

Three Tips To Avoid “The Slow No”

One of my clients introduced me to a new term recently. “The ‘slow no’ is the worst,” he said, “when you put a lot of time and effort into an order and it drags on and on and then you end up not getting it. You’d be better off knowing right from the start that you’re barking up the wrong tree.”

I agree, although I’m not sure that you can always know right from the start. Still, any time that you’re unlikely to succeed, especially in something that involves a long chase, you’re better off figuring that out sooner rather than later.

Yup, It’s A Duck!

One of my high school teachers introduced me to the Duck Test about 50 years ago. *If it looks like a duck, swims like a duck, and quacks like a duck, then it probably is a duck.* Here’s how that applies to printing sales. *If it looks like a poor use of time, based either on instinct or past experience, then it probably is a poor use of your time.*

When I reviewed my client’s most recent “slow no” experience with him, he admitted that there were at least a couple of points during the long process where he should have realized that he was wasting his time. “I’ve been there and done that,” he said, “but I guess I didn’t learn anything from the experience.”

Tip #1: Learn from experience, and recognize the patterns of both failure and success. When experience — or instinct! — tells you that you should be looking for a better opportunity, do just that!

Customer Management

I had a conversation with Nancy Dediemar some years back about customer management. Her position, as I recall, was that firm customer management is critical because (a) it’s part of great customer service, and (b) because it’s the best way to keep them from making you crazy. Nancy was never afraid to tell a customer: “Here’s what I need from you.”

At this point, we need to separate the “slow” from the “no.” If you can accelerate the process of getting to the final decision, you’re probably better off. And you can often do that by setting expectations and accompanying timelines.

Tip #2: Don’t be afraid to manage your customers, with “firm” being a key word. Yes, there’s a line that you don’t want to cross, but again, if you’re unlikely to succeed, you do want to know that sooner rather than later.

Probability Of Success

Now let’s move from “slow” to “no” and consider how to measure your probability of success. On one hand, you can guess at it. On the other hand, you can actually ask the person who’s most likely to know!

This might be thought of as a “trial closing” question, and it’s a question you can ask at both at multiple times and multiple points in the selling process: *“Based on where we are right now, what would you say are the chances that you’ll move forward with this and that I’ll get the order?”*

A high likelihood would suggest that you hang in there. A low likelihood suggests that you might be heading for a “slow no.” A high likelihood of moving forward coupled with a low likelihood that you’ll get the order should at the very least get you thinking about what you could be/should be doing differently to increase your probability of success.

Tip #3: Don’t guess, ask! There’s a huge difference between *I think I have a chance* and *I know I have a chance*. Remember, too, that this can be measured more accurately than just *good* or *not-so-good*. I frequently ask my own prospects to give me a percentage, and I’ve learned that I can often sell myself into a 50% likelihood but almost never into a 10% chance. Just like you, I want more yes’s than no’s, and especially slow no’s!