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Say 'No' to 'No'

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In life, subtle conscious and unconscious decisions often have a profound impact. In business, one such decision is accepting “no” too quickly when in reality it’s the wrong decision for both parties. “No” can have multiple meanings from “No, not today” or “No, I am not sure” to “No, I am not the decision maker.”

Often, this two-letter word masks a stated, implied or yet-uncovered objection that, given enough time, could be identified and resolved and lead to a successful sale or outcome. Considering the amount of time, effort and money invested throughout most sales processes and endeavors, making a second or even multiple attempts to reverse a “no” decision makes good business sense, especially when a negative response rarely tells the whole truth. Throwing in the towel prematurely not only eliminates any chance of sealing the current deal, but often also closes the door to future opportunities with the same buyer.

Too often, however, individuals don’t have the tenacity and resolve to continue beyond the initial negative response. According to Marketing Wizdom Founder Robert Clay, research shows that only one in 50 deals are struck during the first contact or meeting and that 44 percent of salespeople give up after the first “no.”

Of course, not all sales opportunities are created equal. For this reason, cutting losses and moving on may be necessary to stay competitive. On the other hand, when an opportunity has the potential to provide a win-win for both the seller and buyer, accepting “no” without attempting to turn it around can be irresponsible from a financial and competitive perspective for both parties. Top performers understand this concept intuitively and realize perseverance can dramatically increase the probability of getting a “maybe” or even a “yes!” With proper analysis, planning and training,

anyone can learn how to rebound from a negative response and achieve a more positive outcome.

Eliminate the negative

Prospects or customers may reject an idea, product or proposition for a variety of reasons. They may come to the table with preconceived ideas, limited facts or misconceptions about the opportunity being presented. A fear of being locked-in once the deal is accepted can also elicit a negative response. Similarly, deep-rooted loyalty issues with another company, friend or a family member bidding on the job can also play a role.

Regardless of the reason, a negative response is a game-changer for the seller. At this point, salvaging the sale becomes the main focus. Although challenging, accomplishing this task is often doable by following these six steps:

- 1 Restate the buyer's objections without questioning their judgment.** Avoid hurting egos by showing empathy and understanding of the individual's initial response. Then, assume part of the responsibility. "Maybe I didn't communicate the opportunity with enough clarity."
- 2 Reframe the opportunity.** Clearly articulate to the buyer how his or her world would look if they embraced rather than rejected the opportunity. For example, "This approach will significantly lower your costs, increase quality, functionality and provide a competitive edge relative to your current situation."
- 3 Determine the true reason for the refusal of the offer.** Ask pointed questions such as, "If you had a magic wand, what would your ideal solution look like versus the one I suggested?"
- 4 Earn the right to do business with the buyer.** Provide greater detail about the opportunity so the prospect or customer will be confident all expectations will be met and/or exceeded. For instance, "We offer a 100 percent money-back guarantee on our work."
- 5 Compromise when and if possible and appropriate.** Place a lower bid on the job or offer another meaningful negotiating currency such as better terms, conditions or response times.

6 Be confident. Keep in mind with a sincere belief and passion coupled with professional persistence, the best solution and tenacity will increase the probability of success.

Think ahead

The best approach to any sales opportunity is to avoid receiving a negative response in the first place. That's why it is essential for sellers to understand their current positioning as well as the likelihood of the buyer's acceptance level/desire before asking for a significant commitment. This knowledge increases the probability of receiving a positive response.

When "no" happens, systematically reevaluate the experience and question the sales technique before moving on to the next opportunity. Carefully consider what was different about this encounter and why did the same or a different approach work in a similar situation? Develop future strategies by approaching every opportunity through the eyes of the potential customer. Would they see this as a good proposition? What outcomes should they expect, and why would they reject this opportunity? Overall, be prepared with informed and educated answers to counter every possible objection.

Given a second chance

When survival is dependent on developing a consistent flow of high-quality new customers, "no" can be a bitter and sometimes deadly pill to swallow. Yet, if the question is never asked, the answer is always "no." Because few things in life are truly absolute, turning a negative response into a positive one is almost always a worthwhile endeavor. Achieving this can be challenging and requires introspection, tenacity, preparation, the ability to listen, and a willingness to change course in mid-stream when necessary. But given a second (or third or fourth) chance to provide a buyer with a clearer vision and understanding of an opportunity will increase the possibility of future success for everyone involved.

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