

## More Value, Less Rejection

I went out on a sales call with one of my clients last week. We met with the Purchasing Manager of a large hospital. He had an interesting item on the wall behind his desk, a framed graphic which read: “Rejection — Get Used To It.”

The prospect offered us coffee, then stepped out of his office to ask his assistant to get it. My client — the owner of a small printing firm who doesn't really want to be a salesperson, but needs to be — pointed to the graphic and said “Right, as if I'm not intimidated enough as it is!”

“Don't sweat it,” I said. “He's just pointing out a fundamental truth. In fact, he's giving you good advice. Rejection is part of the game. And it may hurt your feelings, but you won't die from it. Remember, if 99 out of 100 prospects reject you but the other one becomes a good customer, you can still reach your sales goals, and that's what really matters.”

### Early-Stages Rejection

I also pointed out that this Purchasing Manager had agreed to meet with him, which is more than most of his prospects had done so far. It's another fundamental truth that most of the rejection in printing sales happens at the very early stages, with buyers refusing to respond to phone calls or e-mails or other attempts at making the initial contact. And it's been my experience that most of that is not really rejection, at least not in the personal sense. It's just a reflection of three elements of human nature — (1) resistance to change, (2) further resistance to adding anything to what's probably already a heavy workload, and (3) a general distrust of salespeople.

In the real world of printing sales, the odds are stacked against you when you make that initial attempt. The chances of rejection are much greater than the chances of acceptance on any individual prospecting call, but it's usually no more personal than having a traffic light turn red as your car approaches an intersection. No big deal, right?

### Later-Stages Rejection

It's a different story when you've met and talked with a prospect, and especially when you've actively competed for some of that prospect's work. It may actually be personal at that point. I've certainly decided not to buy from certain salespeople because I just plain didn't like them. But again, it's been my experience that most of the later-stages rejection is not “like-related” but rather value-related.

Let me put it this way, if you bring value to the relationship, you'll be rejected far less often. That includes price-value, which starts with the lowest price but continues through the whole “competitive price” range. It also includes the “like factor” — but just as rejection isn't always like-related, winning the business isn't either. The proof of that statement lies in situations where the buyer likes both salespeople, but only buys from one of them. (Obviously some buyers spread their work around among salespeople they like, but the point here is that every individual print order has just one winner, and often more than one loser.)

More than anything else, though, value can be defined as “getting I what I want.” And that can range from “I want to avoid the sort of problems I've had in the past” to “I want to reduce my cost” to “I want to market my business more effectively” to “I want lots of progress detail all the way through the project” to “I want to place the order and then not hear anything from the salesperson until it's delivered on time and done right.”

### Key Point

Here's the key point. Value is in the eye of the beholder. The great salespeople find out *exactly* what the word means to their prospects and customers, and then they base their strategy around providing and maintaining it. I hear too many salespeople talking about features (we have a state-of-the-art digital press) and not enough time looking for problems (we do lots of multi-version projects, and our current supplier hasn't been meeting our turnaround expectations) and connecting the two in the form of a value statement — “I have the solution to that problem. We have a state-of-the-art digital press that is perfectly suited to that kind of production.”

Please understand that it's the connection to the “I want” that creates the value. And the more value you create, the less rejection you'll suffer.