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# Customers respond better to low-pressure method

Denver Business Journal - by [Garry Duncan](#)

Americans may be the most individualistic of any culture in the world and American buyers love to make choices. Choice is empowering; taking choice away creates feelings of being victimized.

Think of a time when an event occurred that left you no choice. An extreme example would be theft of a personal item or even a traffic accident caused by someone else.

Forced decisions by a pressure-type salesperson also can create negative feelings of victimization and resentment. The old adage that people "love to buy and hate to be sold" carries a lot of merit, especially in more complex and long-cycle selling. Studies have shown that closing hard and frequently actually hurts larger complex sales.

Reduce defensiveness and protective mechanisms by giving your prospect a comfortable way to tell you "no." No is a choice the prospect wants and without it, people can feel trapped. Feeling trapped or cornered stifles communication. Once communication stops, you have limited chances of making a sale. You always have a chance if your customer still is willing to talk. No one likes arm-twisting, but they do like choice.

There are multiple ways to use choice and empower your buyer throughout the sales process. When you hear answers you don't like, avoid saying, "Yes, but ... "

First, focus on listening and gaining clear understanding. Only then will your prospect consider listening to your response. Otherwise, it seems their choice to be heard has been taken away.

Use choice by avoiding leading questions. Leading questions can feel like a trap.

For example, "Do you want the red or the blue?" or "Do you want three or four?" leaves the feeling of no way out. The result is a protective mechanism in the form of stalls, excuses and hidden objections, all barriers to real communication.

Neutral or skeptical questions are the best. Asking a prospect what color they're considering (neutral), how many they want or what time is good for them is a better way.

When customers ask you to call back, inquire what you should do if you can't reach them. You also can ask how their assistant will know to put you through. If they offer to call you back, ask what you should do if you don't hear from them.

People often have good intentions but also make commitments they don't realize they can't keep. Asking "What should I do if ... " causes contacts to pause and become consciously aware of the commitment they're making. It also creates choice, and people like to have the feeling of being in control.

Other situations to ask "What if" questions include:

- "What if your partner doesn't like it?"
- "What if the budget isn't approved?"
- "What if the committee wants to stay with the current vendor?"

"What if" questions empower decision-makers by helping them feel safe and having a choice in how they respond. They also enable us to gain more information.

When someone initiates a request for literature or information, the real challenge is getting the follow-up appointment. When the request is being made by a decision-maker, our surveys indicate they often avoid committing to an appointment because they don't want to feel the pressure of a personal sales call.

Remove their defensive posture by telling them if they invite you in, it will be their choice at the end of the call if they'd like to continue or end the process. Either way, you get a decision and they feel in control.

To identify decision processes before giving quotes and proposals, ask a "What happens next?" question. "Let's suppose I give you a proposal and you like it; what would happen next?"

Old-school practitioners would say, "If you like it, will you buy it?" or "If I can do that, will you commit?"

In a market of increased competition and with the need for strong alliances, that kind of pressure doesn't contribute to building a trusted advisor relationship. The differences may be subtle but are significant.

The same results are achieved with less pressure and greater comfort. You move the sale forward by helping them identify the next step and then work through obstacles and decisions.

When encountering a potential problem or obstacle and your customer position is unclear, a simple "How should we proceed?" or "How should we handle this?" opens the door to discussing solutions and avoids the risk of proposing an unwelcome solution.

By bringing out concerns and issues early, credibility increases and obstacles are addressed sooner.

It's a myth that bringing up perceived problems creates problems. A simple "I am feeling ... " or "I am thinking ..." or "Is that something I should be concerned about?" is soft enough to get obstacles on the table and get them addressed without creating a new problem.

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