

## Get Dumped Early – and Sell More

When I was dating, I hated getting dumped. Even when I knew deep down that she was right in wanting to split, I'd fight it and try to save the relationship because I hated the rejection. I was also lousy at being the 'dumper' which meant I was involved in several fruitless relationships that went on far too long.

A lot of sales relationships are like that.

The trouble starts with the first conversation. If the client voices obstacles – even significant ones – the tendency is to defer them as long as possible in the hope that as the relationship grows the client's obstacles will disappear. We kid ourselves with the delusional ego-driven belief: "Once they really get to know me (and find out how truly wonderful I am) then these issues will just fade away!"

Most sales processes leave 'overcoming objections' as the penultimate step – further entrenching the principle of leaving the difficult stuff until as late as possible. It's almost as if they are held-over deliberately as a challenge for your brilliant closing skills!

- This is wrong. To build a viable client relationship in today's environment takes more energy and expertise than ever before. This is because:
- - There are more people involved in the decision-making process than ever before – exacerbated by the Global Financial Crisis.
  - There are more stakeholders for the decision-makers to satisfy than ever before.
  - There is more information available to the decision-makers than ever before; which, ironically, often makes decision-making harder

Because it takes so much effort, the attention should be on identifying the obstacles early – so you can make a realistic assessment of your chances of success. You may still decide to take the risk – or to go ahead as part of some broader strategy - but at least you're doing it with your eyes open. The reality nowadays is that most sales relationships are entered into by the salesperson, if not with their eyes closed, at least with rose-coloured glasses on. You are supposed to qualify new clients, but the temptation to add another to your pipeline means that hope overrides realistic analysis.

Think about how much time you spend on proposals that came to nothing: the ones where you looked back and if you were really honest you'd admit that you didn't have much of a chance in the first place. Imagine if you could take just part of that time and put it towards prospecting?

What you should be doing is introducing topics in the early part of the relationship that unearth any potential obstacles further down the track. You might ask about:

- The change that this will involve
- What resistance there will be from the staff
- What problems they had last time they installed a new system as complex as this
- How much (staff) time they are willing to commit to the implementation and ongoing training

This will have one of two outcomes:

1. You don't get the sale – which you probably wouldn't have got anyway, it just would have taken a lot longer.
2. You win the sale – and it happens in a faster time because you have advanced the process.

Either way, you impress the client with your integrity and initiative. By doing the unexpected, you will create a positive memorable experience for the client which means that although you might not win this project, you'll certainly be one of the first asked for the next one.

This is just another application of the 'fail fast' principle. Many smart businesspeople are forgoing long-term planning because they believe that markets change so fast nowadays that long-term marketing planning is becoming irrelevant in some industries. Some markets move so fast that by the time that market data is analysed and provided, the market has changed. So, these suppliers work on a 'fail fast' principle: experiment constantly, take new offers to market, keep the ones that work and dump those that don't. The secret to this formula is to identify early those that aren't working – to fail fast.

As explained earlier, the logic behind this is irrefutable. So, if it makes so much sense why do we do it? Why do we hang on to customers long after we should have parted ways, keep chasing deals that we know we have less and less chance of winning? Is it just to give us a larger client portfolio and something to talk about at Monday's sales meeting? Well, partly, yes; but the real reason is lack of confidence in our pipeline. The fear that if you lose this one, you might not be able to replace them. If this applies to you, be honest with yourself and put aside time to fill your pipeline. And what will force you to do something about it is to lose a few deals.

So, get dumped early. It's good for the relationship...and it will be good for your overall sales results.

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