

27

Your Differences Will Handle Objections

I love different folks.

—Eleanor Hodgman Porter, *Pollyanna*

The Bilbrey Furniture Company was the most successful store in the small town where I grew up. The owner, Lee Bilbrey, provided personal service in an unusual way. As the Wal-Marts and Kmart's began arriving on the scene with their discounted furniture and other items, many businesses died, but not Bilbrey Furniture. Whenever customers would visit Bilbrey's store, Lee Bilbrey would let them browse without interruption for a few minutes, all the while observing them. Then with his detailed knowledge of the items the customers were looking at, he would comment on the items' fabric or construction. He would ask a few very gentle questions and then make a presentation about the furniture the customers were interested in.

If customers did not purchase and Bilbrey felt they would be well served with quality furniture, he had a unique wrap-up to his presentation. Bilbrey would say, "I know you have choices in buying furniture. You could travel all the way to Knoxville and you could buy some cheap stuff at the Kmart. But there is one thing you won't get when you buy from those other places. You won't get me. You have me standing behind your purchase, helping with the arrangement and free delivery and setup. You won't get that anywhere else." Then he would walk over to a freezer and get a quart of ice cream to hand to the customer. Inevitably, the customer would thank Bilbrey and then drive home to put the ice cream in their freezer. Most would talk about how nice that man was and return to buy his furniture. (Having ice cream melting in the car also ensured that customers didn't stop and shop at other stores on their way home!)

Bilbrey understood how to differentiate himself and his business. First of all, he knew his products inside and out, a rarity at the discounting stores. His detailed knowledge was very impressive to his customers. Second, he

270 All Selling Is Personal Selling

stressed the key differentiator of his business: himself. He knew that people begin to decide which product to buy based on differences.

Your Uniqueness

How do you differ from your competition? What are your mission and your vision for serving clients? Is it your niche focus? Is it your size? Is it your commitment to certain levels of customer service? Is it focus on certain services? Whenever you can match up your differences with the needs of certain clients, there is a natural fit. When this natural fit occurs, you will easily overcome the objections that may arise in a selling situation.



In order to be irreplaceable, one must always be different.

—Coco Chanel

Objections arise because prospects sense that your services are not a perfect fit for his business. Whenever a prospect senses this perfect fit, you will have a new client. If there is a perfect match, the prospect will pay more for your services because she values your differences.

Think about it this way: The audit committee has completed its interview of three firms and one of the members says, “They all looked the same, quality work, CPAs, nice proposals, blue suits, smart people, and specialized in our industry.” How will they choose? If all things appear the same, the choice will come down to low price. That is another reason you want to focus on your differences. When the prospect values those differences, price becomes less of an issue.



To be successful in business, you must be unique. You must be so different, that if people want what you have, they must come to you to get it.

—Walt Disney

Jim Belew describes it this way, “In public accounting, we deliver a commodity-type service that is extremely customized. During my youth I worked at a gas station. Gasoline is a commodity. The margin on the gasoline is very competitive. But the profit potential on all of the other products is enormous. The gas station I worked at focused on auto repair and other fluids for your car. Today the gas stations sell milk, bread, prepared fast foods, and souvenirs. While the services have changed, it’s the same concept.

When you bring value to customers, they reward you with their money. Same thing in what we do—yes, you can deliver a tax return, but you focus on some of the real needs: for example, paying less taxes, personal or business budgeting, cash flow, credit and the right kind of debt. Are they investing in the assets to get the right kind of return? Are they putting money away for retirement? You are adding value above and beyond just providing a commodity set of tax returns or books. This is what makes us different.”

A major portion of your prospect investigation should be to determine the needs and wants of the client and then to match up your differentiators to fit the needs.

Your Competition

Bob Gaida uses a “service gap” message. He says, “Across America, there are companies or clients who are being underserved by their local accounting firm or by a Big Five competitor. Our middle-market firm has an opportunity to fill the service gap created when a perception of this occurs. When I am talking to a specific prospect, I focus on these differences. The local firms and the Big Four know of these, but they can’t match them. Clients who are well matched for us will value the service gap message. I never slam my local or Big Five competitors. But I do point out truthful differences.”

On the following pages are some charts to help you sort through your differences from your competitors (see Exhibit 27.1). Fill them out and see how they help you.

Clarifying your differences from your competitors will handle most objections before they arise. But there is rarely a perfect fit, so you must help prospects deal with some of the imperfections.

In a competitive selling situation, the CPA who successfully uncovers and sells to the objections of the prospect will gain a winning edge. How often have you left a competitive proposal feeling really good about your presentation only to learn later that the prospect either selected another CPA or stayed with the current one? And how often did you really know the reason why you lost the proposal?

Handling Objections

A great seller will anticipate and cultivate objections. If you do not know areas of potential client concerns, you cannot address them. And if you do not address them, the objections will stay hidden from you and will kill your chances of proposal success. Begin searching for possible objections the moment you realize that you will propose. Some objections should be handled

Exhibit 27.1

COMPETITION DIFFERENTIATION WORKSHEET	
LIST YOUR COMPETITORS:	
International Firms _____	

National Firms _____	

Regional Firms _____	

Large Local Firms _____	

Sole CPA Practitioners _____	

National Brokerage Houses _____	

HOW ARE YOU DIFFERENT FROM YOUR COMPETITORS?	
I. When you compete against a big firm,	
Your advantages are:	Describe the various benefits to clients:
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	
9.	
10.	

When you compete against a big firm,	
<i>Your weaknesses are:</i>	<i>Describe the impact on clients:</i>
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
II. When you compete against a small firm,	
<i>Your advantages are:</i>	<i>Describe the various benefits to clients:</i>
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	
9.	
10.	
When you compete against a small firm,	
<i>Your weaknesses are:</i>	<i>Describe the impact on clients:</i>
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

(continues)

274 All Selling Is Personal Selling

Exhibit 27.1 (Continued)

III. When you compete against a firm about your size,	
<i>Your advantages are:</i>	<i>Describe the various benefits to clients:</i>
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	
9.	
10.	
When you compete against a firm about your size,	
<i>Your weaknesses are:</i>	<i>Describe the impact on clients:</i>
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

during your presentation and some after the prospect brings them up. The rule generally is this: If your answer to an objection is weak, deal with the objection during the early part of your presentation.

If, during your presentation, your prospect brings up an objection such as “Your fees are too high” or “We’re happy with our present CPA,” there are specific steps you should take to handle it.

Seven Ways to Deal with Objections during Presentations

- 1 *Listen carefully.*** Let your prospect talk it out. The worst thing you can do is anticipate what the prospect is going to say. You may answer an objection your prospect doesn’t have yet.
- 2 *Never argue.*** This will push the prospect into a defensive mode. When prospects become defensive, they will begin to think of new objections and you will find yourself in a wrestling match you cannot win.
- 3 *Restate the objection.*** Restating often is a way to get prospects to answer their own objections. If you are presenting to multiple decision makers, many times one of them will handle the restatement for you. J. P. Morgan said that a person generally has two reasons for doing things: one that sounds good and the real one.
- 4 *Question the area of concern.*** Often when you ask prospects to elaborate, they will determine that what they thought was a problem is not very important in the whole scheme of their decision. You will also gain valuable insight into the concern and give yourself a little time to mentally prepare your answer.
- 5 *Provide a short answer.*** Minimize the mental impact of the objection by providing a well-rehearsed, concise answer. Do not be vague, but be as brief as possible.
- 6 *Confirm your answer.*** If you do not clear the air before proceeding with your presentation, prospects will still be thinking about the area of concern while you are talking about something else. Say something like “That clarifies the issue for you, doesn’t it?”
- 7 *Proceed with a trial close.*** After you have satisfied a prospect as to one of the voiced areas of concern, you may be able to get your prospect’s commitment.

276 All Selling Is Personal Selling

In a competitive proposal process, you have wasted your time if you do not win the business. There is no silver medal for coming in second. Often the key to coming in first is to discover any possible reason, real or imagined, that your prospect may have for rating you number two in any area of your service. Anticipating and handling objections is crucial.

Handling Specific Concerns during the Presentation

Below, I discuss some of the concerns you might encounter during your meetings.

Fees, Price, and Value

When presenting to a prospect, when should you mention the fee? Not until you have established the value of the benefits provided.

Because non-CPAs have difficulty selecting among professionals, they often ask, “How much would it cost me?” Such a question baits you into discussing price before creating a context of value. Price is relevant only when compared to value. Price without value is exorbitant under any circumstances.

If you can avoid price until you have determined the needs of your prospect, you will be in a position to propose the service that will provide the greatest satisfaction.

Don’t ignore a specific request for fees, but answer it vaguely until you can clearly establish value. Say something like “Our fees are comparable to other CPAs, but we may find ways that you can save substantially,” or “Our average billing rates are \$105 per hour. But before I give you a quote, let me see if there are ways I can make you a profit from our relationship.”

Market pricing is a coming issue for accountants. You will be able to market price only when you establish value before quoting a fee. Selling value will distinguish you from competitors and may allow you to realize many times your standard fees from delighted clients.

We’re Happy with Our Current CPA

Are there ways you can respond when you hear this comment from your prospects? Or should you just congratulate them for their excellent choice and bid them adieu?

Most businesses have a relationship with an outside CPA. Rarely will they share small problems with another CPA until the intensity of the complaint is large. But, if you follow these five rules, you may learn there is great opportunity for you.

Rule 1: *If you cannot find dissatisfied people in the business, your chances of success are nil.* The person with whom you are talking may not be unhappy, but another person may be. You may be talking with the CEO who is satisfied with the current CPA firm, but the CFO may hate the firm. Ask your contact, “Who comes in contact with the outside CPA firm?” or “Who has an impact on engaging outside CPA services?”

Rule 2: *Never slam a competitor.* Congratulate your contacts and say that you are glad they are receiving great service, because many businesses are not. Let them know that you realize business must be earned over time and you are willing to make that investment. Tell them that you would like to be their second choice in the event that something should happen to their first choice or when they have a need that number one cannot fill.

Rule 3: *Anticipate the comment that prospects are happy with their current CPA.* “While you are probably happy with your present CPA, our firm has helped many of our clients become more profitable.” Tell contacts that many businesses their size often split their business between two CPA firms so they won’t be dependent on just one for advice or pricing. It is very common for businesses to utilize numerous law firms, for example.

Rule 4: *Offer a service that none of your competitors provides.* Doing this will differentiate you and allow you a better chance to serve. When offering such a service, insure that you can do it profitably and extremely well.

Rule 5: *Try to keep your courtship confidential.* This may be impossible, but the moment your competition learns of your advances to its clients, the other firm will rush into action and clean up its act.

Summary

A key factor in impressing prospects and getting new clients is to be able to articulate your differences from your competitors and to make your prospects understand how those differences are benefits to them. Know yourself first, then your competition. Be prepared to deal with common objections about price by instead selling value. Be prepared to show why it’s worth their effort to change accountants.