

How to Effectively Reduce Sales Call Reluctance¹

Kathryn Thornhill, Allen F. Wysocki, and Riley Tomlinson²

Introduction

A wide variety of companies utilize direct selling to market their products and services. This document is intended for salespeople who must seek out potential customers, as opposed to waiting for prospects to enter a retail establishment. For these sales professionals, the sales process begins with the salesperson contacting the potential client to schedule an appointment. One method of doing this is called *prospecting*, where the salesperson obtains a list of names and telephone numbers of people with whom they have not had prior contact. One well-known type of prospecting method is referred to as *cold calling*. Many salespeople are hesitant to cold call due to fear of failure and/or rejection. This hesitation is referred to as *Sales Call Reluctance*.[®] Call Reluctance can extend beyond the cold call to subsequent meetings with a prospect. It is also detrimental to the sales process because, if the salesperson is not making calls, there will be few appointments, fewer sales leads, and ultimately lower sales and profits for the salesperson and the company. Types of Call Reluctance, reasons for Call Reluctance, and suggestions for reducing Call Reluctance are presented in this document.

Types of Call Reluctance

According to Exceptional Sales (2002a), there are 12 types of Call Reluctance that deal with both telephone and face-to-face selling. The following four types of Call Reluctance are most relevant to this document: over-preparing, stage fright, telephobia, and oppositional reflex. *Over-preparing* occurs when a salesperson over-thinks what needs to be done to obtain a sale, yet under-acts due to stress. In addition, *over-preparing* results in closing only 43 percent of sales quotas, according to Exceptional Sales (2002a). A salesperson suffering from *stage fright* usually fears public speaking, losing an estimated \$10,800 in sales per year. *Telephobia* is the fear of telephone prospecting, which can cost a salesperson up to \$10,000 in commissions every year. *Oppositional reflex* means that a salesperson tends to argue and blame new coaching techniques for lost accounts, resulting in an average loss of nine accounts per year. The dollar amount associated with the loss of accounts will vary depending on the industry in which the sales are being made.

-
1. This is EDIS document SN011, a publication of the Department of Food and Resource Economics, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL. Published May 2003. Reviewed August 2009. Please visit the EDIS web site at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.
 2. Kathryn Thornhill, graduate student, Allen F. Wysocki, Assistant Professor, and Riley Tomlinson, graduate student, Department of Food and Resource Economics, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL.

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Opportunity Institution authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function with non-discrimination with respect to race, creed, color, religion, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, political opinions or affiliations. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A. & M. University Cooperative Extension Program, and Boards of County Commissioners Cooperating. Millie Ferrer, Interim Dean

Reasons for Call Reluctance

Everyone who prospects experiences Call Reluctance from time to time. Although there are many reasons for fear, the reasons for Call Reluctance can be broken down into two distinct categories: repeated failure and rejection (High Probability, 2002).

Repeated Failure

The first reason for Call Reluctance is the fear of *repeated failure*. This occurs when the salesperson attempts to schedule appointments with all the contacts on a prospect list and is repeatedly turned down. Each time the salesperson fails to schedule an appointment, the next contact becomes harder to complete due to the increasing fear of failure.

Rejection

The second reason for Call Reluctance is the fear of *rejection*. When a salesperson calls to schedule appointments from the contact list, he usually asks a series of questions from a rehearsed script. Often the prospect will become defensive, negative, or will cease communicating with the salesperson. Sometimes the salesperson will feel rejected even though it is the product or service and not the salesperson that is being rejected. The fear of being rejected may stop the salesperson from prospecting.

How to Reduce Call Reluctance

First, reducing Call Reluctance depends on the salesperson's type of Call Reluctance (Carroll, 2002). For example, one way to cure *over preparing* is to make sure the salesperson leaves the office by a certain time in the morning. This cuts down on the amount of time the salesperson has to prepare and actually start selling for the day. For the salesperson suffering from *stage fright*, one solution is to practice in front of a group of peers on a regular basis. Doing so will help eliminate the salesperson's fear of public speaking and improve his prospecting skills.

Second, reducing Call Reluctance demands setting realistic goals (Exceptional Sales, 2002b). One way of eliminating the fear of repeated failure is to measure success by the number of scheduled (not

unscheduled) appointments on the contact list. Management can help eliminate the fear of rejection by reassuring the salesperson that it is the product or service that is being rejected, not the salesperson.

Conclusion

Call Reluctance is detrimental to both the salesperson's career and the company. Both the salesperson and the company must work on reducing Call Reluctance, because if the problem is left unresolved, it causes frustration and loss of sales and money. The salesperson must work on overcoming the fear of failure and rejection, while management must be supportive of the salesperson for the benefit of the company.

References

Carroll, John. 2002. *How to overcome sales call reluctance*. [Online] website located at: <http://www.uperform.com/articles/art-reluctance.htm>. Date visited: September 10, 2002.

Exceptional Sales. 2002a. *12 types of call reluctance*. [Online] website at: <http://www.exceptionalsales.com/12types.html>. Date visited: September 10, 2002.

Exceptional Sales. 2002b. *Overcome sales call reluctance with exceptional sales performance*. [Online] website at: <http://www.exceptionalsales.com/>. Dated visited: September 10, 2002.

High Probability Selling. 2002. *Eliminate the fear of rejection and cold call reluctance*. [Online] website at: <http://www.highprobsell.com/callreluctance.html>. Date visited: September 10, 2002.