

IDENTIFYING CALL RELUCTANCE

Don't let fear and other obstacles get in the way of achieving sales goals. By Mark Dahl

When it comes to training, most salespeople have been through it all: motivational seminars, goal-setting workshops, innumerable product training sessions, sales technique sessions—the gamut. Yet, *80% of first year salespeople fail. And at any given time, 40% of all sales veterans are considering quitting.* Why does this gap between training and sales success exist?

The answer to the following question may provide an answer: What do Dr. Ruth, Howard Stern, Pamela Anderson and Carl Sagan have in common?

They are all natural *self-promoters*. They understand the importance of being in front of the right people, the importance of differentiating themselves from their competition, and the importance of repeating these two activities consistently.

Are these the most competent people in their field? Maybe. Maybe not. These folks realize, though, the highest rewards go to those who are willing to self-promote. While self-promotion comes naturally to some people, for the rest of us it's a battle between our desire to accomplish our goals and our hesitancy to appear “pushy”.

Product knowledge, sales skills, positive mental attitude. While critical to sales success, what good are these things if salespeople don't make enough contacts to use them to full advantage? Twenty-five years of field research by internationally recognized behavioral psychologists George Dudley and Shannon Goodson has demonstrated the key to success in sales is the consistent initiation of a sufficient number of sales contacts (*Earning What You're Worth, The Psychology of Call Reluctance*, Behavioral Science Research Press, 1995). According to Dudley and Goodson, a salesperson's hesitancy to self-promote is called “call reluctance.”

Call reluctance is the redirection of energy *away* from goal-achieving activities *toward* coping behaviors. It can mean anything from the inability to use the phone to set appointments, to discomfort with face-to-face

prospecting, to asking for referrals, to asking for the order, to doing business with friends.

For call reluctant people, the emotional stress of making sales calls is greater than the potential reward generated by the calls. Call reluctance is an emotional interference that limits the number of contacts a person will make on any given day. It's an energy leak that renders product knowledge, sales skills, goal drive and positive mental attitude worthless.

Dudley and Goodson's research proves most people in sales today are battling call reluctance. And call reluctance carries severe financial penalties. On average, a call reluctant salesperson forfeits 15 pieces of business every month to the competition. Salespeople who control their call reluctance earn five times more than equally competent salespeople who allow their call reluctance to control them. A salesperson who managed a \$30,000 income last year could earn \$150,000 this year, simply by controlling call reluctance.

The "fear of rejection" and the "fear of failure" are no longer adequate explanations for call reluctance. Dudley and Goodson have demonstrated sales call reluctance can assume 12 separate and distinct shapes. They name and describe each as follows:

Doomsayer: Takes few risks, expects the worst
Over-Preparer: Over-analyzes, underacts
Hyper-Pro: Over-emphasizes image and credibility
Stage Fright: Avoids group presentations
Role Rejection: Secretly feels guilt or shame about sales career
Yielders: Fears being seen as too pushy; has trouble asking for the order
Social Self-Conscious: Intimidated by "up-market" clientele
Separationist: Won't prospect friends
Unemancipated: Won't prospect family
Referral Aversion: Has trouble asking for referrals
Telephobia: Phone prospecting causes distress
Oppositional Reflex: Combative, uncoachable, refuses to be managed

Some people who hear the 12 forms of call reluctance described think they have them all. That's not likely.

A paper-and-pencil test refined by Dudley and Goodson over the past two decades is used to isolate the type and measure the amount of call reluctance

hindering a salesperson. Without such tests, call reluctance is almost impossible to correctly diagnose.

It's important to know the specific type of call reluctance being dealt with so the appropriate countermeasure can be prescribed. Effective countermeasures that work quickly and easily when prescribed correctly have been developed to overcome each form of call reluctance.

All 12 forms of call reluctance are *learned* – taught – behaviors. Call reluctance behaviors develop over time from a *positive* source. It is, for example, important to be prepared. Adequate preparation becomes over-preparation when “getting ready” to make calls replaces actually making the calls.

Because call reluctance is learned, the call reluctance situation of management must be determined. A sales stall will mirror the sales manager's call reluctance. The sales training program must also be reviewed so any call reluctance training concepts it encourages can be eliminated.

The current sales staff's call reluctance situation must be resolved. Salespeople *teach each other* to be call reluctant. And redirecting the sales team's energy away from call reluctant behavior towards goal-achieving activities means more sales calls – and more sales.

The call reluctance of new salespeople must be identified when they join the firm. Sales managers need to know what “baggage” the new rep is packing. Sales call reluctance does not respond to traditional product and sales training methods. The countermeasures need to become part of the overall training program.

Finally, it's important to know the call reluctant situation for service and support personnel. These folks are involved daily with the salespeople. What the support staff “sells” the salespeople in day-to-day conversation has a dramatic effect on sales.

Product knowledge, sales skills, goal drive, positive mental attitude – these things are important to a successful career in sales. But they mean nothing without implementation. Controlling call reluctance leads to more

sales contacts. And the consistent initiation of a sufficient number of sales contacts is the key to sale success.

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