

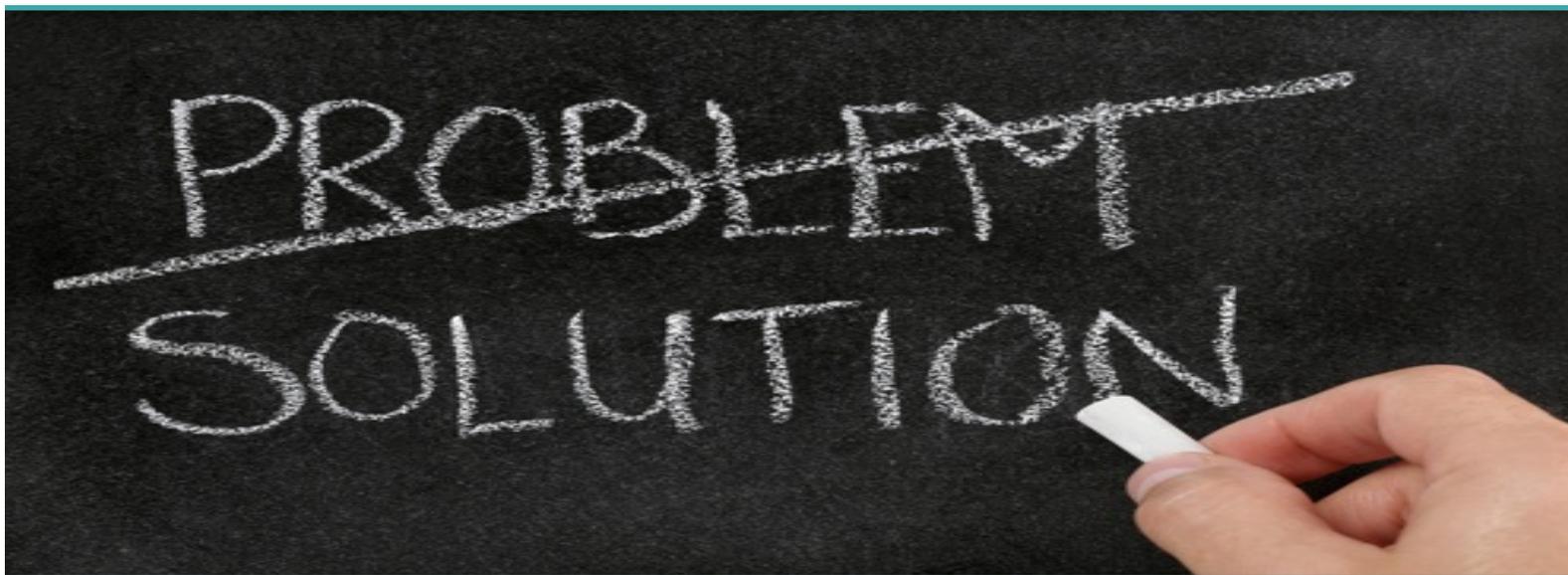
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ACCELERATE SALES:

## Objections: A retailer's best friend

Effective handling of objections not only generates more sales, it helps uncover why customers don't buy. Here's what you need to do each time an objective is raised.

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**Losing a sale isn't the worst thing that can happen to a retailer. The worst is failing to understand why it happened. Understanding why clients buy or don't buy higher-price merchandise depends on how well sales associates handle client questions and objections following a persuasive recommendation.**

If she handles objections well, the sales associate will either make the sale or understand why she hasn't; mishandling an objection loses both the sale and the chance to improve.

Handling objections requires a combination of selling and interpersonal communication skills. Here are some pointers:

**Begin with the right attitude.** A salesperson must never appear nervous or hesitant when an objection is raised. Hesitating or diverting the eyes loses trust. View objections as buying signs, since they most likely demonstrate interest in the product. To remain calm, remember that objections are opportunities to learn more about the client's needs. Top salespeople understand this and are eager to discuss whatever issue a client raises.

**Maintain your role of trusted consultant.** Top salespeople work to help the client make the right decision. Less-experienced sales associates often respond to an objection by nervously repeating features and benefits. They not only fail to address the question but also change their role from advisor to hardcore salesperson and lose the customer's trust.

**Gain more information.** Often a question or objection doesn't fully communicate the client's underlying motivation. For example, after a recommendation a client might say, "I don't know. Do you sell many of these?" Does she want assurance that other like what she's about to buy, or is she looking for something unique that few others have bought? To respond effectively, you need to know.

**Select an appropriate information-gathering strategy.** One effective strategy is to ask for a slight clarification of the question and then remain silent. Thus, you might respond, "So, you want to know if this is popular?" Frequently the client will elaborate without further prompting. The silence also gives you a moment to gather your thoughts before formulating an answer. If you must answer the question immediately, do so in a way that's likely to gain additional information. You could answer, "Yes, I've sold a number of them. Is that important to you?"

**Every time you answer a question, check in!** Just because you think you've answered the question doesn't mean the client

thinks so. If the client feels you're dodging the question, trust can disappear, and you may draw the wrong conclusion about why a sale wasn't made. Simply ask, "Have I answered your question? Does its popularity change how you feel about the item?"

**Recognize "exit strategies" and turn them into true "objections."** A client who wants to delay the purchase and make a graceful exit may say: "I need to look around some more before I buy" or "Can I have your card please?" To find out why—particularly if the client showed high interest in the item—ask an open-ended question such as: "Because you sounded so interested in this item, it seems as if something has changed. Is that right?" Be silent and wait for a response.

**Never walk away empty-handed.** Either make the sale or understand why you haven't by using objections as opportunities to learn more about how to fulfill clients' needs and dreams.

#### About Shanker Inc.

*Martin Shanker is the founder and president of Shanker Inc., a Manhattan-based international management consulting firm for such companies as Burberry, Cartier, The Estee Lauder Companies, Ralph Lauren and Van Cleef & Arpels. Described as a 'behaviorist' by The New York Times, Martin specializes in helping global brands accelerate sales and profit by growing their companies from within. By addressing the tough issues of sales and management teams, and the behavioral dimension of retail relationships, Shanker Inc. offers a unique, multi-dimensional way for companies to achieve success through their own people.*

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