. In my talks and coaching, I often cite the following perspective, “I don’t care what you know until I know that you care.” As the great Stephen Covey listed for his fifth habit, “Seek first to understand, then to be understood.” (Covey 1989)

So, what does this “partnering” process look like? To start with, you must spend significantly more time asking questions and listening than talking about you, your services, or your

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products. The idea is to learn as much as you can about the customer, their wants, and their needs. Moreover, you demonstrate through your interest just how important that customer is to you.

The next critical consideration is to treat each person as an individual. Avoid stereotyping or pre-judging what kind of hearing issues or needs a client has before you begin talking to them. Another common mistake is to anticipate personalities or attitudes. As you show more interest in learning what makes them special, they will offer more insight into how you can best meet their needs. It is easy to fall into the product-driven trap where you focus on the price and features of various products. Specific features provide specific benefits for specific wants or needs. Understanding your product allows you to match product

features to specific potential benefits. By building comfort and rapport with your client, you can uncover the individual desires that call for certain benefits. Then you can match desired benefits to specific products. Customers make buying decisions based on the benefits to them.

Inside the Sales Process

To best understand the role of objections in the sales process, it helps to first look at how that sales process actually works. Every purchase we make is based on perception and occurs when the perceived value exceeds the perceived cost—when the “upside” is greater than the “downside.” Every objection is an idea that the cost is too high or value too low.

As stated earlier, value is determined by the extent to which something

meets our wants or needs and is very specific to the individual. Some people may value image or appearance over ability. Others may need strong relationships more than money. Determining what the client values may come early in the process of building a relationship, but sometimes the perception of value is less obvious. And, it may even lie in the subconscious and impact judgment without awareness.

A person’s perception of cost (the “downside” of a purchase) varies from person to person as well. When evaluating cost, we most often go directly to money. Actually, any discomfort or perceived future discomfort triggers the sense of cost. In the case of money, cost is measured by how uncomfortable one might be with what they may lack once the money is spent. This is significant because we

must be aware that any such sense of discomfort is seen as a cost. This could include the perception of more work, physical pain, mental anguish, lower self-esteem, or any difficulty with change. As with value, these perceptions may lie in the unconscious mind making them hard to identify and understand.

Emotional Hijacking

Most, if not all, buying decisions are made in the subconscious. (Lindstrom 2008) These evaluations of cost versus benefit are largely emotional in nature. Building trust and establishing understanding go a long way toward creating emotional comfort for the client. That said, emotional triggers buried in the subconscious can create overwhelming impulses to buy or stop the process cold in its tracks. Just as there are an incredible number of cited strategies for overcoming objections, there are an amazing array of tactics that savvy marketers and sales people can use to exert influence over others. In fact, many of us use them or fall victim to them on a near daily basis without ever understanding. (Cialdini 2009) Have you ever been at the store, gotten home and as you are

unpacking wondered why you bought something? Or perhaps, in a seemingly weak moment, you have agreed to do something and later wondered to yourself, “What was I thinking?”

One such tactic used extensively follows, what Cialdini calls, the Rule of Reciprocation. For example, a common use of this tactic occurs when you receive a request for a donation to some well-meaning charity that includes a gift. Perhaps the most common gift utilized is the address label. Another long standing one is the dime. Many of us have experienced these tactics so often and for so long that we are getting immune. Still, whenever I keep and use the labels or take out that dime, I can feel the tug – the sense of obligation. “The rule says we should try to repay, in kind.” (Cialdini 2009)

While these deeply embedded instincts are very powerful, they do not reside in our subconscious alone. The subconscious is a repository for the sum total of our experiences. I like to call it our “5 and 50”—everything that we have experienced from 5 seconds ago to 50 years ago. Every experience

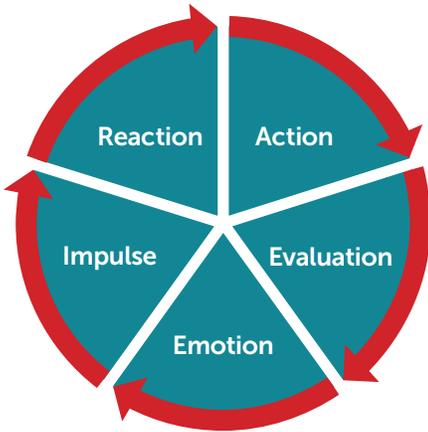
carries an associated emotion. Whenever a current experience is related to a recorded experience the associated emotion is recalled. That emotion can be strong enough to compel us to act in a certain way regardless of logic or rationale.

Fear is one of the most powerful motivators known to man. Because of its power and our familiarity with it, it’s a good example of how these evaluations can impact a buying decision. An easy example might be how the fear of being unable to pay next month’s bills might keep me from buying today even though one may want or even need the service. But fear may also create value. The product or service may somehow be connected to a driving need for an improved image. The fear of being considered weak or even behind the times may cause an overwhelming impulse to buy, even if one does not have sufficient funds.

These situations where emotion overwhelms the decision process are called emotional hijacking. (Goleman 1995) The hijacking follows a consistent pattern. Not only can it be triggered by a specific statement, action, or event; but it can reinforce itself and intensify the power of the emotional influence. *See Figure 1.* Every event or action that we experience causes some level of emotional trigger. When an emotional trigger occurs, our brain evaluates the situation to determine whether the situation is positive or negative (benefit or risk) and measures its relative significance. This induces an emotion of commensurate value and strength. The emotion, in turn, stimulates an impulse to some form of action. This action is based on what our subconscious deems consistent with our “5 and 50.” It is important

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Figure 1. The emotional Hijacking Cycle

to recognize that, while this process of analysis, decision and reaction can take some time when done consciously, it can happen in an instant subconsciously. These are the situations in which we react so quickly that we don't understand what happened or how we got there. This is the essence of emotional hijacking. Our evaluations and reactions are still our choice but no conscious thought went into them.

When looking at Figure 1, you will notice that Reaction and Action are together at the top. When we take the chosen reaction, the brain actually sees this as another action reinitiating the entire cycle. In this manner, when our reactions are consistent with the original emotion, that emotion can be triggered again and again growing in intensity. This is how something that happens in the morning can set us up for a "bad day." There is actually a good reason why our brains react this way. In the brain, emotional triggers are handled by the amygdala. The amygdala has the ability to override the entire brain including rational thought to trigger instantaneous action in case of emergencies.

The probability of threat is determined by comparing the current situation

to our "5 and 50." If it appears to be consistent with a previously recorded risk, signals are sent to the entire brain which release all the hormones necessary for immediate response. The problem with this cycle is that the current situation can be misinterpreted as a significant issue when, in fact, no real significance exists. These hijacks are not always associated with fear. Powerful emotions of joy and desire can trigger the same unconscious responses. Moreover, hijacks can vary in intensity. Some are readily discernible because of their severity. Others are quite mild, barely noticeable and still create an unconscious impact on decisions.

The Push

The emotional hijacking cycle has a profound impact on objections in two

ways. First, a client's objection is merely the verbal acknowledgement of an emotional hijack. More important, however, is how such hijacking may cause us to respond to objections.

To explain how this works, let me share a demonstration I use in many of my workshops which I call 'the push'. I have two volunteers face each other, touch hands and tell them to push. We can see additional strength being used as each tries to resist and hold their position. Then, I step in for one of them and repeat the process. However, I simply drop my hands when the push begins. Often my opposing volunteer ends up in my arms, but at a minimum, they stop pushing. This exercise demonstrates a critical aspect of hijacking. Whenever we feel pushed, it is our human nature



to push back. When we push back, it is human nature for our opponent to push harder. We then push harder, they push harder and so on. This exercise demonstrates the emotional hijacking cycle in action. The reaction to the push is a push back which is seen as a push stimulating another push back. The process intensifies as the pushes continue until something breaks the cycle.

I doubt that you get into many physical pushing matches with your clients, however, psychological pushes are common in human interaction. Marshall Rosenberg, PhD notes "...anything that people hear from us that sounds like an analysis or a criticism, or that implies wrongness on their part prevents us from connecting with them..." (Rosenburg 2012) These verbal miscues are what I call pushes. The inevitable push back comes in the form of argument, deflection, excuses and blame shifting. These defenses are usually accompanied by anger, resentment, loss of trust and a breakdown in the relationship.

When a client raises an objection, it often feels like a push. If that push hijacks us, we are likely to automatically respond with a push back. This, of course, will only get us a stronger objection and may lead to the loss of the client. It becomes imperative that we recognize when we feel pushed and take action to break our own hijacking cycle. The best way to do that is to consciously intervene in the space between the impulse and the reaction. See *Figure 1*.

I like to use what I call the ADD principle—Acknowledge, Disrupt and Distract. We must first mentally *acknowledge* that we are being hijacked. We then do something physical to *disrupt* the unconscious

flow of emotion. One effective option is to take a deep breath and blow it out strongly. Then we try to *distract* our amygdala by focusing on something contrary to the original evaluation. In the case of the objection it might be something like "How can I help this person and strengthen our relationship?"

In the long run, we will be best served by spending some time looking at situations where hijacking has been inappropriate and problematic for us. We can help ourselves by trying to better understand how these situations were mistakenly associated with a previously recorded experience. Doing this can help plant new experiences in our "5 and 50" that are readily distinguished and identified by the amygdala as not as threatening.

Handling Objections

So, now that we are focused on the relationship, our head is in the right place, and we are not hijacked by the objection—how do we handle it? First, we need to accept it for what it is. It is the acknowledgement of an emotional hijack based on discomfort. In many ways, it is no different than the impulse to buy. (Cialdini 2009). The discomfort may be based on many things. The client may lack trust in the seller. They may feel that the seller is too busy selling and doesn't really care about them. It may also be based on fear of future discomfort. They may also perceive something in the product, service, or process that is unconsciously and incorrectly associated with discomforting experiences in the past.

It is best to consider the objection in the same way we should look at complaints. The client is offering us an opportunity. It is a chance to better understand the wants and needs of

that individual. It offers a glimpse into the heart and mind and the possibility to establish higher trust. It gives us the opportunity, not only to build a stronger relationship, but to unleash our own positive spokesperson.

There is a lot to consider when looking for the opportunities within the objections. Are folks failing to see the value it holds for them or are they uncomfortable with the perceived cost? The objection you hear may reflect the true concern or be a cover for what is really hijacking them. Our job is to understand the objection well enough to speak to the true concern.

We must have a method for looking into every objection. It helps to think of every objection as a call for help. So, here is an acronym to serve as a reminder as to how to process objections: Answer the CALL—Care, Ask, Listen and Learn.

C — Care
A — Ask
L — Listen
L — Learn

1. Show them that you **care** about them and their concern. Thank them for letting you know they have objections or concerns. Show respect for their willingness to share that with you. Express a sincere desire to help them make the right decision for them.
2. **Ask** for more information to help you better understand the nature

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of their objection. “Why” is the most powerful word in the English language. In fact, there is a helpful term, “Why to the 5th.” It pertains to asking “why?” as many as five times to gain the greatest possible depth and insight into what is being said. Brain Tracy offers another way to probe for understanding. He likes to ask, “How do you mean?” (Tracy 2004)

3. However, it does no good to ask unless we are prepared to **listen** to the answer. This means active listening. Trying to decide what you are going to say next is not listening. Taking notes on what they are saying can show you care *and* improve your focus on the dialogue. It also helps to paraphrase back to them what you think you heard to ensure that you understand correctly.

4. Finally, **learn** from what you hear. What are the types of concerns folks have about your product or service and how can those best be answered? What special needs might this person have and how might you address them? What does this objection tell you about how you can improve? Part of this learning process should include research into solutions that have worked for others. This certainly includes other satisfied clients whose objections were successfully addressed. It also includes an open dialogue with your colleagues. What objections have they seen and how have those been satisfactorily addressed? What objections are being heard throughout the industry that can be addressed by real changes in approach, in the products or in the services?

So, what happens when you’ve taken the above steps and you believe that you understand the objections, you have demonstrated the specific value for them in terms of what really matters to them, you understand how they perceive cost and have done all you can to minimize that cost, yet they still object or want more time to consider? What is going on? Well, they still aren’t sure that the value is greater than the cost, are not sufficiently moved to action, or have subconscious fears of, what may appear to be, an impulsive decision. If this is the case, then the best response is to ask more questions. Try to see if this is a lack of understanding that can be solved with more information. If it is a lack of desire at this time, perhaps you can offer encouragement. There also is nothing wrong with giving them more time to reach their own comfort zone.



Some might suggest that this is the time to use some emotionally charged tactics. However, applying tactics that hijack them for the benefit of the sale will generally lead to buyer's remorse which may create more problems for you than that specific sale is worth. There is a difference between not seeing the need and not having the need. There is a difference between not understanding the value and a real lack of value to them. There is a difference between addressing fears and dispelling them as unwarranted.

Summary

In order to influence or have an impact on anyone we must first connect with them. When we care enough about our clients and potential clients to treat them as partners in the success of our business we establish lasting connections. The understanding gained from a strong relationship often increases trust, minimizes objections and enhances the ease with which objections can be addressed.

The entire sales process hinges on the client perceiving the product or service as having more value than cost. Cost can be seen as much more than money. Every individual sees value and cost differently. Only when we understand their perspective can we demonstrate more value or less cost. Most objections arise out of some form of emotional hijacking. The evaluation of value and cost is being made at a subconscious level and driven by past experiences. This can't be avoided. We can only seek a deeper understanding that allows us to address the hidden concerns.

Emotional hijacking often causes us to respond in ways that are counterproductive. We need to be aware of our own subconscious drivers, recognize when we are hijacked and slow down

to break the cycle. Most of all, we need to recognize when we feel "pushed" and not push back.

We need to accept objections as opportunities to gain insight into the client and our own performance. Care about the client's concerns.

Ask questions to gain clarity on the true nature of their objection. Actively listen to their answers. Learn what they need and what we can do to meet those needs. Our greatest challenge may be less about overcoming objections and more about understanding them. ■

C.W. Miller, the founder and president of Custom Training Concepts, has been creating high performance teams in a variety of industries for over twenty-five years. He is known nationwide for his inspirational



keynotes, thought provoking seminars and highly interactive workshops. He has authored over 100 articles and training programs dealing with human interaction, emotional intelligence, leadership and management. His focus on the human interaction skills of leaders has created positive impacts in health care, manufacturing, state agencies, education and the military, as well as in professional associations, non-profit, civic, and church organizations. Nineteen years of his career were spent in Chicago helping build a small

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IHS Continuing Education Test

Overcoming Sales Objections—article on page 17

1. Stephen Covey's fifth habit states, "Seek first to _____."
 - a. Sell
 - b. Overcome objections
 - c. Understand
 - d. Care
2. When relating to our clients we should seek to be a partner not a _____.
 - a. Peddler
 - b. Seller
 - c. Vendor
 - d. Friend
3. Partnering involves treating each client as _____.
 - a. An opportunity
 - b. An individual
 - c. A prospect
 - d. Other clients
4. Every sale is based on the relative value as compared to _____.
 - a. Price
 - b. Need
 - c. Cost
 - d. All of the above
5. Most buying decision are _____.
 - a. Made in the subconscious
 - b. Based on logic
 - c. Arrived at under duress
 - d. Carefully thought through
6. Emotional _____ is where emotion overwhelms the decision process.
 - a. Concern
 - b. Stress
 - c. Hijacking
 - d. All of the above
7. In the brain, the amygdala _____.
 - a. Controls emotional triggers
 - b. Has the ability to override the brain
 - c. Can be distracted by focusing on something else
 - d. All of the above
8. When feeling pushed, you should _____.
 - a. Push back
 - b. Not push back
 - c. Ask for help
 - d. Scream and shout
9. The acronym "CALL" stand for _____.
 - a. Create, Achieve, Live, Lose
 - b. Care, Ask, Listen, Learn
 - c. Comfort, Advise, Listen, Leave
 - d. Counsel, Argue, Lecture, Listen
10. Objections should be looked at as _____.
 - a. Arguments
 - b. Unnecessary distractions
 - c. Something to avoid
 - d. Opportunities

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OVERCOMING SALES OBJECTIONS

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Last Four Digits of SS/SI # _____

Professional and/or Academic Credentials _____

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(Circle the correct response from the test questions above.)

1. a b c d	6. a b c d
2. a b c d	7. a b c d
3. a b c d	8. a b c d
4. a b c d	9. a b c d
5. a b c d	10. a b c d

