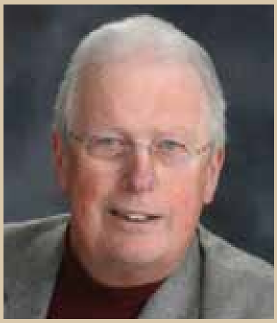
Managing Resistance

How to handle a customer's objections in order to gain trust, and their continued business



By Patrick T. Malone

How do I overcome objections?
How do I handle "No"?
How do I deal with difficult people?

At the beginning of our sales leadership development sessions, when I ask the participants what they would like to accomplish, these are the most popular responses. Many salespeople seem to think if they can minimize the customer's negative points of view, that their customer will drop their resistance and the salesperson's goals will be achieved. In other words, the belief seems to be "If I prove my point, you will drop yours."

Dean Rusk, the Secretary of State under President Kennedy exposed the futility of that logic when he said, "To me, the silliest argument in the world is, 'If you knew what I know, you would agree with me.'"

So, how do you manage resistance and answer objections? You can meet resistance with resistance, but the winner only gets a loser who remembers it forever. Given that the objective of leadership is to obtain wholehearted followers for a given course of action, you need to create a whole new mindset when it comes to managing resistance and answering objections.

Start by thinking of resistance as your client saying "I cannot catch up with your confidence. This (the point of resistance) is standing in the way. Can you help me?" Any resistance now is seen as the client asking for your help. That should change your entire approach.

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Understanding your client's perspective

Think of this in the context of IV fluid therapy. For many of your clients, the veterinarian is the only one who knows how to identify a patient in need of IV fluids, which IV fluid is appropriate for that patient, and how much IV fluid that patient needs. Further, they have very little time to teach their techs these skills, which limits the clinic's ability to deliver the benefits of IV fluids to more patients. By developing these skills within your client's clinic, you will not only increase the use of IV fluid therapy products that they use, you will also improve the quality of medicine that they deliver to their patients.

Your new approach to addressing these obstacles then is to probe to understand the client's perspective of IV fluid therapy, and discover what may be keeping them from utilizing IV fluids more often. Below you'll find a few probing questions.

- "Doctor, how do you decide which patients receive IV fluids?"
- "Doctor, how do you train your staff on IV fluid therapy?"
- "Doctor, what prevents you from utilizing IV fluids more often?"

Until you discover the client's point of view regarding IV fluid therapy, or any type of treatment, you cannot begin to explore solutions that will work for them.

Once you understand their point of view, you can present aligned solutions that will establish the appropriate priorities, offer help, reduce risk, prevent future problems and/or provide the appropriate proof. Staying with the IV fluid therapy category, think of Abbott's approach to these clinical issues.

Now that Abbott's IV fluids are labeled for veterinary use, you can spend time educating your customers on a topic that they want to know more about. To help you, Abbott has the necessary tools and services at your disposal. First, they've created simple, easy-to-use posters for in-clinic use. These include a poster to identify which crystalloid fluids to use for different disease states, and another poster that shows how much fluid to give a patient based on its body weight and level of dehydration. Next, the manufacturer has a 24/7 hotline with access to its technical services veterinarian who can answer your clinic's questions about fluid therapy and other topics. Finally, by setting up in-services led by one of Abbott's Veterinary Liaisons – which can be supplemented by lunch-n–learns from Abbott's sales force – you, the distributor rep, are solving the problem, answering an objection, and bringing extra value to that clinic.

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Interestingly, the more you are able to help your clients manage the problems preventing them from reaching confidence, the more you will be seen as a trusted adviser and less as just another distributor sales representative. In most clinics, trusted advisors usually end up with the vast majority of a clinic's distribution purchases, while vendors are relegated to secondary or tertiary positions. So the trusted advisor role is good for both your psyche and your pocket book.

Remember, first change your mindset – see resistance or objections as your customer saying "I cannot reach confidence, can you help me?" Then change your approach by probing to understand the situation from your customer's perspective. Many times the NIQCL probing sequence will aid you in asking the right questions. However, remember to acknowledge the answers before asking the next question so that you create a conversation and not an interrogation. Aligning comes next and you will be surprised to see the resistance dissolve right before your eyes. ■

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