

11.2: Objections Are Opportunities to Build Relationships

Learning Objectives

- Understand what a sales objection is.
- Learn how overcoming objections can strengthen a relationship.
- Understand when and why prospects raise objections.

You've been working really hard at school, and it's paying off. You're doing well this semester with a GPA right where you want it. Spring break is right around the corner, and you and your friends have been talking about going to Mexico. You even had an impromptu "fiesta party" at your place and even do some research about airfares and hotels; there are some great deals out there. You present your case to your parents and end with a strong "close" to seal the deal: "The timing is perfect since it's my senior year. I can book the flights tonight online." You thought you sold them on the trip when they say, "We're worried about you going out of the country without a chaperone." You are deflated, but you won't take no for an answer so you wait for a moment, let it sink in, then deliver your response, just like you planned. You have just experienced the fine art of overcoming objections.

Since you are constantly selling in your everyday life, you have also undoubtedly encountered objections: your friend doesn't want to see the same movie as you, your brother doesn't want to share the car, your parents want you home earlier than you would like. When you attempt to convince someone or "sell" him on your point of view, you are not always successful. But each time you "sell" your idea, you usually have additional information or a fallback position so that you can get what you want while meeting the other person's needs. You are probably more skilled in overcoming objections than you realize.

Occasionally in your sales career, you will encounter a situation in which you are able to close the sale directly after giving your sales presentation. Such a situation, however, is the *exception* not the *rule*. Objections are simply a natural outcome of the sales process. Each potential prospect has his own set of unique needs, and, though you may identify most of them during the pre-approach stage of the selling process when you do your research, you will not be able to anticipate all of them. After all, you are not a mind reader. Besides, if all it took to excel in sales was to deliver a perfect script, anyone could do it. But that is not the case. The essence of sales is handling objections and truly understanding how you can help your prospect meet her needs. It is a demonstration of your skills as a salesperson to find the opportunity in these objections, listen to your prospect, and then respond. So an objection is simply a question from a prospect that indicates that she wants more information. If she weren't interested, she wouldn't be asking questions. John Boe, "Overcome Objections and Close the Sale," *Agency Sales*, September 27, 2003.

The first myth to dispel is the assumption that objections are *bad* or an omen foreshadowing failure. On the contrary, resistance usually portends commitment. If a prospect is asking you questions, you can at least assume that he is interested in your product or service. In fact, in all likelihood, he already knows whether or not he needs or wants to make the purchase. Thus, the reason he is objecting isn't necessarily because your presentation failed to communicate the features, advantages, and benefits of your offering. Rather, he is objecting because he is seeking reassurance; he is on the fence of indecision, and he wants you to provide him with the incentive that justifies an immediate purchase. R. T. Edwards, "Power Selling," *American Salesman* 38, no. 3 (March 1993): 13. Supply your prospect with the right information, that is, show him why he wants to buy your product or service.

What Are Objections?

Objections, also called sales objections, are generally defined as prospect questions or hesitations about either the product or company. William C. Moncrief and Greg W. Marshall, "The Evolution of the Seven Steps of Selling," *Industrial Marketing Management* 34, no. 1 (January 2005): 13–22. While *objection* may sound like *rejection*, you should never assume that when a prospect asks a question or expresses a concern that you have failed to generate interest in your product or service. It is true sometimes that your prospect will object when he truly cannot or does not want to buy. Usually, though, objections mask—intentionally or unintentionally—a request for more information. They simply signal your prospect's level of interest and alert you to what actions need to be taken to bring the sale to a close. If your prospect expresses objections, consider them invitations to continue to sell. Furthermore, leverage these objections into an opportunity to continue to build your relationship with your prospect so that you can continue to create a positive influence on the buyer's decision. The fact is objections help you build your relationship and find the true reason for resistance. Think of objections as opportunities.

How Objections Build Relationships

As an analogy, consider asking someone out on a date for the first time. Even if you have hooked him in with a great pick-up line (approach) and dazzled him with your sparkling personality (presentation), he may still not be convinced that you are serious about him. Naturally, he might respond by playing hard-to-get. How you react will reveal to him your level of commitment. By allowing the relationship to grow slowly and organically, you demonstrate your patience, sensitivity, and sincerity. You establish a foundation of trust that eventually wins him over. On the other hand, if you respond by getting huffy and stomping off, he will probably be glad to see you go.

Objections as Opportunities

You might not keep track of objections in your everyday life (especially as they relate to dating). However, you may find it interesting to know that in sales, a prospect will say no an average of five times before he buys. John Boe, “Overcome Objections and Close the Sale,” *Agency Sales*, September 2003. That means that it’s more likely than not that you will experience a prospect who poses at least one objection: asking a question, requesting more information or time, or pushing back due to financial constraints. Without objections, you would have no way of knowing what a prospect is thinking, what concerns she has, or what barriers might be in the way of her saying, “Where do I sign?”

The fact is objections are an important part of the selling process. But thinking about *overcoming* objections might be the wrong frame of reference. The word “overcome” implies that you want to conquer, fight, or win (and, therefore, your prospect loses). Patty Morgan-Seager, “Handle Objections and Have Fun!” Multifamilypro, http://www.smmonline.com/Articles_handleobj.htm (accessed October 24, 2009). Instead, it’s best to think about objections as a perfect extension of the selling process. Think back to the steps of the selling process that you have covered so far: prospecting and qualifying, preapproach, approach, and presentation. Throughout each of these steps, your focus is on understanding your prospect’s needs and building a relationship based on trust. The same is true for this step: handling objections. This is all about learning more, finding common ground, and providing the solution that is best for your prospect. Objections and conversation help you better understand exactly what your prospect wants and needs. The bottom line is that you don’t want to avoid objections; you actually want to encourage objections and ask for them. According to the *Selling Power Sales Management Newsletter*, “Objections are not personal attacks; they’re gifts.” “Hug Your Objections,” *Selling Power Sales Management Newsletter*, August 15, 2007.

Consider Objections before They Occur

If objections are such a positive part of the selling process, you might be wondering how to be prepared for them; how to think about them; how to consider them even before you get them. Here are some strategies for preparing for the objections portion of the selling process that will help you build your relationship.

- **Understand your prospect and believe in your partnership.** If you did your homework at every step of the process so far and put together a presentation and proposal that really makes sense for your prospect’s business, you should be confident in the fact that you are a true business partner to your prospect. Objections lead to sharing and learning and the ability for you to make adjustments in your proposal that will help your prospect manage her business. Janaé Rubin, “Overcoming Objections” *Folio*, November 2005, 80–81.
- **Remember WII-FM.** WII-FM (What’s In It For Me) is the radio station that everyone listens to. Never lose sight of your prospect’s buying motivations. If time is mission-critical to his success, know what you can deliver and by when. If national reach is important to your prospect, be sure you address it in detail in your proposal.
- **Understand risk.** Understand what your prospect considers a risk (e.g., time, money, changing suppliers). When risk outweighs reward in the mind of your prospect, chances are she will find a reason not to buy. Understand her risk factors and address them head on. This will allow you to employ a “risk-removal” strategy, rather than a selling strategy. Jeffrey Gitomer, *Little Red Book of Selling: 12.5 Principles of Sales Greatness* (Austin, TX: Bard Press, 2005), 153, 157.
- **Anticipate objections.** Think about every possible objection you might get—before you get it. That means making a list of every objection before you even make your presentation and building in the response into the presentation. Paul Karasik and James Benson, *22 Keys to Sales Success* (New York: Bloomberg Press, 2004), 119. Your success as a salesperson will largely be determined by your ability to anticipate and handle objections. Felice Philip Verrecchia, “How to Identify and Overcome Objections,” *Edward Lowe Peerspectives*, August 11, 2004. Write down all the possible objections and go back and incorporate them into your presentation. Then, give your presentation to a friend or colleague and see if they can find any additional objections. Although you can’t make your presentation “objection proof,” you can anticipate and be prepared for most objections that will be raised. Felice Philip Verrecchia, “How to Identify and Overcome Objections,” *Edward Lowe*

Peerspectives, August 11, 2004, . Anticipating objections helps you be responsive, rather than reactive. Keith Rosen, “Respond to your Prospect’s Objections,” AllBusiness.

- **Raise objections first.** Since you have done so much preparation and you understand and have a good relationship with your prospect, be proactive and be prepared to raise objections first. When you raise an objection, you actually turn it into a discussion point rather than an objection. It shows your prospect that you are thinking about the sale from her perspective and helps you build the relationship. Janaé Rubin, “Overcoming Objections” *Folio*, November 2005, 80–81.

Objections should not intimidate you or dissuade you from continuing the selling process. Rather, you should consider objections opportunities to learn more about your prospect’s needs. The more you understand about your prospect’s needs, the greater your ability to determine how your product or service can satisfy them or how your product or service *can be improved* to satisfy them. Remember, selling is about solving problems. The solution that you offer will demonstrate to your prospect whether or not you truly understand his needs and whether or not you have his best interests at heart. By embracing your prospect’s objections and handling them effectively, you will inspire his trust, confidence, and most important, loyalty. As a result, both you and the prospect benefit.

✓ Power Selling: Lessons in Selling from Successful Brands

Handling Objections: All in a Day’s Work

At iCore Networks, a leading VoIP (voice over Internet protocol) provider, handling objections is an everyday learning experience. Sales reps gather at 8:00 a.m. sharp every day to discuss successes and failures from the previous day and role-play overcoming objections and then put what they learn to work in the field all day. The commitment to coaching and being in front of customers works for the company and its sales force: the average compensation for a first-year sales rep is \$92,000. Mike Hofman and April Joyner, “A Salesforce Built around Cold Calling,” *Inc.*, September 1, 2009.

Why Prospects Object

While prospects may voice their objections in different ways, just about every objection comes down to one of four reasons: no or not enough money, no perceived need, no sense of urgency, and no trust. John Boe, “Overcome Objections and Close the Sale,” *Agency Sales*, September 2003. As a selling professional, you have control over each one of these objections. But it’s too late if you address it only when the prospect objects. In other words, you are actually handling objections at every step of the selling process. For example, you can avoid the price objection with thorough qualification during your first step of the selling process. Joan Leotta, “Overcoming Doubts: The Road to a Sale Is Blocked by the Prospect’s Doubts,” *Selling Power* 20, no. 2.

If a prospect does not have a perceived need or high sense of urgency to buy your product or service, your challenge is to understand the drivers of his business. Every business has challenges, and your role from the time you qualify the prospect is to understand your prospect’s “pain points,” those issues that cause problems for him and his company and present barriers to growth. If you truly understand your prospect’s business, it is much easier to present a solution that addresses the perceived need and reasons to buy it now. “There is no reason for buyers to buy today unless we build in that sense of urgency and give them a reason to buy today,” says Dana Forest, director of sales at Simons Homes. William F. Kendy, “An Uncertain Situation: How to Kick-Start the Hesitant Buyer,” *Selling Power* 27, no. 9.

Many objections are raised because the relationship between the prospect and the salesperson is not fully developed. business-to-business (B2B) selling is dependent on trust. If the trust is not there, or the relationship is not yet fully developed, it can be difficult for a prospect to make a change or finalize the purchase. If this is the case, prospects will frequently delay or stall before making a decision, which can be an attempt to derail the sale.

When Prospects Object

While you may not be able to predict your prospect’s every objection, you can at least predict that *he will object*. Knowing when to expect objections is the first step to handling them: you will eliminate the chance of appearing caught off guard or unprepared to discuss the product or service that you are selling.

Of course, it is possible that the prospect may object at any time during your sales call—from introduction to close. Still, there are specific points in time during the sales process where these objections are more likely to occur: when you are first trying to make contact, when you are making a sales presentation, and when you are attempting to close the sale, or make a trial close. As you learned in Chapter 10, a trial close includes any attempt to close the sale but usually focuses on asking the prospect’s opinion:

“What do you think about the turnaround time?” A trial close may occur at any point during the selling process. In other words, if the prospect indicates that she may be interested in making the purchase, it is an opportunity to make a trial close.

Objections are likely to occur at several points during the selling process, including the trial close. It’s best to be prepared for objections at every step in the selling process, including the qualifying stage. Know your prospect and be ready to incorporate objections into your sales presentation. Jeffrey Gitomer, “Objection Prevention & Objection Cure,” video, May 18, 2009.

Setting Up the Appointment

Imagine that you are in the middle of a cold call and you are attempting to set up an appointment to meet your prospect. You have barely uttered your name when your prospect exasperatedly grunts, “Don’t waste your breath. I’m not buying anything you’re selling.” How do you respond?

This scenario is meant to illustrate the fact that you may meet resistance as soon as you try to establish contact with your qualified prospect. Hopefully, you will have reduced the rate of this problem occurring by properly qualifying your prospect beforehand and preparing for the most common objections. Nonetheless, anticipate resistance from the beginning.

Using the questioning technique is a good way to engage your prospect in conversation and learn more about what can help her run her business.

Video on Questioning Techniques



Prospect:	No thanks, I’m satisfied with my current supplier.
You:	May I ask you who you are currently using?
Prospect:	We work with Advanced, and they have been doing a good job.
You:	Advanced is very good at what they do. Did you know that Symone offers a money-back guarantee? In other words, if you are not completely satisfied with the conversion or the service, we will completely refund your money. It would be worth thirty minutes of your time to learn more about it. How does Tuesday at 8 o’clock look?

When you are giving a sales presentation, very often the prospect will ask you questions as you go. It is unlikely that your prospect will wait until you have finished your presentation before asking you questions. However, the experienced salesperson will actually encourage questions throughout her presentation since she knows that responding to them supplies her with precious time that she can use to further demonstrate how her offering can solve her prospect’s problem. As a rule, you will want to acknowledge objections as they arise. If you feel that the objection will be addressed at a later point during the presentation, you may postpone your response, but you will need to communicate this information to your prospect. For example, you might say something like the following:

Prospect:	I’m a little concerned about the financing.
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You:

I'm glad you brought that up. I'm going to address that in the next slide, which I think will provide you with the information you are looking for.

During the Presentation

Otherwise, he may think that you are avoiding the question and that you are trying to hide something, are unprepared and do not know how to respond, or are simply not listening—all kinds of impressions that you do not want give.

During the Trial Close

Recall from Chapter 10 that you can test your buyer's readiness after your sales presentation by employing a trial close. If your prospect hasn't expressed any opinions at this point of the selling process, then the trial close is your opportunity to seek them out. If your prospect responds positively to it, then congratulations! This response indicates that you have skillfully executed each step of the selling process: creating rapport, gaining the prospect's trust, listening, identifying his problem, and presenting products and services that will provide him with solutions and value. "Telemarketing Tips about Overcoming Objections," September 25, 2009. From this point, you can move to the next step of the process, the close.

If, on the other hand, an objection is raised, then you will use this time to respond to it. Always remember that an unacknowledged concern lessens the opportunity for a sale. Responding means fully listening to your prospect's concerns and objections, asking clarifying questions to determine whether or not you understand them, identifying the types of objections they are, and meeting them. To be clear, "meeting" an objection does not mean saying what you think the prospect wants to hear; you should never make a promise about a product or service that you cannot deliver. How you *meet* an objection will depend on the type of objection you are dealing with. Simply put, meeting the objection means returning to the presentation stage, elaborating on your product's capabilities, and emphasizing in what ways they benefit your prospect. For example, assume you are making a sales presentation for a software product to a B2B client and she presents an objection about the timing of the installation.

Prospect:	This is really an interesting option for us to pursue, but we are planning on launching our service much sooner than your timeline suggests. I'm not sure your implementation timing will work for us.
You:	When are your planning on launching your new service?
Prospect:	We want to have everything in place and tested in less than forty-five days.
You:	So it sounds like the biggest challenge is the installation date. I can talk to our head engineer and see if we can change the installation date. If we can guarantee installation within thirty days, will you commit to the two-year agreement?

In this example, it's important to note that the objection led to the prospect sharing information that was not previously known: the date of the launch. This is valuable information that the salesperson can use to potentially overcome other objections and provide service that will help the prospect meet his goals.

After you think you have responded to and have overcome all your prospect's objections, you can proceed with another trial close. If you determine that your prospect has new objections, then you will want to repeat the response process. You may have to use a trial close several times before moving to a close. Keep in mind that the sales process is not perfectly linear; rather, it is iterative. Depending on the prospect and the product, it is perfectly appropriate to repeat steps.

When you are certain that you have addressed all your prospect's objections and that he has no further objections, move to the close. Don't be shy! You have earned this right and, besides, your customer expects you to!

In the same way, you should never allow yourself to become defensive or antagonistic when a prospect makes an objection. Since your goal is to build and sustain an enduring customer relationship, you will want to handle your prospect's objections with as much delicacy as possible. For example, avoid responding to objections with statements beginning with "but": "But our company is better" or "But we offer more value for your money." Keith Rosen, "Respond to your Prospect's Objections." It's better to

respond in a positive way, such as “We are the only company that offers a guarantee on our product. If you’re not satisfied for any reason, we’ll refund your money. Our goal is for you to be more than satisfied—we want you to be delighted.”

Key Takeaways

- **Objections** are a normal part of the selling process and are not a personal reflection on you but rather an opportunity to learn more about how the customer is evaluating the potential purchase.
- **Objections** actually help build relationships because they give you the opportunity to clarify communication and revisit your relationship with the prospect.
- The best way to handle **objections** is to be thorough in every part of the selling process from qualifying through the preapproach, approach, and presentation.
- It’s a good idea to anticipate **objections** by reviewing your presentation, writing down every possible objection, and building it into your presentation.
- It’s especially important to understand risk from your prospect’s perspective so you can create a risk-removal strategy.
- Prospects object for four reasons: money, no perceived need, no sense of urgency, and no trust.
- Prospects may pose **objections** at any time, but especially while setting up the appointment, during the presentation, and during the trial close.

? Exercise 11.2.1

1. Go to a local health club and go through the sales presentation as if you were going to join. What objections would you have for the salesperson? Which objections did the salesperson address to your satisfaction? Which objections did the salesperson not address to your satisfaction? Why?
2. Try to sell your professor on conducting class as a study period next week. How would you prepare for the “presentation” to make your case? What are some objections you might receive? How might you handle the objections?
3. Identify the three most common points at which objections occur in a sales presentation. Provide an example of each one in your everyday life.
4. Assume you are selling real estate and you are calling a prospect to set up an appointment. How would you handle an objection that she doesn’t have the time to meet with you?
5. Assume you are a financial services salesperson. You have presented an investment strategy to your prospect, and he has objected because he is concerned about the state of the market. How would you handle this objection by making him feel more comfortable with the risk?
6. Contact a salesperson for a local business and ask him how he handles objections. Share your findings with the class.

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