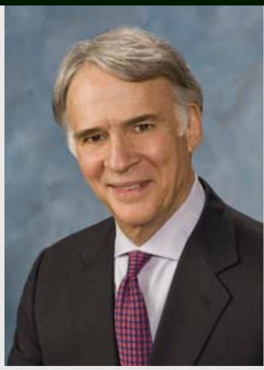
The Baron Group July, 2009



Hello Everybody:

It is hard to believe that the year is half over. And once again we have to report that it continues to be a challenging time for most of us. If the recession did begin in December 2007, as The National Bureau of Economic Research reported earlier this year, than we have been dealing with this for a year and a half. That's 18 months. We are not alone when we complain that we have had enough. And although there are those glimmers of hope, it is not over yet. But most of us think the worst is behind us.

And with that in mind once again our thoughts turn to how we need to behave in times like these. Being gracious is high on the list. When we receive disappointing news, when we don't win business, when things are delayed, when decisions are not made and when we don't get any response, our emotions can get in the way. That rarely helps our cause. Regardless of how upsetting the news may be, the professional saleperson needs to take the high road. That is what we will investigate in this quarter's newsletter

So hang in there. Better days are ahead. We hope the next newsletter in the early Fall will focus on how to best manage the upswing. But for now, let's think about what we need to do at this moment in time so that when things do turn around we will be positioned to win.

Enjoy the summer.

Eric

Let's Talk Selling

It's a Great Time to be Gracious

I remember attending a wedding years ago because of the wise words of advice that were offered during the ceremony: *It's easy to get along well in good times...the challenge is to get along well in bad times.*

Great advice, to be sure—but not just for a young couple about to take their vows. It's also great advice for anyone in business, and holds particular value for those of us in sales in these troubled times.

We hear people frequently complain that business courtesy is a lost art, and that civility in business seems to have disappeared. Many complain that business people fail to show one another the respect that they once did, and we certainly can't argue with that. Unfortunately, we see it every day, particularly in the sales arena.

It's the little things—phone calls aren't returned, emails are ignored, and solicitation letters don't elicit a response. Whether you are dealing with a new prospect or a long-term client, it's more than likely that you may find yourself marveling at how often your attempts to reach out are ignored rather than how responsive your target may be.

We hear many stories about people responding to inquires, following through on specific requests and even submitting proposals that were requested… and never hearing a word back.

Think about that for a minute. The RFP goes out. A potential supplier invests the time to submit a thoughtful proposal... and they never even get a response. Not even an acknowledgement of receipt, nor a perfunctory "we have decided to go in another direction."

It is hard to understand and even more difficult to accept. But it happens too often and almost everyone agrees, much more today than yesterday. We are moving in the wrong direction.

Lest we lose all hope, it is important to remember that there are reasons, some good or at least understandable, that may explain this behavior, but do not justify it. People are busy, people don't like to give bad news, people seek to avoid conflict, people want to be liked, etc. People are concerned about the possible reaction on the other side, and tend to focus on things that are more comfortable for them. While this does not justify the behavior, it may make it easier to accept.

So the challenge for all of us, of course, is to think about how we respond to this.

(Continued on page 2)

How to Say 'No'

Sometimes salespeople have to say 'no' to their customers. In the spirit of being gracious, let's explore how to do that effectively.

Most people don't like to say no. Whether it's turning down a request from a friend, taking a position with a child, letting a colleague know you can't help, or telling a customer you can't do what they requested, for most people it's not a comfortable thing to do.

But it is something we have to do. Something we have to do often. And in some cases we have to be diplomatic when we turn down a request.

Sales professionals often find themselves in situations in which they have to say no. It happens with colleagues and it happens with clients. And with that in mind, we can all benefit from learning a specific process to make it easier for us to have to convey difficult messages and at the same time make it easier for those on the other side to accept what we have to say.

(Continued on page 3)

It's a Great Time to be Gracious (continued)

With the myriad of feelings we experience when we are disappointed, ranging from despondent to angry, the question becomes—how should we behave?

We believe the answer is simple—**take the high road**.

Synectics Inc, the highly regarded consulting firm that has spent 50 years researching group interactions, developed many memorable phases. One of my favorites is a hard one to practice but very powerful when played correctly: *Assume value, reserve judgment.*

The reality is that everyone is ridiculously busy. Many of our clients tell us they can be overwhelmed at times… and battle fear on a daily basis. Too many are self-absorbed, and what we have seen results from these constant concerns about company, career, job, family and future. It is difficult to think of others when you are more concerned about yourself—bottom line.

The tendency is to put more energy into *their* customers and *their* business and less into their colleagues, partners, vendors and suppliers. Too often, the result is a lack of responsiveness, which can be so frustrating.

Assume Value, Reserve Judgment

Of course, this doesn't apply to everyone. But as you well know, it can be contagious… and spreads quickly and without warning. We hear all the time that it happens too often, and before people know it, there is a negative undercurrent that shapes your professional climate. It can be difficult to shake off. And that's not good.

So again, take the high road. Assume value. If your phone calls are not returned, send a pleasant email reviewing what you left in your message. If your email does not yield a response, send a new one that expresses your understanding of their situation, ("I know how busy you are…"). If they owe you a response, gently request a brief response. ("it would be very helpful if you could send a brief response…") Finally, if you require a response, explain why you need it, clearly and specifically and what the benefit is to them for responding. And as Kate Reilly likes to say, let them know it's ok to share bad news.

Sometimes a brief email acknowledging that these are busy times and that you will try again in a few weeks can be extremely effective. Other times, you may opt to leave it in their court. It may surprise you how often messages like these result in a response. It may not be the response you wanted, but you will get an answer.

Graciousness is a wonderful behavior; it sends a powerfully attractive message and will continually differentiate you from the pack.

It's a life skill that applies uniquely in this tough business climate.

Conversely, coming across as frustrated, disappointed, annoyed or upset does very little good. Punitive behavior yields few dividends and making people feel uncomfortable does little to help relationships. Working against our instincts in these moments is often in our best interest.

If someone offers an apology, it is easy to respond with "…no need to apologize, I know how busy you are." Similarly, if someone lets you know they forgot, you can respond with "…in these times it is easy for things to slip through the cracks."

It's simply a more honorable way to deal with people. Even if you didn't win the business, saying something like "we appreciated having had the opportunity…" is a great way to show class.

This approach demonstrates empathy and sensitivity—two key behaviors clients demand from salespeople. And yes, it differentiates you from others.

Remain mindful that we don't want you to come across as insincere, obsequious or weak. But we do encourage you to take that high road, to be gracious, and to do it all the time. Remember that it is how we treat each other in bad times that can be challenging. Do it well and you will enjoy the long term results—especially when the good times roll back around, as they are bound to do.

The Process – How to Say "No"

1. **Acknowledge their request**
2. **Paraphrase your understanding of what was requested**
3. **Tell them that you want to help**
4. **Tell them what you *can* do**
5. **Tell them what you can't do**

The following is a process that we encourage you to consider.

1. Acknowledge their Request

This entails listening carefully so that you can let the person know you heard them and that it was ok to ask. It shows respect for the person in that you are not judging what they requested but instead you are willing to discuss it. It lets them know that you are focusing on them, not you. Acknowledgement demonstrates empathy and sensitivity and sets the climate which gives you more latitude to problem solves.

Example: Somebody wants to borrow your car and you can't do it. You would acknowledge it by saying something like "I know you really need to get to the airport quickly." It lets the person know you heard them and are aware of what they want.

2. Paraphrase your Understanding of the Request

Paraphrasing provides you with the opportunity to demonstrate that you have been listening. It is inextricably linked to acknowledgement. Paraphrasing is your explaining your understanding of the request in your words. Paraphrasing establishes clarity around the specific request that you are going to reject, so there is no misunderstanding.

Example: A colleague asked you to work late to help get out a proposal. You can't help because of a family commitment.

The Acknowledgement: "I know how much pressure you are under to get this out.

The Paraphrase: …and I appreciate the fact that you'd like me to stay late and work with you to help you get it done tonight…"

3. Tell them that you want help

This is your way of letting them know that you would really want to do what you can to help. It also will let them know that it was OK to ask. It sets the tone for the eventual rejection by letting them know that you would like to respond positively if you could.

Example: A client calls to see if you can rewrite your proposal and get it back to them within 24 hours. You know that's impossible. After going through the first two steps you could say something like: "I would really like to help you prepare for the meeting. And quite frankly it would demonstrate how responsive we can be…"

But as you see, it sets the tone for where you are headed in that it lets them know you would like to help (and why) and it implies that you can't do it in the way they specifically requested.

4. Tell them what you can do

When people do make requests that you can't satisfy, you will have a much more successful interaction if you offer alternatives. To simply reject a request without offering options leaves you no place to go. It gives the impression that you aren't willing to problem solve. And it can, whether it's correct or not, give the impression that you are not interested in helping.

There are always alternatives. They may not be acceptable to the other person, but at minimum it demonstrates your willingness to work with them to reach a conclusion.

Example: A colleague asks you to switch vacation weeks so he can attend a family reunion. There is no way you can do this as you have your own family vacation planned and the dates are locked in, and you won't disappoint your family. What you might say is something like this (after acknowledging, paraphrasing, and communicating your desire to help):

"Here's what I would be happy to do. I will talk to as many members on our team as possible to learn if someone else can do it. I will even send an e-mail to other team leaders to see what they can do. Or, perhaps if you can't trade vacations with someone, maybe we can figure out how to get someone to cover for you so that the work will get done. I will do whatever I can to help you get away that week."

5. Tell them what you *can't* do

Now it's time to be as specific as you can about your inability to do specifically what they want. Having shown understanding of the request, demonstrated that you listened carefully and expressed a willingness to work with them, it's time to say no.

You have to be very deliberate. You have to be clear. Having led up to this in a sensitive and open-minded way, you must be very specific. There isn't room for misunderstanding. You must say no and explain the rationale behind your decision.

Example: You have to reject a prospective client's request to eliminate the pre-payment penalty. You effectively walked through steps 1 to 4. Now it's time to say no.

"…now having said that, I regret that we must turn down that request. As I mentioned, there are several things we can do to make the deal more competitive. But the pre-payment policy is something we simply can't take off the table. Without it the deal would not have the protection we need to ensure that this is an agreement that works for both of us. And since we include it with all of our clients, we would feel most uncomfortable not doing it here. I hope you understand.

Now these examples are hypothetical. And in day-to-day conversations people don't talk precisely like this. But the **process** is what we want you to consider. It allows your colleagues and clients to know that you have their interests in mind, that you want to help them, that you want to work with them, and that your decisions are thoughtful and careful. Now it's just a matter of doing it…

2009 Public Workshops

The Baron Group

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"We infuse consultative selling with creative problem-solving skills, enabling salespeople to elevate their relationships from vendor to trusted partner, and boosting results.

"Tip of the Month"
www.barongroup.com

Consultative Selling Skills (two-days)

August 6-7 ◆ November 5-6

Objectives

- Understand the connections and similarities between problem-solving and selling in order to transform the sales call into a problem solving opportunity.
- Determine both the obvious and not so obvious needs of their customers.
- Use state-of-the-art skills to determine needs, including: questioning, listening, reframing, interpreting understanding non-verbals and paraphrasing.
- Provide recommendations with benefits linked to specific client needs.
- Present ideas in addition to products and services as answers to customer needs and add value.
- Resolve objections using a problem solving approach and mentality.
- Apply facilitation techniques in selling situations.
- Plan and follow-up their sales calls in a professional manner.

Coaching for Improved Sales Performance (two-days)

October 22-23 ◆ December 3-4

Objectives

- Observe their salespeople in selling situations with an understanding of what to look for and how to capture key points.
- Give feedback in a balanced, helpful, and non-threatening way.
- Offer a salesperson ideas as to how to be more effective in the selling role.
- Manage the resistance salespeople demonstrate when a manager suggests changing or modifying their sales approach.
- Gain commitment by getting the salesperson to develop an action plan at the conclusion of the session.
- Apply the process in other situations to help people grow in their jobs.
- Deal effectively with coaching problems and issues.

For more information on The Baron Group's public workshops please visit our website www.barongroup.com

Resolving Client Objections (One-day)

NEW

August 28   September 25
October 15   November 13

Session Fee $650.00
Time: 9:00 AM – 4:00 PM
Location: The Baron Group,
57 Wilton Road, Westport, CT

Visit our website for more information

www.barongroup.com

A Thought for the Times:

Call one client or customer from your "dead file" each week.

That's almost fifty calls during the year. You will make contact with 5-10 of them and you will get business with one or two. The dead file is loaded with people who know you.

You will be surprised to see that the dead file isn't as dead as you think.