



**Joe Bannon**, Senior Vice President, Global Marketing and Brand Strategy at 5MetaCom, has over 40 years of experience in agricultural sales and marketing, and currently works with B2B companies on brand strategy, internal alignment and sales training.



**Pause**



**Answer**



**Redirect**

In previous issues of *Groundwork*, we discussed sales prospecting and communicating value. In this issue, we address one of the toughest obstacles to selling: customer objections.

Objections can occur any time you're calling on a potential customer. "If I'm a sales rep spending 10 or 11 months calling on somebody and getting to know that customer, I could end up with 20 objections over that time," says Joe Bannon, Senior Vice President, Global Marketing and Brand Strategy at 5MetaCom. He advises that the ability to respond effectively to customer objections will depend on how well you've gotten to know the farmer, so you need to rely on all of the knowledge you gained while you were prospecting and demonstrating the value of your products (see previous articles in this series).

Joe recommends handling objections using a process called **P-A-R: Pause, Answer, Redirect**. The first step – pause – is the most critical, because sales reps need to listen to the customer and give them time to state their objections. Joe advises against jumping in and offering more information, because you might not get to hear their real question. He says that top sales performers pause for two to three seconds when a customer raises an objection, while poor-to-average salespeople tend to interrupt and interject their response without hearing the full objection. "People who answer the question too fast sometimes answer the wrong question," Joe says. Instead, he recommends pausing before saying, "So let me make sure I understand what you're saying" or "Can you tell me more about that?" Pausing shows the customer you care and understand their concerns.

Joe gives sales reps the same advice his dad – a salesman – gave him: "God gave you two ears and one mouth. Use them in that order." He says that was great advice, and he still makes sure to listen more than he talks.

When responding to objections, knowing what matters to the customer is key. Joe offers this example: If the customer is highly technical and they tell you, "I don't think your seed is as good as what I'm using," you might be tempted to talk about your outstanding yield, but they might be more interested in technologies that offer insect protection or herbicide tolerance. If, instead, you respond to that objection by pausing first, then you can ask, "What do you mean when you say our seed is 'not as good?'" The customer might say, "I like their below-ground insect protection." Then you can offer them information to address their specific objection, such as: "Well, we have below-ground protection, too, and let me tell you more about what it can do."