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ALEXEY OSIPENKO
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Objection Handling B2B

HOW TO DEFEND THE TERMS AND SAVE THE RELATIONSHIP

Alexey Osipenko

Objection Handling B2B. How to defend the terms and save the relationship

«Издательские решения»

Osipenko A.

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Who are you: a weakling, a discounter, a fighter, or a monetizer? Who is your client: a budget-conscious person, a comparison-seeker, a huckster, inexperienced, inattentive, stingy? What worries them most about your offer? To answer objections, you need to ask questions. For a person to change their mind, they must reformulate it themselves. In short, this is not an easy book. Most likely, you will have to reconsider your approach to sales. But the results will surprise and delight you.

Содержание

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How to defend the terms and save the relationship

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A L E X E Y O S I P E N K O

OBJECTION HANDLING

How to win back the client who said “no”

SALES TECHNOLOGY · BOOK THREE

About This Book

The client listened to your presentation, looked at the price, and said: “No. Too expensive. Not right now. We already have a supplier.” At that very second, most salespeople politely say goodbye — and leave on the table money they had all but earned. This book is about what to say in the second that follows the “no.”

Inside is the complete technology for working with rejection: the four roles of the salesperson and the one-step rule, the six faces of the “too expensive” objection, the seven-chairs algorithm from the pause to joining, four methods of proof rooted in ancient Greek argumentation theory, seven steps for working through an old grudge, Socratic questions, reframing, and a strategy for nudging the hesitant client to the finish line with warm-up touches.

Everything is built on live breakdowns of real negotiations by salespeople in the construction materials market: with mistakes, refinements, and ready-made phrases you can take word for word. Every subtopic is closed out with “Remember” blocks, self-check questions, and a practice assignment. At the end there is a thirty-seven-point master checklist for objection handling.

The author is a business trainer with twenty years of experience training sales teams: manufacturers and distributors of construction materials, real estate, services, banks.

In the “Sales Technology” Series

Book One. SPIN Selling: how to sell what doesn’t sell itself.

Book Two. The Selling Presentation.

Book Three. Objection Handling — the one you’re holding now.

Contents

Chapter 1. Money Frozen Inside a "No"

There is a phrase that has cost me more than any other phrase in my life. It sounds polite, well-mannered, almost noble:

"Well then, I understand. All the best. Health and happiness to you."

I said it dozens of times. And every time I said it, money silently disappeared from my pocket. Sometimes tens of thousands. Sometimes millions. The most unpleasant part is that in that moment I felt like a well-bred man and a professional. The client said "no" — and I didn't push. What a gentleman, right?

Be honest: how many times over the past month have you said something similar to a client? "All right, I understand." "Okay, I'll call back later." "Agreed, talk soon." Count them. Right now, don't put it off.

And now a harder question. How much money was lying on the table in each of those conversations? In actual currency. For some it's fifty thousand rubles, for some it's a million and a half, for some it's twenty. Add those sums together — and you get a figure I call "money frozen inside someone else's 'no.'" That money hasn't gone anywhere. It hasn't burned up. It's simply sitting there, waiting — with clients you have already found, already met, already made an offer to. Only one thing remains: go back and collect it.

This book is the third in the series. In the first, we broke down SPIN — the questioning technology that uncovers the client's needs and makes them want change on their own. In the second, the selling presentation: how to show your offer so that the client calculates their own benefit themselves. And now we've reached the most tense moment of any sale. The presentation is done. The client has heard everything. They understand what you're offering and what it costs. They look at you and say:

"No."

"Too expensive." "Not right now." "We already have a supplier." "The shelf is taken." "We work with someone else and we're happy." "The project specifies a different material."

This is where the real sale begins. Everything that came before — rapport, questions, the presentation — even an average salesperson does in one form or another. But after the word "no," the paths diverge: one politely says goodbye and leaves, the other gets to work. The difference between them is precisely the difference in income you see inside any sales team.

In this chapter, we'll figure out what an objection actually is, what categories everything you hear from clients falls into, which of the four roles you're in when you meet a refusal — and why six completely different people hide behind the word "expensive," and each of them needs to be spoken to differently.

But we won't start with the client. We'll start with you.

The “Two Minus One” Formula

Before we talk about technique, we need to deal with the reason. Technique without a reason doesn’t work: you can learn the best phrases in the world and never once say them, because there’s no reason to make the effort.

Take a sheet of paper. Seriously, take one — the exercise will take three minutes and will keep working for a whole year.

Number one. Calculate how much you earn per month today. Monthly average: add up your income for the last three months and divide by three. You don’t have to show anyone — write it honestly.

Number two. Now imagine you’ve seriously decided to raise your personal sales. Not “the company grew,” not “the season took off” — but you specifically put your head and hands to work. Write down the monthly amount you want to reach after three months of good, intensive work. Just adjust for the season: if your income grows on its own during peak season, add extra on top — so that it’s the result of your deliberate effort, not just “everyone suddenly wants to buy and you’re shipping orders.” I usually ask people to lower this number: doubling right away is hard. Let point B be realistic.

Now subtract the first number from the second. The difference is the third number — the most important one. This is your reason. This is what you’ll be changing anything in your work for at all. Multiply it by twelve — you get your expected annual increase. For some it comes out to six hundred thousand, for others a million two hundred.

And the last step. Write down three reasons why you need this money. Not five — three. And try not to burn the entire budget on one thing. “I’m building a house” — that’s wonderful, but a house will devour any amount of money, and you’ll never know whether you earned it or not. Among your three reasons, find at least one that lights a fire in you personally. A vacation, a more serious car, a jet ski — by the way, a jet ski sometimes costs more than a car; check your license while you’re at it. One salesman wrote to me: “paying for my daughter’s education.” Noble. But admit it honestly: are you ready to spend a month pushing difficult clients over the line for the sake of a line item that says “semester tuition”? The body has to want it. Give it what it wants.

Why is this exercise in a book about objections? Because objection handling is the most energy-intensive part of a sale. If a salesperson has no reason to push themselves, they won’t sit there in the evening thinking about whom to call back, whom to meet for a second round of negotiations, whom to convince to buy at a higher price. They’ll live in the mode of “discount, discount — they refused, oh well, they refused.” If there’s no reason to fight, there will be no growth, no matter what you read in this book.

And immediately the second question — the main one. Fine, you’ve decided: plus seventy thousand a month. How? What exactly will you do differently over the next three months?

I ask salespeople this question constantly, and do you know what I hear? “I’ll work more.” A street sweeper works more. He doesn’t increase his income. “I’ll grow my client base.” Great — and what will you do to grow it? “I’ll get new knowledge in the field of sales.” Knowledge by itself doesn’t help: first understand what you’re going to do, then ask yourself what information will help you do it more effectively — only then does training make sense.

That’s a surface-level answer, and it doesn’t help. It’s like “what will you do to look good?” — “I’ll lose weight.” And what will you do to lose weight? That’s where the real answer begins.

A goal is an order from the brain to the body. Write that down somewhere. If the goal is formulated as “work more,” the body doesn’t understand what to do. So it doesn’t do anything. But “this week I will call back five clients who turned me down last quarter and find out the true reason for the refusal” — that’s an order. The body picks up the phone and dials.

Remember: a goal is an order from the brain to the body. If the body doesn't understand what exactly to do, it's not a goal — it's a wish.

Hang a question on your refrigerator: "How am I going to increase my sales?" Let it hang there. Gradually, more and more precise answers will start coming to mind — and you'll begin to manage your sales instead of just watching them.

Check Yourself

— What is the difference you got between point A and point B — and what exactly will you spend it on?

— How does the formulation "I'll work more" differ from an order from the brain to the body?

— By your estimate, how much money is frozen today in clients who told you "no"?

Practice

Write down three clients who refused you in the last three months, and next to each one — the amount of the deal that didn't happen. In monthly terms: how much money per month each would bring in if they had agreed. Add it up. That figure is your personal fund of frozen money. The goal of this book is to unfreeze at least a third of it.

Do They Buy From You — or Do You Sell?

Every salesperson — myself included — lives in two roles within their job. Sometimes one dominates and the other sags. I call these roles: the loader-salesman and the salesman-salesman.

The loader is the one people buy from. What does that mean? I have a product. There are people who already know this product, already want it, and are simply waiting for someone to walk up and say: "You taking it?" They answer: "Of course." Others call on their own, visit the website, place an order. My job is to get the invoice out in time and organize the shipment. That's not bad and nothing to be ashamed of — it's part of the job. But it's not selling. It's shipping.

The salesman-salesman is a different situation. A person uses a competitor's product, is used to it, is perfectly happy with it. I come and convince them to switch. Or they don't use this category of product at all — and I convince them to start. Now that is selling.

The problem is that salespeople who have been in the market a long time imperceptibly slide into the loader role. Familiar clients keep ordering things, requests come in, invoices go out, the day is full of motion — and it creates the feeling of vigorous selling. Then you ask such a salesperson: "How will you increase your income?" And he answers: "Well… I'll sell more" — meaning that for some miraculous reason clients will start buying more.

I ask salespeople to do a simple exercise: divide their reality into two columns. On the left — what people buy from me: products, services, characteristics that clients take on their own, by default. On the right — what I have to sell: the things that don't move on their own.

Once I was working through this exercise with a team of salespeople in the construction materials market. One says:

— People buy insulation board from me. What I sell is delivery and deferred payment.

— Wait, — I say. — Why are you selling delivery? Delivery is usually bought.

— Because our delivery costs more than the market average.

— There it is. You're not selling delivery. You're selling expensive delivery. Feel the difference? The task just became honest.

The second salesman:

— People buy insulation from us, but what we have to sell is profiled membrane. Retail barely knows it. And not just ours — the membrane as a category is poorly known. Clients don't ask for it, and salespeople at the outlets don't offer it.

— So your task is to sell a little-known product. That's a different job from "selling membrane." You fight obscurity differently than you fight price.

The third:

— Adhesive foam. The competition is savage: a retail outlet carries ten to fifteen manufacturers. The purchasing manager looks at the shelf and asks: why do I need a sixteenth?

— So you need to put your foam on an overcrowded shelf. Do you hear how the wording changed? "I sell foam" — that's a murky task. "I'm putting foam on an overcrowded shelf" — that's a specific task, and you can prepare arguments for it.

And the fourth case, the trickiest:

— Everything sells for me. Our board is the best-known on the market; people ask for it by name.

— Wonderful. And when a client says that a young competitor has the same board fifteen percent cheaper — what happens?

— Well… I have to explain why ours costs more.

— So the board is bought from you, but the price of the board — that you sell. Every day.

Look at your two columns. Objections arise only in the right one. Nobody objects to a loader — they either take from him or they don't. People object to a salesman. So the longer your right column is, the more important this book is for you — and the more money is lying in it for you.

Remember: objections live only in the territory of "I sell." If you almost never hear objections, you are most likely not selling — you're shipping.

Check Yourself

— What in your product range is bought by default, and what do you actually have to sell — and why?

— In which role — loader or salesman — do you spend most of your working week? What signs told you?

— Which wording describes your hardest task more precisely: "I sell product X" or "I sell X under conditions Y"? Formulate your own "under conditions."

Practice

Draw a table with two columns: "They buy from me" and "I sell." Fill it in honestly, including product characteristics: price, novelty, shelf position, delivery terms. Next to each item in the right column, write one sentence: why this doesn't get bought on its own. You have just drawn a map of your future objections.

What an Objection Is — and When It's Real

Let me remind you of the map we've been following throughout the series. A sale consists of five stages: establishing contact, uncovering needs, presentation, objection handling, closing the deal. Not the stages of a visit, not a meeting agenda — precisely the stages of a sale you will pass through in your interaction with any client.

Notice: objections are the fourth stage, after the presentation. That's not a coincidence — it's a diagnosis. A real objection is possible only when the person has understood you correctly: heard the presentation, seen the price, grasped the offer — and something didn't suit them. If an "objection" comes before the presentation, it's most likely not an objection. It's either a fantasy — the person is arguing with something you never said — or an attempt to brush off the conversation. Fantasies and brush-offs are handled differently; we'll get there in the final chapter. For now, hold on to the rule: first the client must understand what they are refusing. A refusal without understanding is not a refusal.

Now the definition. I've been through many clever formulations and kept the simplest one. An objection is an obstacle on the way to closing the deal. I gave a presentation. Normally, a deal should follow a presentation: here's the product, here's the price, here's the invoice. But between the presentation and the deal, an obstacle has grown. My job is to remove that obstacle: go around it, take it apart, seep through it. Not jump onto a different road, not turn around and drive away — remove the obstacle and reach the deal. The same one, the original one.

An important conclusion follows from the simple definition: an objection is not the client's attitude toward me, not a verdict, and not an evaluation of my work. It's a road sign that says "obstacle ahead." You don't take offense at road signs. You work with them.

Everything you hear from clients breaks down into six categories. Break it down — and the work gets easier, because each category has its own nature and its own moves.

The first category is price. "Too expensive" — and sometimes, by the way, "suspiciously cheap." The most frequent, the most famous, and we have a separate conversation about it ahead.

The second is the product. Quality, color, functionality, characteristics: density, flammability, water absorption, thickness. Everything that relates to the product itself.

The third is service. Logistics, lead times, payment terms, claims handling, the option of small batches. "Nowhere to store it," "delivery takes too long," "no deferred payment" — all of that goes here.

The fourth is brand. The fame or obscurity of the mark, reputation, reviews. Note the difference: negative experience is about quality or service — the person got burned themselves. Negative reviews are about brand: the person didn't get burned, they've been reading.

The fifth is the salesperson. An unpleasant but honest category: an objection to you personally. You let them down, didn't call back on time, said something wrong — or the client simply wants to work with a different manager. This objection is almost never spoken aloud, which makes it all the more important to learn to recognize it.

The sixth is timing. "We need it, but not now." Off-season, no warehouse space, let's come back to this in the fall. The most insidious category: it sounds so reasonable that the salesperson agrees automatically. "When should I call you back?" he asks, feeling like a tactful professional. Which role is that, do you think? Right — the pushover; we'll get to him in a few pages.

A timing objection has to be fought like any other. Let me tell you a story that, in its time, changed my attitude toward "not now."

A negotiation. Me and three representatives of the client: a furniture factory, one of the Moscow ones. The general director, also the owner. The production director, also a co-owner. And the retail director — a hired manager; let's call him Denis. We're discussing a large training project for their salespeople. We talked and talked and talked — and then they exchange glances, all but high-five each other: "Done. Decided. Excellent project." Inside, I'm already celebrating. And then the general director adds:

— We start in September.

And the calendar says May.

Everything inside me is boiling. What September? We just discussed everything, everyone likes everything — why wait four months? And here's my choice. Option one, the polite one: "Understood, agreed, we'll talk in August." Option two — fight. By that point I already knew my sin of easy agreement, and I decided: no way. Honestly, I don't remember word for word what I said. I only remember the internal "brrrr, what September?" — and another half hour of conversation: why September, what's stopping us from starting earlier, what will happen over the summer, how much money the factory will fail to earn in four months with an untrained sales team.

Half an hour later, they're high-fiving again: "That's it, guys, decided. We start next week."

And then Denis, the retail director, comes out of the negotiation hypnosis, looks at his partners and says:

— Guys, do you realize what he just did to us? We wanted September.

We started a week later. And then worked together for many years.

The moral is not that I'm so clever. The moral is that "we need it, but not now" is an objection. An ordinary objection that can and must be handled. But it looks like an objective circumstance that nothing can be done about. That is its strength — and your weakness, as long as you believe it.

Remember: an objection is an obstacle, not a verdict. It becomes a verdict only when the salesperson agrees with it on the first try.

Check Yourself

— Why is a real objection possible only after the presentation? What's wrong with objections "at the door"?

— Recall the last three objections you heard. Which of the six categories does each belong to?

— Which timing objection did you most recently accept as an objective circumstance — and what could you have done differently?

Practice

Compile the top 5 objections of your market — word for word, as clients say them. Sort them into the six categories: price, product, service, brand, salesperson, timing. If some objection doesn't fit into any category, it's most likely worded too broadly. Refine the wording until it fits.

The Four Roles: Who Inside You Answers the Objection

When a client says “no,” it isn’t some abstract “you” who answers. One of four roles that live inside every salesperson answers. For many people, this classification turns out to be the most useful thing they take away from my materials at all — because it’s about the truth about themselves.

Role one: the pushover. What does the pushover do when he hears an objection? He agrees. Accepts. Folds. “We work with another supplier, we don’t need anything.” — “Understood, sorry to bother you.” “Our shelf is overloaded.” — “Oh, it really is overloaded. Well, I’ll be going.” “We can’t meet this month.” — “All right, let’s do it in a month.” The pushover’s firmware has it hard-coded: the client is right by default. Not because the pushover is stupid or cowardly — that’s just his default setting. They said “no” — so it’s no.

Role two: the discounter. This one doesn’t fold — he pays. And often even before the objection has been voiced: he immediately offers the cheapest option, leaving himself no room to negotiate. And if an objection does come, the discounter has one single argument: we’ll make it cheaper. Don’t like it? We’ll make it cheaper. You work with someone else? We’ll make it cheaper. You already have this product? We’ll make it cheaper. This role has a psychological foundation: deep down, the discounter doesn’t believe in the value of his own product. He wouldn’t buy it at that price himself — and so the only path to a deal he can see is a concession.

Role three: the fighter-arguer. Oh, now this is a serious character. Strong, emotional, technically savvy, never at a loss for words. Compared to the pushover — a real champ. But he has a defect: he argues. As soon as the arguer switches on, the salesperson stops hearing the client and starts piling on: an argument, another argument, three more arguments. Eyes blazing, facts flying in bursts. What the client feels in that moment is one thing: pressure. And he resists. The arguer knows how to talk a client into the ground. Lead them to a deal in which the client feels like the winner — no.

Role four: the monetizer-negotiator. The highest level of the craft. Where the pushover agreed, the discounter offered a discount, and the arguer started arguing, this person does a strange thing: he converses. He listens. He asks questions. He doesn’t prove — he talks, and steers the conversation toward one point. The monetizer’s firmware sounds like this: “Yes, I’m the most expensive. But with me, you’ll earn more.” He looks at the client who’s explaining where it’s cheaper and what terms they offer there, and calmly thinks: my friend, none of that matters, because you won’t earn as much money anywhere as you will with me. Yes, you’ll pay me five hundred rubles more per unit. And on that unit you’ll earn twice as much. Everything the monetizer does in the conversation leads to that point: with me, you come out ahead.

And now the unpleasant part. Take your one hundred percent of working time and honestly split it across the four roles: what percent are you the pushover, what percent the discounter, what percent the arguer, what percent the monetizer. Write down four numbers, right now.

Written them down? I know roughly what you got. Something like “ten — twenty — forty — thirty.” The handsome numbers of a self-assured professional. Some people even write “zero” next to the pushover.

Now the truth. The average truth about a salesperson who simply lives and sells in their routine process looks like this: sixty percent pushover, thirty percent discounter, ten percent arguer, zero percent monetizer. Zero. And before you close this book with the words “get lost, that’s not me” — hear out one story.

There’s a company, a dealer for a porcelain tile plant. One of the strongest teams in its niche: they tear up the market, capture territories, competitors fear them. Not rookies, not sleepy sales reps — fighters. I worked with them for several years. Another training week comes around: two days on all five stages of the sale, a day off, then two days on objections only. On the first day I explain the pushover, the discounter, the arguer, and the monetizer. And I know the reaction in advance. They have a fighter, Sergey — I knew it would be him. He said: “No. That can’t be right. We’re not like that. I’m not like that.”

Two days of work on objections go by. Sergey gives his feedback:

— I understood the most important thing. I am a pushover. And it’s not clients I’ve been folding on. I’ve been folding on entire regions. And now that I understand that — we’re going to take them.

Strong people differ from weak people not in the absence of weakness, but in the readiness to see it. If you allow yourself the thought “yes, most of the time I’m a pushover” — your sales will start growing unexpectedly fast. If your numbers really are “zero — twenty — thirty — fifty,” then I’m sorry: you have nowhere left to grow. But forgive me, I don’t believe in numbers like that.

Now the promised second story — about me.

That same week I was telling you about: two days of work with the team behind me, Wednesday is a day off, and I’m sitting there preparing for the two days on objections. My mood is excellent. I’m thinking: good thing I’m no pushover. I know the technology, I sell actively, I have thousands of negotiations behind me. Not a pushover, definitely.

And suddenly it hits me like an electric shock. I recall the past two days — not as a trainer, but as a salesman.

On Monday, a request came into my inbox from the website: “Looking for a training specialist, here’s the phone number.” I was working with the group all day, but I’m a good sales guy — I call during the breaks. Didn’t get through once. Didn’t get through twice. Didn’t get through three times. Oh well, good for me, I tried.

On Tuesday, I hadn’t forgotten the request. I call back. Someone picks up, a cheerful voice:

— Hello!

— Hello, you left a request, I’m calling about it.

— Ah, thank you very much! But we’ve already chosen someone. We don’t need anything.

Now, the question. What do I do — the hotshot negotiator, the man who teaches people to fight for deals? I say:

— Yes, yes, of course. All the best. Health and happiness to you.

And I hang up. And go back to my business. I’m busy, I have a group, today is not a selling day. I forget about that conversation completely.

And on Wednesday it hits me. I folded. I heard an objection — and folded that very second. And didn’t even notice it. That’s why people write “zero percent” next to the pushover: not because they don’t fold, but because they don’t notice themselves folding. Folding doesn’t feel like defeat. It feels like politeness, being busy, common sense.

I never did call those clients back — too much time had passed by the time it dawned on me. But I formulated a rule for myself that has since won back a great deal of money for me.

The one-step rule. To avoid being a pushover, you need to take at least one more step after the word “no.” One question. One argument. One action. Then, normally, another one — but one at minimum. The pushover ends where the second question begins.

Let’s test the rule on my situation. The client says: “We’ve already chosen. We were choosing — and we chose; we don’t need anything else.” What two questions should have been asked to earn the right to end the fight with a clear conscience?

Salespeople usually suggest: “What criteria did you use to choose?” A good question. But not the first one. “Are you sure you made the right choice?” Leads nowhere: of course they’re sure. Here’s the right sequence.

Question one: “Have you already paid?”

If not — the fight continues at full throttle: a choice without payment is not a choice, it’s an intention. But suppose the client answers: “We’ve paid.”

Question two: “And has the service already been delivered?” In your world it will sound like “and has the product already been shipped?”

He says: “Not yet, next week.” And then the third, the control question: “Can you get the money back?” — “Well… I can.” — “Then I’m coming to see you. Let’s talk.”

And only if it’s been paid for, shipped, and installed — now it’s over. That deal I lost honestly: I fought, I didn’t fold. The difference is enormous. A deal lost in a fight teaches you something and leaves the contact warm. A folded deal teaches you nothing and leaves behind only “health and happiness to you.”

Remember: to stop being a pushover, one step after the word “no” is enough — one question, one argument, one action. Better yet, a series of them.

Check Yourself

— How did you honestly distribute your hundred percent across the four roles — and what changed in the numbers after the stories in this section?

— What is the fundamental difference between the arguer and the monetizer, if both have a strong command of the facts?

— Recall your last fold. At what moment of the conversation did you agree — and what one step could you have taken instead?

Practice

Write down three specific names: clients you folded on — agreed with the refusal, didn’t follow through, or didn’t even try. Not company names off the top of your head, but living people who come to mind first. This is your goal for the week: these people are holding your money right now. After the next chapter, you will know exactly what to say to them. For now, just record the names and the amounts.

What Objection Handling Is Not

Before learning to handle objections, you need to stop calling things objection handling that aren't. Let's play a game. I'm the client, you're the salesperson.

I want to buy a thousand square meters of insulation from you. You've held the negotiation with me, clarified the task, and figured out: I need fifty-millimeter board. You calculated: two hundred six packs, a total of five hundred fifty-six thousand rubles. You announced the number. I look at you and say:

— Listen, that's expensive somehow. Five hundred fifty-six thousand — that's expensive. I don't want to buy that.

You think for a second and answer:

— Look, in principle… in principle, forty-millimeter would work for your purposes too. I've run the options — even thirty would pass. A thousand square meters in thirty-mil is four hundred fifty-three thousand.

I say:

— Oh, now that's a different conversation. Fine, I'll take the thirty for four hundred fifty-three.

Done, I bought it. We shook hands. And now three questions.

Question one: did you close the deal? Yes, you did. The sale happened, the money came in, the shipment went out.

Question two: did you win the negotiation or lose it? You lost.

Question three: how much did your loss cost? One hundred three thousand rubles. That's exactly how much you just pulled out of your own turnover and laid on the table, because I said one word — "expensive."

Let's break down what actually happened. You did not handle an objection. You failed the first deal — the five-hundred-fifty-six-thousand one — opened a new, cheaper one in its place, and closed that one. This is called "changing the commercial offer." A useful skill? Sometimes, yes. Objection handling? No. The objection "expensive" was left untouched: you didn't even find out what the client meant. Maybe he has a budget. Maybe a competitor offered less. Maybe he just haggles out of habit. You didn't find out — you paid right away.

The second way to lose looks even more respectable. The client says "expensive," and you answer:

— One second, let me call my manager… Hello, boss, I've got some great guys here, they want to take a thousand square meters, a promising client, they might take more. Can we give them a discount? Come on, it's only eighty thousand… We can? Excellent!

And you turn to the client with the radiant face of a man who has just secured a gift for him. In fact — you've again paid for the deal out of your own pocket. Note the wording: you weren't paid for the deal — you paid for it. A discount without a counter-obligation is not a sales tool. It's the price of your inability to continue the conversation.

And what would objection handling have looked like in this game? Roughly like this: "Hold on. What's wrong with that amount? Why is it expensive for you? What are you comparing it with? What budget do you need to fit into — and where did it come from?" In other words, a fight for the original deal. For those same five hundred fifty-six thousand, for the fifty-millimeter thickness, for the full price. The deal may change in the end — but after the investigation, not instead of it.

Remember: if after an objection you offered something cheaper, you did not handle the objection. You closed a different, worse deal and paid for it out of your own pocket.

Check Yourself

— How does "changing the commercial offer" differ from "handling the objection" — in actions and in money?

— Why is a discount in response to “expensive” a payment by the salesperson, not a gift to the client?

— Recall a deal where, after an objection, you offered a cheaper option. How much did your loss cost in actual money?

Practice

Pull up your last three deals in which you moved on price or downgraded the configuration after the client’s words. Calculate the total difference between the original offer and the final one. Write down the figure. This is not a reproach — it’s the budget you will reclaim with the help of the following chapters.

Taekwondo or Aikido

Now about how you must not answer — at the level of the very style of the conversation.

I practiced taekwondo for seven years, and as an adult at that, from thirty-six to forty-two. A wonderful sport: the task is to strike faster than your opponent. Strike for strike, speed against speed. There are blocks, but the philosophy is simple: hit first, hit faster, hit more precisely.

Well: you cannot work with objections that way. The client strikes — “expensive!” — the salesperson strikes back — “but it’s quality!” The client winds up harder — “your competitors are cheaper!” — the salesperson counterattacks — “and their quality matches the price!” This is open conflict, an exchange of blows. Even if the salesperson “won” — out-argued the client, crushed him with facts — there will be no deal: people who’ve been knocked out don’t buy.

Which martial art works as the metaphor? Aikido. I’ll admit honestly: I’ve never practiced aikido and never once sparred with those guys. But word has it they know how to turn an opponent’s energy against him — and looking at Steven Seagal, I’m inclined to believe it. What matters for us is the idea itself: not a blow meeting a blow, but joint movement, a dance with your opponent, in which you use his energy and look for the point where you can gently apply your own effort.

What does that sound like in words? Let’s run an experiment. I throw an objection at you: “Guys, I get it all, but for me it’s expensive. I don’t want to buy.” Salespeople usually answer with the first phrase from this set — find the strikes among them:

— That insulation thickness isn’t enough for your structural design anyway.

— Yes, it’s expensive. But with us, it pays off.

— Expensive compared to what?

— Why do you consider it expensive?

The first phrase is pure taekwondo. Translated into plain language, it means: “You’re incompetent, you calculated it wrong.” The client may well be incompetent — but telling him that point-blank is the equivalent of a kick to the head. The second phrase is more interesting: the idea itself is right, a monetizer’s idea — “with me, it pays off.” But the delivery is a strike: you are objecting to the objection, negating his negation. The same idea has to be delivered differently, and we will learn how. Now the third and fourth phrases — that’s aikido. You don’t resist the client’s energy, you move together with it: he said “expensive” — you asked him to continue.

The difference can be stated in a few words: talking is wrong — asking is right.

Remember: you don’t answer an objection. You question an objection first. A question is the only way to find out what you are even dealing with.

The Six Faces of "Expensive"

Why can't you answer right away, even with the right arguments? Because you don't yet know whom you're answering. For many years I analyzed negotiations — my own and other people's — and came to a conclusion that saves an enormous amount of effort: behind the word "expensive" hide six absolutely different, non-overlapping reasons. Six different people say the same word — and each needs their own conversation.

Face one: the budget-holder. The person has hit a number. There's four hundred — there's no five hundred. And note, the budget can be real — the money physically isn't there — or invented: "that's how much we planned to spend." Telling them apart is critically important, and we're about to learn how.

Face two: the comparer. He's running a tender — a real one or one in his head. He's not poor and not stingy: he simply doesn't want to feel like a fool who paid you more than he could have paid someone else. He has a specific "it's cheaper somewhere."

Face three: the haggler. A professional buyer. His budget is fine, he isn't comparing you with anyone — he simply knows that haggling pays. Do you know which five words are the highest-paid in business? No consultant, no expert earns as much per phrase as a haggler does. Look: we're negotiating a five-hundred-thousand deal. The haggler says: "How about a little ten percent discount?" A few words, two seconds. And if you answer "sure" — he has just earned fifty thousand rubles. Twenty-five thousand per second. That's why hagglers will never stop haggling: it's the best job in the world.

Face four: didn't expect it. The person has encountered this product and its prices for the first time. He isn't comparing with anyone, the budget is fine, he isn't haggling. He simply wasn't prepared: "How much?! On what grounds?" The most harmless character: he needs to be shown the reality of the market in the moment, and he'll say: "Ah, got it. I thought everything was cheaper. Well, it happens."

Face five: didn't understand the value. He sat through the presentation and something didn't land: "I don't understand where that price comes from." This is not an objection — it's a request for a repeat presentation. The entire second book of the series was about what to do with him.

Face six: not used to spending on himself. A rare beast, almost never found in corporate sales, but worth knowing about. The money is there, he isn't comparing with anyone — he simply isn't in the habit of buying himself expensive things. "What for? This'll do." If your client is a private individual, you will meet this one.

Notice: this list contains no manipulators and no kickback-seekers. Those are separate stories, not about "expensive." Here are six honest reasons, six ways of genuinely thinking this way.

Now the main thing. The first question at the word "expensive" is always the same, and I recommend writing it down verbatim: "Let's clarify. I didn't fully understand: why is this expensive for you?" The client himself will tell you who's in front of you: "well, I know where it's cheaper" — the comparer; "we have a budget" — the budget-holder; "I didn't quite get what makes up the price" — didn't understand the value. And only after that does the work begin — different for each face.

Let's walk through the three main scenarios in person.

Scenario one: the budget-holder. The client says: "Our budget is limited." What questions do you ask? Salespeople usually suggest: "And what does your budget consist of?" Not bad, but not for this moment. The first question is different: how much is missing?

Here's how it works. Once I was going over a real case with a salesman: he had quoted a client a volume worth five million. The client: "Expensive!" Now, the question: expensive — how much is that? In the client's head at that moment, expensive means the entire five million. Finding five million is hard. Are you out of your mind, five million! And in response to that horror, the salesman starts justifying the entire amount.

And now the same conversation with one question:

— I understand. And what budget would be acceptable for you?

— Four million.

Stop. So how much is "expensive," really? One million. Not five — one. Twenty percent. And the objection has suddenly slimmed down fivefold: finding one million is incomparably easier than finding five. And if your invoices aren't in the millions — then it's not "five hundred thousand is expensive," it's "a hundred thousand needs to be found." A completely different conversation.

Then question two: "And is increasing the budget possible — if the solution is worth it?" And a third, if the answer is "in principle, yes": "Where could you get the missing amount?" Not point-blank, of course — but that is exactly your task: to start the money-finding process inside the client. As long as "expensive" means the whole amount, the client is defending. When "expensive" becomes a specific difference, the client starts thinking about where to get it. You have changed his job: he was a defender — he became a seeker.

Scenario two: the comparer. The client says: "I'm being offered a lower price." The first question is not "whom are you comparing us with," as most people answer. Who exactly is over there is a tenth-order concern. The first question: what's the difference? How much are they offering, in money?

This question is diagnostic. If the client answers "half the price," it means one of two things: either he's deceiving you, or he's being deceived — someone is selling him something from a different category disguised as an equivalent, and he's comparing the incomparable. The second, by the way, is scarier: the man is being fed nonsense, he'll buy junk and get problems. If the difference is small — you have a real competitor in front of you, and the real work begins.

Write down the second question: "And what do you know about that supplier's other terms?" And the person will honestly say: "Nothing. I know the price." There's your playing field: delivery, lead times, storage, claims handling, training, consistency of stock. Their product is cheaper — and how about this? And this? Your task is to shift the comparison from price lists to the total cost of working together. And separately, check that the comparison of specifications is even valid: very often people compare materials of different density, thickness, configuration — and the "cheaper" crumbles before your eyes.

Scenario three: the haggler. The most interesting one. The client looks at you with kind eyes and says: "Guys, I love you, I like everything, let's work together. Just make it a little cheaper." No competitors, budget's there. There is only a years-long habit: ask for a discount — earn money.

I state this with full responsibility: salespeople at large have no tools against hagglers. Hagglers always win, always corner you — simply because the salesperson is afraid of losing the deal, and the haggler is afraid of nothing. The combination I'm about to give you I assembled bit by bit over many years — from my own negotiations, sitting and thinking: well, what do you say to them when they haggle yet again?

First — the ranging shots. In boxing this is called "unsettling the opponent": the punches aren't on target yet, but the opponent starts getting nervous.

— What do you need a discount for?

A simple question, but the roles have already flipped: a minute ago you were the one proving things, now he is. Try asking it one day and watch the face.

— Why should I give it to you specifically? What's so special?

— All right, and what do I get from you? What do I receive in exchange for this discount?

You've held them in tension — now the combination for the punch. Phrase one:

— Do I understand correctly: you believe my price is unfair and I'm cheating you?

The person will startle: “No, no, of course not, nobody’s talking about cheating, I trust you…” You have just moved the conversation onto moral ground — and haggling is uncomfortable there. Phrase two — it’s not even a question, but a gentle imposition:

— But you do want to get the maximum benefit from our cooperation?

— Well, of course.

And now the punch:

— Then let’s focus not on a small discount, but on the big benefits you’re going to receive. Look at this again…

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.