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## You win some, you lose some

Most sales articles are about winning; this is an article about losing. Sales people hate to lose, but even the best of us lose far more often than we win. In fact the top producers hear “NO” a lot more than the average rep. They also hear “YES” a lot more, simply because they pitch more people and close more often than their less ambitious peers. By the way, this is why we make the big bucks. I know sales people with high school educations that bring home bigger checks than their lawyer neighbors. Why is this so? It is simple economics, the basic concept of supply and demand. There is always a shortage of people with the self-esteem and psychic toughness to put up with constant rejection. Since losing is such a big part of what we do, how we handle loss is an important factor in our success, here are some thoughts on the “dark side” of selling.

### **Embracing reality**

Someone once said the only time losing is more fun than winning is when you're fighting temptation. Losing is tough, but if you work in sales, you have to get used to it. By definition sales is persuading others to buy your product. You need the cooperation of the client to be successful. There is no 100% foolproof way to get others to accept your ideas; the human mind is just too complex. I have seen many people who thought selling was an easy way to make a living and failed because they couldn't handle the rejection. They didn't understand that sales is a sifting process, we have to talk to a lot of prospects to identify the people who have both a need and the inclination to buy advertising. Paradoxically, embracing loss is necessary for success in sales. Even Vince Lombardi who famously said, “Winning isn't everything, it is the only thing!” had to admit, “If you can't accept losing, you can't win.” A person who can't accept loss will do everything to avoid it. The only sure way to not lose is to not play the game at all. Risk averse reps will avoid making calls because they might be rejected. They fail to close because they are afraid the customer may say no. They take an easy renewal rather than recommend a better program to a client. In short, they stop being a sales person. Good sales people never learn to like losing but they learn to accept it as part of the job.

### **Resilience**

Winston Churchill defined success as “going from failure to failure without losing enthusiasm.” Mental toughness enables a sales person to go from rejection to rejection without losing their edge. We all come up with our own ways to deal with rejection. I carefully recorded my sales activities especially my closing ratio. I knew how many “no's” I heard before I heard a “yes.” When rejected, I knew

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that I was one step closer to making a sale. This kept me going to the next call. I had a rep on my team with a theater background. She saw herself as playing the role of a successful salesperson. When a prospect said no, they weren't rejecting her personally; they just didn't like the character she was playing. Monitor your "self talk" and avoid negative thinking. It is easy to think, "today is not my day, I'll start fresh tomorrow," that tomorrow will never come. Don't put the blame on the prospects. If you begin thinking "all of my prospects are idiots," why should you make any more calls?

### **Responding to loss & rejection**

We cannot control everything that happens to us but we can control our reaction to events. As a young rep I had this Ralph Waldo Emerson quote taped to my sun visor, "Win as if you were used to it, lose as if you enjoyed it for a change." This is sort of the 19th century version of "Never let them see you sweat." Remaining poised and in control when faced with rejection accomplishes two things.

First, it will leave the prospect with a positive impression of you as a confident professional. This will help you on the next attempt. Second, your behavior affects your thoughts; you can "fake it till you make it." If you act confidently you will become more confident which will cause you to be more successful. I have always felt a responsibility to my prospects. If I am calling on a customer at the end of a hard day or after a particularly rough call, I can't let my presentation suffer. My 4 p.m. prospect deserves to see a presentation delivered with the same energy and enthusiasm as my first customer of the day. My job is to help them and I can't do that if I approach them with a long face and a dull sales pitch.

### **Leaving the door open**

When you determine that you are not going to get the sale, you need to develop a good exit strategy. Remain professional and thank the customer for their time and for considering you. I am in the habit of doing this in a hand written thank you note. This automatically sets you apart from the typical sales person (Less than 4% of the US Mail is hand written correspondence) and makes a memorable statement. I always include this statement: "Please let me know if there is anything I can do for you in the future. I will contact you from time to time when we have any programs that would benefit your business. Thank you again for your time and for considering my publication." If your competitor drops the ball or the customer's situation changes they are very likely to give you another chance.

### **Learning from loss**

Every loss is a learning experience. When a prospect tells you no or an advertiser decides to go another route do a little "CSI-ad sales." Think about

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your interactions with the customer. What would you do differently next time? How did the customer react to what you said and what you presented to them? Few customers share the real reason for rejecting your proposal, most people will try to let you down easy by saying they “don’t have the money” or some other similar story. They almost never give you the real reason they did not buy. By asking a few questions to draw out the customers you can learn a lot about your sales presentations. I’ve found that customers are much more forthcoming and honest once the issue has been decided.

### **Make a last ditch attempt**

After making a number of attempts to sell a prospect with no success, it’s time to put them on the back burner and concentrate on better prospects. Before I give up on a prospect I like to make one final call. I thank them for their time and tell them that I will have to move on to other accounts. Before leaving I tell them, “Ms. Customer, I feel like I let you down. I know my publication could help your business but I haven’t been able to communicate that to you. Is there anything that I could have shown you or said that would have convinced you? I would appreciate your feedback.” After saying this, just sit down and wait for an answer. This doesn’t work all the time but it does work. This puts the ball in the customer’s court and sometimes gets them to reveal their own hot buttons. Since they have already told you “NO”, what do you have to lose?

### **Conclusion**

The sales business is not a wind sprint. It is a marathon. Even the best sales people face rejection every day. What sets top performers apart is that they get better on every call. They learn something on every call; they see every call as an opportunity to polish their skills. Eventually they start hearing “YES” a lot more. This is why professional sales people “WIN” on every call no matter what the outcome.

*This article was written by Jim Busch of the Pittsburgh Pennysaver.*

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