

## 'I hate you'

Sense of humor can be best tool for hostile prospect

### Question:

The top executive of a prospective customer started our meeting by saying, "Derek, I hate your company. I will never buy from you." I was shocked. How do I negotiate past "no"?

### Response:

In sales, there is no one right way to handle a situation. However, thinking quickly on your feet, with sincerity and a sense of humor, will often earn you a seat at the buying table.

Your situation reminds me of a colleague who is the director of sales (DOS) for a mid-sized company. A new hire who reported to him secured an appointment with a prospect who was notorious for being belligerent. To support the new rep, the DOS decided to attend the meeting.

At the appointment, the buyer didn't disappoint them. He lived up to his reputation by immediately going into a tirade criticizing their company and their product. After four minutes of being clobbered, the DOS said to the buyer, "Joe, where's the love? We came here for love and all we're getting is grief. Where's the love?"

The buyer began laughing hysterically. That first year, they did \$ 2.3 million in business. The customer, while still a tough negotiator, never insulted them again.

A friend who is a seasoned rep with over 20 years in sales is a killer prospect.

His pipeline is always twice the size of the next highest producing rep. When meeting with a prospective customer some years ago, he encountered a similar situation. The customer began the meeting by saying, "Matt, I hate your company. I hate your product. And I hate you. There's nothing to talk about."

The rep paused for a moment and then said, "If we can get over this 'hate' thing, I'd like to review an idea I've come up. After researching your . . . I have an idea that I estimate, will save you between \$20,000 and \$50,000 per month depending upon the option you select. It's obvious now is not a good time to talk. When would be a better time to talk about this?" The customer looked puzzled. Moments after, he broke into a belly laugh and three months later, issued Matt a P.O. for \$40,000.

In each of these cases, the salesperson took a risk, but why not? It appeared they had already lost the sale, so why not try something different? And in both situations, their instincts coupled with critical thinking and creativity, worked to their benefit. I'm sure there are stories out there in which people have been escorted to the door for less.

Unfortunately, the issue at hand is that most sales people have not been trained in how to manage resistance. Companies say they offer sales training, but in reality this 'sales training' is in fact, poorly orchestrated product training; lots of technical information dumped into a hundred PowerPoint slides without any customer relevance to put the pieces together.

Deep down we all know that product expertise does not qualify someone for sales success. I've seen a lot of product marketing and engineering people transition to sales and fail, miserably.

A sales professional's performance potential extends beyond their product

knowledge. It requires a delicate balance between emotional discipline, creative thinking, confidence, communication skills, a sense of urgency, intuition and judgment. A deficiency in any one of these areas will contribute to a consistent shortfall in sales performance.

For example, if a sales person lacks confidence, their prospecting efforts will be inconsistent; they will avoid scheduling meetings with key decision makers, stumble during a high profile presentation, cave in at the bargaining table and won't ask for the business.

For you to turn this situation into a learning experience, develop a list of the most difficult situations you've heard about or could imagine encountering. Gather real-life scenarios from sales people both within and outside of your company. Ask them to describe to you the worst scenarios they have faced in their career, how they handled it and what happened. To gain further insights, asking the following question, "Knowing what you know now, how would you handle it differently?"

And don't stop there. Ask the buyers with whom you have a solid relationship with, to describe the horror stories they have heard from sales people or from other buyers over the years. Then inquire how they would handle the situation. Expect to gain a unique perspective.

In addition to the two scenarios detailed upon, here are five common objections sales people encounter:

1. I'm not interested.
2. I don't have a budget.
3. I'm satisfied with my current supplier.
4. I don't have time.
5. We're under contract.

Once you have gathered your initial list, block time to strategize and script how

you would respond. Be sure you have scenarios for each stage of the buying process; the initial meeting, the information gathering step, the presentation, the proposal, and terms of agreement. Resistance happens throughout the buyer/seller dance.

Memorize them. Close your eyes and go through a sort of a dress rehearsal in which you imagine yourself responding to even the nastiest buyer with ease. This creates muscle memory; an important advantage when you have to think quickly.

In sales, when you walk away from a situation knowing you missed an opportunity, because you didn't know what to do, it eats at you. If you only had more time to think. The stakes are high and when you are in front of a customer you have to be ready to perform. It's never about just gathering information – it's about positioning and closing the deal. That means you always do your homework before walking into their office.

Consider for a moment that a typical buyer sees 15 salespeople each week. Those

who fall into the category of being a hit and run sales person, meaning they are not competent and are only interested in securing a P.O., soon begin to feel like a bad cold that keeps lingering on. It's no wonder buyers become nasty.

But you don't have to get mad. Instead, get even. Be the standard by which all other sales people are measured. Be prepared, passionate, competent and add value. Position yourself as a strategic resource and expert. Gain brain share by being the first call when the buyer needs information or assistance. When you set the standard for being informative, responsive, professional and conscientious, your competition will have some very long days ahead.



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