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If They Like You, They'll Find a Reason to Like Your Product

by Jack Roseman, Contributing Columnist

We all have to deal with closed doors, but I don't think people get doors slammed in their faces more often than those trying to create something new. In the last column I told you how deadly too-ready acceptance of a "no" can be for an entrepreneur; that knowing how to handle what seems like a closed door is critical to eventually succeeding. In this column I will offer a couple of tips on how to do that.

The most important thing is to recognize that a "no" is a point of view and not a fact of life. We covered that in the last column. I repeat it because it's so important. If you take a "no" too seriously, it will sap your confidence, energy, and conviction. And when you are confronting somebody with a different point of view than your own, it's essential that you have access to all three.

To get past "no," you need two things: someplace to go and an excuse for hanging

around long enough to get there. Think about it. The silence that follows a straight, simple "no" can be deafening. It can make you feel numb and mistaken. It certainly makes you feel unwelcome, like you are intruding, wasting the other person's time. You can't afford to dwell on any of these thoughts. That's why I say you need someplace to go. You need to keep your focus on your own point of view, your own ideal outcome.

But even that isn't enough. You also have to find a way to hang around long enough to change the other person's point of view. And you have to do that without annoying or irritating the other person. When someone has dealt you a blunt "no" it's the same as saying you are wrong. In business, "no" isn't usually sugar coated. More often it's a bare-fisted rejection; sometimes it even feels like it's delivered with brass knuckles.

That's hard to take. It feels insulting and the natural reaction is to strike back, but that's the worst thing you can do. The reason is that far more important than selling your product or service, is getting the prospect to like you. And you won't do that by retaliating.

One of the things you learn in marketing is that customers buy on the basis of emotion and then rationalize why it's a good business decision. Good salesmen understand that. Once a customer likes you, they'll look for a reason to justify buying from you. They can't say that's what they do, but that's what happens. If they don't like you, they'll find holes in the most logical argument you can make for what you're selling. So you don't want to be irritating.

You don't even want to be unresponsive. So how do you graciously hang around after somebody has essentially dismissed you? You have to

change the paradigm. The best way I have found to do that is with humor. But you can also do it with hyperbole - extreme exaggeration. Or you can just come back in some other totally unexpected way.

Last month I told you how I got an extra seat on a sold-out plane by telling a supervisor that the future of my marriage was in her hands. At the time, my company was spending a lot of money with USAir and I could have played that card. I could have tried to intimidate my way into an extra seat. That might have worked. She might have found a seat for me with that approach too. But, probably not.

My experience has been that when you yell at people, especially over the phone, the door just shuts tighter. By trying to intimidate her, I probably would have motivated her to find a way to avoid helping me.

You don't want people working against you in business, or anywhere else for that matter. You want them motivated to help you out. How do you do that? You make them like you. If you can, you make them laugh. If you can't think of something funny, try making the moment when they say "no" non-confrontational. You've probably seen people accomplish that by taking the sting out of somebody's irate diatribe with, "But how do you really feel?"

Get them to like you. At the decision point, if the decision you don't want to hear comes down, marginalize it by

changing the paradigm. React in a totally unexpected way. Use exaggeration, humor, imagination. But stay likable and stay credible.

And don't forget: "No" is always a point of view, not a fact of life.

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