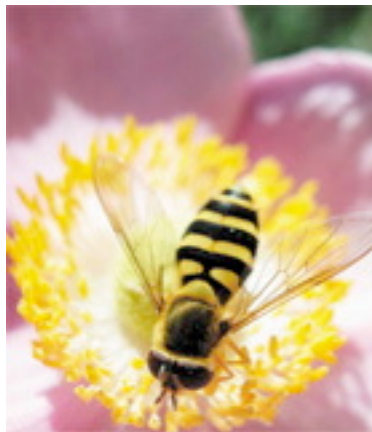


Desired Outcomes which Benefit Both Parties
Removing objections prepares the way
for successful proposals

By Charlie Lang, Executive Coach, Trainer and Founder of Progress-U Limited



After several weeks of tough negotiations and numerous changes to the draft contract, Andrew was confident that the deal to sell a complex IT solution was very close to being finalised. Therefore, he could not have been more surprised when told by his counterpart: "We are not convinced that the synergies we could create with this solution are sufficient to make the investment justifiable. Sorry!"

The contract he had been working on for months evaporated into thin air in a matter of seconds, along with the financial benefits the project was expected to bring. As CEO, Andrew was obviously in a very embarrassing situation and his efforts to revive the deal came to nothing. The decision was final.

He asked himself how it could have happened. Had he been too optimistic or missed a vital clue? He realised eventually that he should have taken better note of objections voiced along the way and tried to understand their root cause. By doing that, he could have minimised their impact or avoided them completely.

Objections are a way of indicating disagreement with any proposal that doesn't sufficiently match expectations. In most cases, expectations are a combination of available information and desired outcomes, which, in turn, are the result of core values and beliefs developed from personal and professional experiences.

In the course of normal business communication, an executive can minimise the chance of facing objections by working on two areas: the proposal and the level of expectation.

When to propose?

When coaching executives and especially salespeople, I find they tend to make proposals much too early and thus, almost inevitably, provoke objections. What they should do is wait until the person they are dealing with can see a sufficient match between what is being offered and what is expected before actually making any formal

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proposal. To do that, it is necessary to help the other party achieve awareness of his or her own expectations and a recognition of what the proposal should include.

Once this awareness exists, the salesperson can move ahead by emphasising certain key points. It only makes sense to submit a formal proposal if it will clearly match the major expectations.

The basic challenge is to create a high level of trust since otherwise the process of mutual discovery will not work as intended. For this, the person planning to make the proposal must first focus on the outcome desired by their counterpart. This should come across as a genuine interest and be intended to achieve maximum clarity. The person receiving the proposal should ensure they have enough information and are sure their desired outcome can be achieved.

When examining Andrew's case after the event, I discovered there was never any great level of trust. The two parties had been trying to outsmart each other in order to achieve the best possible outcome for themselves. As a consequence, important information was held back and neither side knew precisely what the other wanted to get out of the deal. Andrew wrongly assumed things were moving in the right direction and believed that, since work had started on a draft contract, the negotiations were progressing towards a satisfactory conclusion. In his eagerness to achieve an outcome, he had provided inadequate information and had formed unrealistic expectations.

Managing expectations

It is, though, possible to manage expectations and desired outcomes by providing key information. For example, if you are a senior executive trying to get a department head to invest more in staff development, he might say the first priority is to improve productivity. He might believe this is achievable with the skills of the current team combined with his own hard work and assumes this approach will get him a promotion. Rather than provoking an objection, you could instead explore the various ways in which productivity could be increased. If the target is to improve by 15 per cent within the

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next 12 months, you could explain and provide examples of how training staff in new competencies would make this possible, and give them greater job satisfaction.

The aim would not be to change his desired outcome (promotion), but to understand how he expects to achieve it and why, and then to provide information which allows him to see the bigger picture for the company. In that way, he will be more inclined to adjust his attitude towards staff development, will create greater value for the organisation and may well exceed the original target. However, without the additional information, his basic methods and expectations would be unchanged. If you can anticipate and remove an objection, the outcome is almost certain to be better.

Whenever we hear an objection, it is a signal to stop pushing our own agenda and, instead, to work on building greater trust and managing the expectations of the other party.

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Charlie Lang - Executive Coach, Trainer & Founder of Progress-U Limited



Charlie Lang works with senior executives who are already successful and want to make sure that they stay at the leading edge. They are often challenged by issues like:

- How to improve staff retention, especially how to keep top performers.
- How to achieve a corporate success culture that guarantees longterm success.
- How to create new levels of excellence through high employee engagement.

Charlie, an executive coach & trainer who is known for his innovative approaches towards leadership, change processes and sales, assists his clients in mastering these challenges. They achieve outstanding results through Charlie's unique application of latest findings in research combined with his own experience in international management and leadership.

Charlie's mission is to help Progress-U's clients deal with their interpersonal challenges in the most effective way for the benefit of all stakeholders. To achieve this, Charlie offers Executive Training and Coaching to middle and upper management. He also delivers public speeches, and is a passionate thinker and writer of articles on these topics. End of 2004 he started authoring "The Groupness Factor", a book on First-Class Leadership which was published in August 2005.

Contact

M +852-9199 2019

E Charlie.Lang@progressu.com.hk

W <http://www.progressu.com.hk>

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