



eTip #35

Yes, No, Maybe?

For this month's eTip, we invited Maura Schreier-Fleming, president of Best@Selling back to discuss the subject of effective selling. Below is an article written by Maura Schreier-Fleming on "What You Never Want to Hear in a Sales Presentation."

Here's your choice. You make your sales presentation and your customer replies with either a "no" or a "maybe". Which is better to hear? I'll take the "no" every time. Here's why:

Why Do Customers Say "Maybe"?

Less assertive people dislike confrontation. Buying is stressful for them. If they tell you "no" you might try harder to convince them to buy. That creates more stress for them and it makes them uncomfortable. They will try to remove the stress. By saying "maybe", it will at least temporarily get rid of you and avoid any confrontation.

Some customers are afraid to admit they really don't have the power to say "yes". If only you could tell them that it hurts your business far more to use your selling time on someone who can't say "yes"!

How Can You Avoid "Maybe"?

During your initial contact, either by phone or certainly during the first sales call, you should have a list of questions that will define a true prospect. Always make sure you identify the decision maker. To spare some egos, the question to ask is, "Who along with you is involved in the decision-making process?" Other questions that separate the prospects from the maybes are, "Is there a budget in place for the product/service?" and "When will the decision be made?" If the decision is a long way off the likelihood of hearing "maybe" is increased. Another question is, "What are the criteria for selection?" If your customer gives an evasive response, it will be difficult for him to justify selecting you. Expect another maybe.

Getting an Answer

Some salespeople will want to confront the customer for a decision. They would say, "I don't think we're going to do business. That's all right. I need to know now." Rather than using this direct approach, I would prefer to leave an opportunity for future business. There just might be valid reasons or concerns that force your customer to answer "maybe." A better question for your indecisive customer would be, "What will it take for us to do business?" Clearly, if your prospect cannot answer that question he is unlikely to ever become a customer.

Thinking that a "maybe" is really a "yes" is dangerous in sales. You may think you're being optimistic, but you are not. You're creating false hope. Optimism produces sales. False hope gets you nowhere. In sales, it's much safer to believe that a "maybe" really means "no." Think of the time that you spend attempting to convert the "maybe" to a "yes" when the "maybe" is a "no." If you could spend all the wasted "maybe" time on true prospects, your selling results would improve dramatically. Better yet, find out quickly what "maybe" means to your customer by asking him. If you can't do that, I'd rather hear "no."

Maura Schreier-Fleming is president of Best@Selling (www.BestatSelling.com). She works with sales professionals on skills and strategies to close business faster. She often speaks at sales conferences and trade association meetings across the country. Her selling columns appear in the Dallas Business Journal, The Insurance Record magazine and Jobbers World. She can be reached by e-mail at info@BestatSelling.com.

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