

# Your Greatest Competitor -- Indifference

By Joe Heller, High Performance Sales Coach

Who is your greatest competitor? Throughout the history of selling, sales professionals have always faced great adversaries that compete for their highly coveted piece of business. Is yours the large multinational company or the boutique that somehow seems to call on your best customers? No, the most formidable competitor that has haunted salespeople for decades is the invisible competitor, the unseen attitude of customer indifference.

Why is indifference such a challenging competitor? Psychologically, indifference is rooted in our belief system. Its endemic, an attitude, a viewpoint held by your customers that you must change in order to close your sales. In addition, while you are more than able to compete head on against the visible products of your toughest competitor, the balance of power shifts when you are forced to compete against the invisible competitor of the human mind.

Indifference is not based in logic, but lies embedded in your client's perception. Many factors can contribute to client indifference, including familiarity with an existing product, or "may be" false satisfaction with a competitor's product, or the failure of the buyer to notice additional needs, or their failure to recognize the unique benefits value of your product/service. However, the most prevalent factor by far is simply complacency, the age-old adage, "but that's what we've always bought." Indifference comes from the client's opinion that what you are selling is a commodity-like product with relatively no distinction nor value over their existing product/service.

How do successful salespeople confront the competition of indifference? You attack the issue strategically, armed with a thorough evaluation of a potential client's current business practices. Indifference is overcome when a salesperson maps out a plan to resolve areas of customers' hidden frustrations by uncovering previously unidentified needs. In approaching indifference, the sales professional must understand the psychological considerations that are tied to changing an attitude. Your client needs to be motivated to change.

To combat indifference, you need to acknowledge that indifference affects your customer, gaining permission to ask probing questions that increases your understanding of the customer's specific needs.

By having a questioning strategy, you help the customer gain an awareness of the needs and problems your product can solve. Probing questions permit you to explore problems that may have been lying dormant, and/or hidden; buried for years under by the initial adoption of poor business practices.

Analytical probing allows you to understand the customers' core business; including new business strategies the client is planning, and to define the competitive pressures within a market niche or segment with the goal of helping the customer realize problems or needs of which they were previously unaware.

Having a questioning strategy designed to overcome indifference permits you to discover who the other suppliers are that are currently doing business with your prospective customer. By evaluating how satisfied the customer is with the current suppliers, you uncover business needs they would like to improve. Additionally, strategic questioning provides an opportunity to investigate the customer's strategies and goals, allowing you to align your product/service with the achievement of their business objectives. Once a customer's business objective is in the open, you can determine how your product can assist your customer in meeting their stated business goals.

**Note:** Effective probing that ties questioning and strategy together allows the sales professional to become consultative in their selling approach focusing on the customers business needs. Probing also allows you to gain insight on how your customers are positioned in the market, allowing you to evaluate how effectively they are competing, identifying who their competitors are, and whether they are gaining or losing market share respective to the specific products and segments they serve.

Raising the customers awareness about their current level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction, helps identify the consequences of leaving things unchanged, promoting the cost of a the need to facilitate change. If the questions are carefully crafted by your understanding of their business, the customer discerns the immediate financial implications of not acting in a timely manner, advancing the breakdown of the indifference barriers.

Remember the 80/20 Rule, also known as the Pareto Principle states that 80% of sales are made by the top 20% of all sales people. As a result, the lower 80% make 20% of the sales. One major failing of the lower 80% of salespeople is a tendency to introduce an assumed need the customer has not verbalized though probing. When a salesperson introduces a need the customer hasn't verbally expressed, the customer sees the sales person as "pushy," destroying any comfort level that's been built. The salesperson's poor judgment causes the customer to raise their barrier of indifference toward the salesperson's perceived high-pressure tactic.

Learning to recognize indifference by applying the appropriate strategy and tactics to combat it will continually advance the sale and lead to greater success in selling. Occasionally overcoming indifference happens immediately, but more than likely conquering customer indifference takes a long-term commitment.

Note: Questions that the salesperson asks must drive a business solution. Here are a few examples of questions to ask to gain a mutual understanding of a need between you and your prospect. ~ How do you feel about the results you are getting now? Are you on plan to achieve your 1/3/5 year goals? Are there any competitors in the market that are impeding your growth plans? How does that affect your business operations/sales? What impact is that having on your new client acquisition? Customer retention? Your product quality? Your productivity? Your cash flow?

In summary, indifference is a psychological competitor that lies in the attitudes of our customers. Remember, in a questioning strategy there are more than just using open and closed ended questions. There are questions that are designed to capture account information, help the customer recognize problems and what the problems will cost if not addressed, and questions on how to orient the customer to distinguish that your product is the right solution that will drive results to reach their intended business goals.

Final Thoughts: I've been talking about conquering indifference on the buyer side in order to win new customers. However, I'd like to point out that 68% of the customers a business loses are rooted in indifference from the sales professional. From the customers' perspective, they believe that the supplier has stopped treating them appropriately with care and empathy, no longer valuing their relationship.

Remember, that it takes up to five times more effort/energy/cost to win a new customer verses maintaining a profitable relationship with an existing customer. Indifference is a critical issue faced by all, causing the loss of more client relationships than any other reason. You must take care of your customers because they are the most valuable assets your business has.

One final note; in order to become a successful in selling you must become an avid student of what works in selling. I developed the Revenue Warrior Selling System (TM) to give you a competitive advantage and succeed against your most challenging competition. You can find the Revenue Warrior Selling System (TM) on my site <http://www.JoeHeller.com>. Go there right now and click on the Revenue Warrior Selling System (TM) to learn more. It's a great resource from my personal library for yours.

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