

Handling Objections . . . The Beginning of the Chess Match

Now that you are masterful at how to get past the gatekeepers, be they human or technology-based, what happens when you actually reach your prospect on the phone and he or she is resistant, or says things that sound a lot like trying to get rid of you?

There are strategies you can use to handle whatever objections a prospect might raise. Part of all of them is about listening for what the prospect is really saying or asking, and part is keeping your focus and being unstoppable. Either way, you have to make the calls to even hear the objections, but as we saw before with phone fear it is easy to avoid making the calls. Your preparedness to handle objections and know ahead of time how you will respond to a predictable set of possible objections will allow you to make calls with confidence.

Myth: you will be less afraid [to pick up the phone, have the meeting] if you are more prepared.

Reality: you will only become less afraid by doing it more often . . . you don't get less afraid by being more prepared, you simply become more prepared by being more prepared.

However, you DO need to be prepared to handle objections in the business development context.

You will need to handle objections in two situations:

1. On calls to get appointments
PURPOSE: to get a meeting scheduled (not to identify specific coaching or consulting needs)
2. In a sales meeting
PURPOSE: to listen for what their problem is, and show how you can help them solve their problem through your services (and get a second meeting or a next step commitment).

There is a finite set of objections . . . what are they? What do you hear most often from the people you are calling or meeting with? I've started the list for you. Add other frequently heard objections below:

- Not interested
- I'm not the person you need to speak to
- No budget for that
- We already use someone for that
- We handle that in-house . . . our HR department does that
- We had a bad experience with an outside consultant
- Just send me some information
- I'm too busy, I can't talk now
- I'm not available (when you suggest a date & time)
- Call me again another time
- We don't use coaching here (or consultants, or outside trainers, or whatever)
- You're not local, we want someone who is local to our headquarters
- This is not something we can take on right now
- You are an unknown quantity to us, you've never worked with us before

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Now, plan your responses. What will you say to each of the objections above? Many of the objections you'll face can be addressed with some version of the following responses:

"I'm just calling to make an appointment, how's Tuesday at 10?"
and

"You know, a lot of my current clients said that until they saw [fill in the blank]" (see box: Typical Objections and Responses)

Remember your objective in each context. Either you are simply trying to set up a meeting, or, if you are already in a meeting, you are trying to listen for what the problem/challenge is that your services can solve. *Keep your purpose in mind.*

Know how to hear in their objections what they are *really* saying. Listen for what they are not telling you:

"I don't have a budget for that this year" or "that seems really expensive" really means that they don't yet see the value in what you can do for them or how you can help solve their problems.

"We don't need that right now" really means that you have not yet uncovered what their problem or hot issue is ... you may be talking about leadership coaching or succession planning and leadership may not be what they see their issues to be ... perhaps they have a problem with attrition and they are not seeing how attrition is a leadership issue. Or perhaps they are focused on talent management issues and not seeing the application of coaching as an intervention into managing and developing the organization's emerging leaders or current leadership bench strength.

"We already work with someone who does that" really means they don't yet see how your services are distinct or unique from what they believe they already have ... explore further. Offer examples of how your services complement other coaches/consultants, or share how you've worked in partnership or collaborated with other consultants within organizations like theirs.

"Can you just mail me a brochure?" really means "I have no idea what you can do to help and I need to get off the phone." This is your cue to set up a meeting and get off the phone. You might say, "I'd rather bring it to you in person and talk to you about the work I've done with N firm (as long as N firm is similar to them either in industry or size) and how I was able to help them produce X results or solve Y problems. How's Monday at 11?"

In a meeting, people won't often come right out and tell you that they don't find value in what you are trying to sell them, they instead will couch it in terms of budgets or timing or another smokescreen. Talking about coaching or consulting is abstract and hard for them to understand, and even when they are savvy users of coaching or consulting services, they do not always see the link. You have to find a way to talk about results in terms of anecdotes of how you helped

someone (or some company) like them resolve a situation or a problem they are also facing. Couch your message in how you can help them solve their problem based on how you helped someone like them handle a similar issue.

So, what do you say when faced with these objections and you have already ascertained the meaning behind the objection? Here are a few sample responses for you to try. Play with these, try them out, and see what shifts or opens up for you. Ultimately, the goal is to get fluid enough with your ability to handle objections on the fly so that you won't need to use something scripted like the examples below and you will allow your natural personal style to shine through.

Worksheet: Overcoming Objections

Objections are part of the journey. See them as evidence that you are making progress. They are a natural part of getting to "yes". If you are prepared in advance to handle and overcome them, you will sail smoothly through the call. There is a predictable and finite set of possible objections. Explore them and prepare your responses in advance. Identify and expect the various "no's" you could possibly run into. They are likely to be some variation on the themes below; but please use this worksheet to capture the objections most relevant to your particular business. Then, plan your responses to each one.

Not interested

Too busy

Wrong person

No money

Not available

Relationship with competitor

Send me info.

Call another time

Others:

Tip Sheet: Typical Objections and Responses

IF THEY SAY:	YOU MIGHT RESPOND WITH:
Not interested	A lot of our current clients said that before they saw the value that our service brought to the communication issues in the firm. I'd like to come by and talk with you about a few relevant examples so you can see if it would make sense for your firm. Are you available Tuesday at 9?
I'm not the person you need to speak to	Really? What do you do? [Listen to their reply and look for your opportunity to say:] We really should get together. How is Tuesday at 10?
I'm not the person you need to speak to (reprise)	With whom should I speak? Can you introduce me?
We use a competitor of yours	A lot of our current clients also use competitors. Our services complement theirs and I'd like to come by and talk to you about how we've worked with our competitors to jointly serve our client needs. Does Tuesday at 3 work for you?
We don't use coaching services	A lot of our current clients said that before they saw the 500% ROI that executive coaching generated for them. I'd like to share those results with you. Can I come by Tuesday at 9?
We don't have a budget for that	A lot of our current clients said that before they saw the cost savings that resulted from using our services. I'd like to come by and talk with you about how we have helped our clients achieve significant savings. How's Thursday at 11?
We had a bad experience with an outside consultant	We really should get together. Are you available on Friday at 1 so that I can come by to hear about your experience and to demonstrate how we will provide you better service in the future?
Just send me information	I would be happy to do so, but there is so much that I could send, I'd like to make sure I have a better understanding of which of our materials would be most relevant to you. Why don't we get together to discuss it on Wednesday at 2?
I'm too busy to talk now	I'm just calling to schedule an appointment. Can you and I talk on Thursday at 3?
I'm not available then	Is [a specific date and time two weeks later] better for you?
Call me another time	That won't be necessary, I'm just calling to schedule an appointment. Can you and I talk on Thursday at 3?

Always follow your response to any objection with a proposed date and time to meet. It will encourage the prospect to consult his or her calendar. If the date and time you proposed is not an option, counteroffer another: “Is Monday at 3 better for you?” “Does Thursday at 9 work for you?”

And don't forget to thank the prospect for his or her time.

At some point, you will encounter somebody who just keeps throwing you objections. After responding to 2-3 of these objections, you might discern that the prospect is really not a good prospect for you, at which point you can choose to hang up and try another person on your target list. It is okay to be willing to walk away from these calls ... remember, it is all a numbers game. Don't spend too much time being attached to any one prospect. Keep on calling for other appointments. Don't take it personally if they don't want to meet with you. It could be an issue of timing. Keep them on your target list and try again in a few months if you still think they are a good prospect.