



UNIT 12 Tactics for Overcoming Sales Objections

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Identify the steps you can take to build your credibility.
- ✓ Identify the objections that you encounter most frequently.
- ✓ Develop appropriate responses when prospective buyers throw you a curve.
- ✓ Learn ways to disarm objections with proven rebuttals that get the sale back on track.
- ✓ Learn how to recognize when a prospect is ready to buy.
- ✓ Identify how working with your sales team can help you succeed.



Unit 12

Tactics for Overcoming Sales Objections

Building Credibility

If you want to build your credibility with other people, you have to first of all be **credible to yourself**. This means that you fully support your products or your services before you try to convince someone else that they have value. If you believe you are selling a good product or offering a valuable service, you won't have much difficulty selling that product or service to other people. Your body language (open, confident) and your tone of voice (positive, enthusiastic, pleasant) will tell them that you believe in what you are selling.

The **first impression** goes a long way to establishing your authority. You should have a clean vehicle; polished shoes; trimmed, clean fingernails; clean, groomed hair; no heavy scent or body odor; and preferably only one bag.

Be aware of your **body movements**. Don't fiddle with your hair, tug at or adjust your clothing, play with your beard or mustache, or otherwise fidget. Fidgeting detracts from your credibility and can demonstrate nervousness or a lack of confidence in your product.

If you have a **demonstration**, this can add to your credibility when it is well done. Make sure that you ask permission first and know exactly what you are doing in terms of your delivery and the technology that you are using. A demonstration that goes wrong sells nobody.

If you have **testimonials**, you can have several written up and ready to pass out, or you can have the names of people willing to be called. Please make sure you ask their permission first and get the correct contact information for them. Keep all testimonials or contacts up-to-date.



You must believe that your company, your products, and your services are the best. What makes you believe in your products and/or services?

Can you think of other ways you can build your credibility?

Your Competition

Let's take a moment to talk about the competition. Why talk about the competition? Because sooner or later every person in sales has to be aware of the fact that others are offering similar products and services. Often there isn't a great deal of difference between the products and services you offer and those of your competitor down the street.

Your client may also decide there are alternative solutions to their dilemma. Your client may decide to use internal resources as a solution to their problem, or they may decide to do nothing at all, and use their budget for something else entirely.

Learn about what your competitors are doing and consider other alternatives to your client's problems. Then forget about them. Concentrate on your client, and on the strength of your own products and services.



Who are your competitors?

What are their strengths?

What are your products and services?



What are their strengths?

In sales circles, we often talk about our USP: our Unique Selling Point. (This is sometimes also referred to as the Unique Selling Position.) If we can differentiate our products and services from everybody else's by knowing what is unique and special about ours, we already have an advantage over many people who are in sales today.

Can you identify the USP for each of your products or services?

Critical Communication Skills

Active Listening

If you want to be prepared for handling objections, it helps to be an exceptional communicator. In terms of sales, and in building those important relationships, being a strong communicator means being a good listener and being good at asking questions so you understand your clients and their needs.

We can probably all use some help at being better listeners. Our workdays are often filled to the brim and we can be very distracted with interruptions. Make sure that all of the distractions you carry on you (phones, PDAs, etc.) are turned off so that you are able to give your full attention to your client.

How do you feel when someone shows interest and enthusiasm for what you say? Flattered, of course, that someone thinks you've got something to say! An interested listener makes you feel appreciated, confident, and good about yourself.

On the other hand, most people see poor listeners as rude individuals who are disinterested and unwilling to acknowledge other people's opinions, feelings, and experiences. You are far more apt to get the sale by listening carefully to what the client has to say, than you are to act the part of the slick-talking salesperson who doesn't give the client a chance to talk. Listen and learn is a good motto for everyone in sales.

Active Listening

Active listening means that we make a conscious decision to try to understand things from the speaker's point of view. It includes letting the speaker know that we are listening and that we have understood what was said. This is not the same as **hearing**, which is a physical process, where sound enters the eardrum and messages are passed to the brain. Active listening can be described as an attitude that leads to listening for shared understanding.

When we make a decision to listen for total meaning, we listen for the content of what is being said as well as the attitude behind what is being said. Is the speaker happy, angry, excited, sad...?

Responding to Feelings

The content (the words spoken) is one thing, but the way that people feel really gives full value to the message. Responding to the speaker's feelings adds an extra dimension of listening. Are they disgusted and angry or in love and excited? Perhaps they are ambivalent! These are all feelings that you can reply to in your part of the conversation.

Reading Cues

Really listening means that we are also very conscious of the non-verbal aspects of the conversation.

- What are the speaker's facial expressions, hand gestures, and posture telling us?
- Is their voice loud or shaky?
- Are they stressing certain points?
- Are they mumbling or having difficulty finding the words they want to say?

Demonstration Cues

When you are listening to someone, these techniques will show a speaker that you are paying attention, providing you are not acting them out.

Physical indicators include making eye contact, nodding your head from time to time, and leaning into the conversation.

You can also give **verbal cues** or use phrases such as "Uh-huh," "Go on," "Really!" and "Then what?"

You can use **questions** for clarification or **summarizing statements**. Examples:

- “Do you mean they were charging \$4.00 for just a cup of coffee?”
- “So after you got a cab, got to the store, and found the right sales clerk, what happened then?”

Tips for Becoming a Better Listener

- **Make a decision to listen.** Close your mind to clutter and noise and look at the person speaking with you. Give them your undivided attention.
- **Don't interrupt** people. Make it a habit to let them finish what they are saying. Respect that they have thoughts they are processing and speaking about, and wait to ask questions or make comments when they have finished.
- Keep your **eyes** focused on the speaker and your **ears** tuned to their voice. Don't let your eyes wander around the room, just in case your attention does too.
- Carry a **notebook** or start a conversation file on your computer. Write down all the discussions that you have in a day. Capture the subject, who spoke more (were you listening or doing a lot of the talking?), what you learned in the discussion, as well as the who, what, when, where, why, and how aspects of it. Once you have conducted this exercise 8-10 times, you will be able to see what level your listening skills are currently at.
- Ask a few **questions** throughout the conversation. When you ask, people will know that you are listening to them, and that you are interested in what they have to say. Your ability to summarize and paraphrase will also demonstrate that you heard them.
- When you demonstrate good listening skills, they tend to be **infectious**. If you want people to communicate well at work, you have to set a high example.

Powerful Questions

There is probably no better way of getting your client or buyer involved in the sales presentation than to ask questions. Just make sure to ask only one question at a time and give the other person enough time to respond.

Let's look at some specific types of questions.

Closed vs. Open Questions

Closed questions can be answered with a single word or two or a simple yes or no. They can begin the closing process in a conversation, or provide confirmation of a detail, but they don't usually lead to gathering more information. Where most people need more practice is asking the **open question**, those where the listener is given a chance to explain, to tell how they feel about an issue, or offer suggestions.

Open questions give us more information because:

- They encourage other people to talk
- We get opinions and ideas from others

- They can help us determine if people have interpreted what we say correctly
- They can help us arrive at consensus much more readily

Good open questions include:

- What is your opinion?
- How do you think we should solve the problem?
- What would you do in my shoes?
- Tell me more about...

Note: Be very careful about “**why**” questions. All too often these questions sound like accusations, and the listener immediately becomes defensive.

It is **easier to build relationships** with potential customers if we become skilled at asking questions that give us more information about that person and their wants and needs. The questions help us find common ground with someone, show the person we are interested in them, and we put the emphasis on them rather than us.

Good **customer-focused questions** can include:

- What do you think we can do about this?
- What would you like me to stop doing?
- Would it be helpful if I...?
- Supposing we were to...?
- Help me understand where you're coming from?
- Let's set a time when we can talk about the changes we're prepared to make.
- I'm prepared to... Would that ease the situation?

Clarifying Questions

Listen very carefully to what the client is saying. Clarify any implied or unclear statements. If someone says “This isn't exactly what I had in mind,” you might say, “Tell me what you were thinking of.”

Asking questions to clarify statements greatly decreases your chance of making a verbal blunder or promising more than you can deliver. First ask yourself, “What is this person not saying?” and then ask the other person directly.

Here are some examples:

- I'm not exactly sure what you mean. Can you go into more details for me?
- From what you are saying, I have the impression... Would I be right or wrong?
- I'm not sure I understand what you really need.
- Let me see if I understand you correctly. You are going to ...
- From what you've just said, you've decided to...

Use questions:

- To find out what your client wants and needs
- To deal with objections before they get in the way of a sale
- As a way of being prepared for your next sales presentation
- As a way of engaging your client



Observation Skills

A keen ability to observe your surroundings and better understand a situation is another useful skill to have. **Pay attention** to the appearance and behavior of the individual you are meeting. These characteristics can be a rich source of clues for learning about the other person. We learn much of what we need to know about other people by observing them. When we observe, we collect the non-verbal information they present to us. From these observations, we can make some inferences about their energy levels, how they are feeling, and their readiness to say yes to the sale.

Here are some other things we should be aware of.

Body Movements

Is the person exhibiting open, relaxed movements, and making eye contact, or are they fidgeting during your presentation? Are their arms crossed or is their body turned away from you? While closed or turned away body movements do not necessarily indicate a closed mind or disinterest, pay attention to these clues.

Facial Expressions

Notice whether they are looking you in the face, have an alert expression, and appear relaxed. Signs you have talked too long or haven't engaged their interest might include yawning, rolling eyes, or taking peeks at their watch. Indications they are uptight about something usually include a tense or worried look on their face, and whether their hands are relaxed or busy.

You should know that generally the higher up the corporate ladder people go, the less they smile, so don't be put off by a stern visage. Your ability to connect with the right people (those that make the buying decision) will lead you to the decision makers more often if you are involved in business-to-business selling.

As for you, try for a pleasant expression rather than a lot of smiles.

Grooming

Careless attire or lack of grooming could be an indication this person is unimpressed by himself, by his organization, by his job, and perhaps by you. On the other hand, everyone will expect your grooming to be impeccable.

Read People

You may notice that someone is having a hard time sitting still and has a lot of pent up energy. Engaging them in the presentation is one of the surest ways of keeping their interest high. Someone else may make comments or suggestions that indicate a practical nature. Make sure you give them the practical aspects (features as well as benefits) of whatever you are trying to sell. Someone else may like to engage in a bit of small talk before getting down to business, and others want you to leap right in. The more you meet people and are interested in them, the easier this becomes.

Posture

Relaxed or tense? Ramrod straight or stooped? We do make some assumptions based on posture. While it may be dangerous for you to make assumptions, make sure your own posture would make your mother proud.



Handling Customer Complaints

You represent your company and your products and services. Customers want to know you will be there for them when they need you, and that you will go that extra mile to help them when they need you.

Just as important as making the sale is following up afterwards with your client. You can present with confidence when you know there are no customer care issues not dealt with from a previous interaction.

Find Complaints and Fix Them

Get in the habit of finding any complaints your customers may have and fixing them before you go back to the client for another sale. Sometimes we run a mile from customer complaints. We have the attitude that a customer complaint is a bad thing and a mark against us and our products or services. That isn't so.

A customer complaint indicates there is **dissatisfaction** somewhere. You can make yourself look like a hero to that client by rooting out the dissatisfaction and fixing it.

Every time you find dissatisfaction, make a note of it. When you are making your next sales presentation you can mention the client, and their dissatisfaction, and explain how you were able to take care of it. That is far more impressive to most clients than saying that all your clients are 100% satisfied all the time. (However, don't mention that client by name unless you have their permission to do so.)

Think about your present clients.

Do you call them after the sale to see if they are satisfied?

If you don't make the call, why don't you?



If you do make the call, what are some of the things you have learned from it?

Can you give some examples of customer complaints you have fixed?

What have been the results?



Overcoming Objections

What are Objections?

Dealing with objections sometimes feels like the salesperson's worst nightmare. However, when you are prepared and know your products and services, responding to objections can be another way to reinforce the value of your offerings.

Objections are really a technique that the buyer uses to slow down and make sure he or she isn't rushing into the sale. If you have no objections at the end of your presentation, it's entirely possible that people weren't listening, weren't interested, or weren't buying.

When you hear an objection, consider it as an emotional response to your presentation instead of outright rejection. The client is interested enough in your product or service that they have made a connection, even when that connection is portrayed to you through an objection.

Think of yourself when you are about to buy an expensive item, or for that matter, when you are deciding which size of milk carton to buy. You know that it's a little cheaper to buy a larger quantity than you need, but do you want a big jug of milk in the fridge? What if it goes bad before you finish the jug? When you buy a large item, do you have the same kind of thoughts?

When an objection is made, consider the opportunity you have. The client has not said no to you; they are expressing interest by making objections and asking questions. This is your chance to really shine by managing those objections.

Attitude Check!

When a client raises an objection (or several of them) it is important to stay with them as a sales professional. The objection itself is not a "no" and so it is up to us to help the individual through any difficulties so that they reach a point where they are ready to make a purchasing decision.

When handling objections:

- Try to anticipate objections and deal with them early on in the relationship.
- Help the client find their own answers to their objections. Ask questions and artfully direct the client to identify the answers without sounding pushy or manipulative.
- Remember, we rarely believe what someone else tells us, but we'll believe what we tell ourselves!
- Remember that an objection is a sign that the client is interested in buying, and not a sign that they are going to say no.

Handling Objections

Universal Strategies

Here are some tips that you can apply to all objections:

- **Listen:** When your client is objecting, hear him or her out. Don't leap in too soon with your response. Make certain you are clear about what the objection truly is by asking open ended questions.
- **Acknowledge:** Summarize and/or paraphrase the objection back to the buyer, to be sure you are both on the same page and to acknowledge that they have raised a valid point.
- **Respond:** Think of this as another opportunity to sell the features of your product or service and put it in a good light. Avoid being defensive.
- **Ask for feedback.** Ask questions like, "Have I been clear enough," or "Are there still some questions you'd like to ask?"

Then, move on to the next point or ask one of those direct questions to nail the sale.

Example

Interaction		Notes
Mrs. Jones	I really like your product, but I'm not sure I'm comfortable with the service plan that is required.	
Salesperson	I understand that you're reluctant to commit to our company for several years, especially when you haven't dealt with us before. A five year service plan seems like a big commitment.	Here the salesperson is validating Mrs. Jones' statement and re-phrasing her objection to ensure he understands her concern.
Mrs. Jones	It sure does.	
Salesperson	What we're actually offering is peace of mind. Any widget you purchase, from any company, will need to be serviced once a year. With our service plan, that service is included. We'll even call you when it's time for your appointment, so you don't have to worry about remembering service dates.	Here the salesperson is responding to the objection. He is even using it as an opportunity to enhance the product's value and describe the selling features.
Mrs. Jones	That sounds convenient.	
Salesperson	It really is – I have one for my own widget! Would you like the three year, five year, ten year, or lifetime plan?	Here's the direct question that propels the buyer into action.

Specific Strategies

In addition to the basic plan we've outlined above, there are some other techniques that you can use depending on the situation.

Name	Description	Example
Be Curious	Ask them why they didn't buy. (Use this technique as a last resort only.)	"I really thought this product was a fit for your needs. Can you let me know why you decided not to buy?"
Boomerang	Use their objection to weaken their point and reinforce your point.	Customer: "This widget is way too light." Salesperson: "It is remarkably light, isn't it? We've started using a lighter, more durable metal. We've found that it's much safer."
Can You Clarify?	Ask the customer for more information before responding to the objection.	Customer: "I would never buy this product. It's not built to last." Salesperson: "I'm interested in why you think that. Would you mind explaining that further?"
Certain Closure	Offer to resolve their objection if they make the purchase.	"If I get the author to autograph this book, do we have a deal?"
Deflection	Avoid the objection. Use this one sparingly, and make sure you're polite.	"That's an interesting point. Now, let me show you the colors this model comes in."
Disagree	Politely and assertively disagree with the customer, but make sure you have facts to back you up.	Customer: "Acme Widgets doesn't require anything like this." Salesperson: "In fact, Acme Widgets does also require a service plan, although theirs is quite a bit more expensive."

Name	Description	Example
FFF (Feel, Felt, Found)	Empathize with the customer, tell them how others have felt, and tell them what they have found.	"I understand that you feel that this plan is a big investment. Others (including myself) have felt the same way. However, they have found it really gives them peace of mind."
Reframe	Interpret their objection as something other than an objection.	"I can see this isn't making sense. Sorry – let me put it another way."
Show Your Hand	Ask the customer to list all their objections at once.	"It sounds like you have a lot of concerns. What else is on your mind?"

Pricing Issues

Of all the objections sales people hear in the run of a day, price is often the most common one and usually the most difficult one to handle.

In practice, price is rarely the true outstanding issue. When you don't know much about what you are buying, you buy price. Part of your job as a sales professional is to educate clients about what they pay for when they buy your product or services.

In order to avoid this objection, we find that honesty is the best solution. During your presentation, you can bring up the issue of price and openly ask the client whether they remain interested. Try something like, "Ben, I'm going to tell you now that I think our product or service will be helpful for you. However, I'm going to let you know that although we aren't the most expensive option out there, we are not the cheapest either. I always like to point that out so that it does not surprise you later. Knowing where our prices fall, does it make sense for us to continue?"

Instead of being tempted to automatically drop your price, here are some options to manage this objection:

- If you can, **find out in advance what their budget is** and then offer them products and services accordingly. One advantage of this approach is that you will create a proposal that meets their budget, which makes it more attractive. The disadvantage is that you may have left money on the table. However, a subsequent sale (once they realize how valuable you are!) can open that additional opportunity to you.
- You can give them the **pricing in layers** of options: the platinum version, the mid-range version, and the economy version. Frequently the client will pick the mid-range (and sometimes they'll even pick the platinum range), but rarely do they like the image of their company buying the economy version.

- Use a **differentiator** if you have one. Yes, your fee may be higher than that of the competition but you can demonstrate the added value the client gets when they choose your product/service. This works when you do indeed have a feature or benefit that puts you in a competitive position. For this one, you have to do your homework ahead of time. You want to be prepared with your USP and know what the competition can offer as well.
- **Make it easy to say “yes.”** Suggest a payment plan or a lower up-front cost with the final payment after the product/service has been delivered.
- Once they state their objection and you answer it, ask them if they have other concerns. Then answer the next one and ask again. The idea here is that the first objection they raise may not be the real objection that they have. You will need to ask skillful questions to **get at the heart of the matter**.

There are some things that you should always emphasize when dealing with this objection.

- The value of ownership versus the cost of purchasing
- The value of the service versus its cost
- The value of long-term benefits versus the up-front costs
- Benefits rather than features

Do you have other ways of handling pricing issues?

If you get tongue-tied every time you have to talk price, practice until you can get it right. You want to sound relaxed, confident, and in control; not uncertain, tense, and fearful.

Buying Signals

How will you know when your client is ready to buy? It's not an exact science, but some signals will be more obvious than others:

- The buyer leans forward and becomes more engaged.
- The buyer begins making more eye contact.
- The type of questions the buyer asks changes from questions about the product or service to the details of delivery.
- The pace changes: it slows down or it speeds up.

Are there other signals you have noticed?

You can often rely upon your own intuition as well. If you have understood what the client was looking for, and you have presented your solution to the point where all the buyer's questions have been answered, you should be in a good position to look your client in the eye and say: "What do you think? Are we ready to do business?"

This still leaves the response in the hands of the buyer. He or she should not feel they are being railroaded. At the same time, you have asked for their business. If they say they aren't ready yet, you can probe to find out what else they need. This is really another type of objection, so let them explain what is holding them back, respond to their concerns, and try moving forward again.

Closing the Sale

Closing Techniques

Remember that you can't make a buyer do anything, including making a decision to buy. Besides, trying to force somebody to do something they don't want to do is not only unethical, but it may work against you in the long run.

Textbooks will give you all sorts of suggestions for closing the sale. However, if you have two or three that you use and use well, this can work in your favor. If you have too many techniques that you think might work, you may come across as unsure and indecisive. Use what works for you. Remember, whether the answer is yes or no, find out why.

If you presently have no strategies at all, try these.

Direct questions such as:

- Are we ready to move ahead on this?
- When can we get started?
- Shall I write up the order?

The Ben Franklin Approach

Take a sheet of paper, divide it in half, and write up the pros on one side of the sheet. Then you invite the buyer to write up the other side with cons. This close can be effective for the undecided buyer who just needs to get everything in perspective. However, use it with caution. If you get the sense the buyer doesn't want to do this, drop it immediately.

The "Leave It with Them for the Weekend" Close

Whether it's a new puppy, a photocopier, or a TV, leaving the product with the buyer for the weekend is an option that often works. They get to try it out on their own and pretty soon they are coming up with their own reasons why they should buy this.

Persistence Pays Off

While you don't want to become a pest, you also don't want to assume a "no" today is a "no" for a lifetime. Some salespeople will tell you they expect five rejections before they get the green light. While that may or may not be the right number of rejections to expect, do expect rejections. Learn from them. Then use what you've learned when you go back to try again.

You can also use the "no" client as a source of referrals. Although they are not buying from you, they may know someone who can use your product or service and be willing to refer you to them. It can't hurt to ask.

Thank You Notes

Never underestimate the power of the thank you note. If you get the sale, send them a note thanking them for their order. If you don't get the sale, send them a note thanking them for taking time to meet with you.



Top Fifteen Activities That Make You Successful at Closing the Sale

1. You've done your homework. You know your products and services and your potential client or buyer.
2. You arrive just a bit early, looking calm and professional.
3. You are pleasant to the person at the reception desk.
4. You appear confident but not cocky.
5. You are comfortable making a bit of small talk and then shifting easily to presentation mode.
6. You are a good listener, asking questions and letting the client take the lead, until it is time for your presentation.
7. Your presentation is interactive and is planned to take up no more than two thirds of your meeting time, so that the client can ask questions throughout.
8. You bring up any objections you can anticipate and respond to them without being asked.
9. You probe for further objections and respond to them as they come up.
10. You sound enthusiastic about your products and/or services.
11. You observe changes in behavior that tell you the buyer is ready. Then you ask a closing question.
12. If you are successful, you finalize the details. If you aren't successful, you find out why and respond by answering their objections.
13. You try closing again. If you are successful, you finalize the details and complete the process.
14. Whether you have been successful or not, you thank the buyer for their time and exit smoothly.
15. If you set up a thirty minute meeting, you do not go over the appointed time. If the customer has lots of questions or the conversation goes off track and it looks like the meeting will go longer, ask permission to answer them and extend the appointment, or whether you should get back to them at another time.



Personal Action Plan

I am already doing these things well:

I want to improve these areas:

I have these resources to help me:

As a result of what I have learned in this workshop, I am going to...	My target date is...	I will know I have succeeded when...	I will follow up with myself on...

Further Reading:

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