

Why You Should Take Sales Rejection Personally

By John Chapin

All of us have heard, pretty much since week one of our sales careers... don't take sales rejection personally. You know the mantra: "They're not rejecting you, they're rejecting your product or service." I have to admit, I agreed with that for my entire 31-year sales career until a recent experience changed my mind.

About two weeks ago I was calling insurance agencies to let them know about a sales seminar I was doing for one of the local State Insurance Associations. Typically this is a very warm call where I simply state my name, the name of the association I'm doing the seminar for, which they usually have a very good working relationship with, state who the seminar is for, the ultimate benefit to the target audience, and let them know I'm sending them an e-mail with the details. This takes about 15 seconds. The call is a layup because there's no real sale involved, I'm simply e-mailing information about a seminar that offers a large benefit to the target audience. Every call I'd made in the past, about 1200 of them, had gone fine, but on this day, one particular call did not. When I finished speaking, the person on the other end of the phone said, "Thanks for the offer, but I'm all set." This was not a normal response and it threw me off for a second. My brain did a quick scan for possible reasons for the prospect's answer and the most obvious was, he doesn't have a need because he doesn't have any agents (the target audience) working for him. I responded immediately with, "Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't realize you didn't have agents." He said, "I do. But they know everything." I was instantly taken aback. In fact, I was downright offended. My intense reaction caught me by surprise because it's far from typical for me. Any type of rejection usually rolls off my back. I responded with, "You're kidding, right?" His reply, "Nope, they know everything."

I then launched into a series of questions and statements, breaking about five or six rules of selling. "I have a brand new agent who did \$16,000 in *commissions* his first six weeks in the business. I also have a 73 year old, 48 year veteran agent, who doubled his income in 9 months. I'm the top insurance sales trainer in New England and your people are all set? They know everything? Let me ask you, what do they carry in their hands into a cold call? Where do they park in a client's parking lot? Are they getting through the gatekeeper to the decision maker in major accounts 95 to 98% of the time?" You know what he came back with, don't you? Right. "Thanks, I'm all set."

I know, consider the source and 'win the battle, lose the war.' This person obviously wasn't my market because he didn't believe in training and improvement. For some reason though, none of that seemed to matter to me in the moment. In addition to breaking the five or six rules such as: Rule #1: Agree, and Rule #2: Ask questions versus throw a bunch of stuff on the wall and hope something sticks, I became completely unglued. I didn't care that I was being combative and

argumentative, another broken rule. All I could focus on was: how dare he dismiss *me* with such a backhanded, brush-off response such as: “I’m all set.”

As I regained my composure and debriefed after the call, one thing became crystal clear: I was *so sold* on my seminar and its ability to help any and all insurance agents, that I took the rejection personally. I also realized that the personal rejection I felt after that call was like rocket fuel. I was now like a man possessed. I was extremely motivated to call as many people as possible. I imagined that many of them would be his competitors who would then use my techniques against him. I also imagined everyone buzzing about how good my seminar was and somehow it would get back to this prospect and he’d realize what he missed. A little crazy maybe, but remember, emotion is not logical. And nothing motivates like the right emotion. The personal rejection I felt was almost the same as if someone told me I wasn’t good enough, or there was something I couldn’t do. Whatever it was, it lit a fire in my belly that carried me for about three days and frankly, whenever I need a little motivation even two weeks later, I think about that call.

The advantages of taking sales rejection personally

Advantage #1: It strengthens your resolve.

This is about the motivation that I mentioned above. Think about the things in your life that mean the most to you: family, friends, being a good example for your kids, perhaps your faith, other causes that are important to you, or proving yourself to others. These are all things that you take personally and they are all things you’re willing to fight for and in many cases probably even die for. This fight and belief is one you want to have about your product or service if you are going to go out and get beat up and rejected. The average salesperson calling on a major account gets rejected 11 times before they get an appointment. If you don’t have a ton of motivation and resolve, how are you going to persist and get through the 11 rejections?

Advantage #2: It strengthens your soft underbelly.

When I looked more closely at the premise of not taking sales rejection personally, something occurred to me. It seems as though “not taking things personally” is simply a way to protect one’s fragile ego. While it’s true that a healthy ego is important in sales, it’s also important to have a strong ego, in other words, an ego that doesn’t fold like a lawn chair or cheap suitcase when times are tough. As a result, if someone is able to take rejection personally and have the strength of ego to endure the impact of that, it means that they’ll not only have the motivation to face the rejection necessary, but they’ll also be strong enough to thrive in both sales and in life. In short, taking rejection personally will serve to toughen you up.