



THE GOOD PEANUT

“NEED FOR APPROVAL –HOW IT SABOTAGES SALES AND HOW TO FIX IT”

A report on professional selling by Julian Griffith

“Beware of no one more than of yourself; we carry our worst enemies within us.” Charles Spurgeon

When we think of our own upbringing and what was probably expected from us it is little wonder that so many seek the approval of others in their day to day lives.

From an early age we're told we've got to get on with our siblings, be popular at school, be part of a team, avoid confrontation, be polite and ask permission to do the things we want to do. Be easy going in social gatherings and maybe bite our lip instead of questioning something that's been said we don't agree with.

So many salespeople are drawn to sales because they like the social aspect, meeting new people, being popular, part of a team, they want to please, receive recognition and be rewarded. These things are important to them.

Here's the rub. It's these very characteristics, the ones we assume would support us when selling that commonly combine to create our Achilles Heel and stop us being as effective as we need to be. They can manifest into saying things we don't mean, asking permission to do something, feeling anxious when someone disagrees with you, not pushing for a response when you need one, a fear of rejection, indecision and a need to please.

The common defence from salespeople is that people do business with people who like them – and the majority of the time they are of course right. However, it's when the salesperson has a *need* to be liked by their clients that serious problems arise. Their need to be liked is greater than their need to close business.

Ring any bells? So how widespread is this need for approval with salespeople?

To find the answer I analysed data from five clients' sales organisations we had recently evaluated across a diverse range of industries and selling environments.

The test data comprised 159 sales managers and salespeople. Of this number 101 or 63.52% self evaluated as having a *need for approval* when selling and all bar one of this group were also *too trusting* of prospects and clients.

According to Objective Management Group (OMG)¹, who have assessed over 500,000 salespeople, (about 50,000 in 2010 alone) through 8500 sales organisations, *need for approval* is the second most powerful and most common weakness found in and handicapping salespeople from achieving their real potential.

¹ Objective Management Group - www.objectivemanagement.com

They go on to explain the salesperson *“will avoid saying or doing those things which, in his/her mind, would change how the prospect feels about him/her. This includes, but is not limited to tough questions, legitimate confrontation and the potential inability to handle rejection or a 'no'. The result is that this person will develop pipeline bloat - prospects that remain in the pipeline with relatively few of them getting closed or eliminated.”*

A conversation with a colleague based in the US really struck a chord when he told me that the sales organisations doing well over there were the ones that challenged their clients' thinking and the ways they did things. This calls for bravery, risking confrontation and rejection, frankly something impossible to achieve if your sales team is riddled with this hidden weakness for seeking out and needing approval.

Harsh reality is we need to have our salespeople doing the difficult things, because according to additional data from OMG in 2010 only 44% of the salespeople they have evaluated are hitting their numbers.

The facts are it's tough to handle a rebuke, easier to adopt a stance that will bring approval. But the more flattery someone seeks the easier they can be manipulated.

Seeking approval will prevent sales from being closed because the tough questions just aren't being asked, the salesperson leaves with the message *“I'll think about it and come back to you ringing in their ears”* - again. They'll sit in the car after the meeting wishing they could go back in and just ask that awkward probing question they were desperate to pose, the one that may have got them the order but were too nervous to ask in case it upset their prospect, and God forbid resulted in them being asked to leave!

So often I talk with salespeople who genuinely believe if they give prospects lots of information they will eventually buy from them. Some will, but the majority will not. The salesperson has been a terrific unpaid consultant and their prospect has bought from their competitor because she was brave and asked the hard questions.

So what can we do to overcome this problem within ourselves and our sales teams?

If this is a selling weakness you recognise within yourself or members of your team that's a great start. It's vital to understand these are usually hidden issues, they're not a criticism of us as human beings, instead a very common problem that blocks us from being successful when selling.

Start now to change the way you think, coach those around you to help them overcome their need for approval.

To finish, I've listed some key strategies for success you can adopt by shifting the way you think. They will help to get this selling weakness under control.

- Accept you cannot and will not please everyone
- Stop looking for flattery or praise from your clients. If it's given thank them quickly and move on
- Break your connection with your own self worth and start to think along the lines of *“This is his problem, I expect him to behave that way”*
- Be more assertive
- Trust yourself when making decisions and then stick with them
- Stop looking for verification on your facts such as asking *“Isn't that right?”*
- Replace the word *“approval”* with *“respect”* in your internal vocabulary

Understand the negative impact that a need for approval has had on your sales career. From this point on focus on what you now seek from your clients – *respect*.

About

The

Author



Julian Griffith is the most sought after private advisor to CEOs specialising in sales force performance for three specific reasons. 1) He tells it like it is 2) He doesn't play politics and 3) He has an uncanny gift to uncover sales blockages that most CEOs don't always recognise on their own. Having held senior sales leadership positions both in the UK and Australia, Julian has seen the good, the bad and the ugly among sales leaders and why they innocently miss hidden performance blockages within their own sales teams.

Julian is the Managing Director and Founder of The Good Peanut. As a CEO Insider himself, he has witnessed firsthand the key ingredients needed to transform an underperforming sales team into a world-class sales organisation and he and his team work with CEOs intent on building high performance sales teams to drive growth for their companies.

In his book "The CEO Solution", Julian discusses the leverage that you need to optimise your sales organisation's ability to perform at a world-class level, he unmaskes the truth about what is really going on in your sales force and covers specifics such as how you can prevent your sales team from eroding margins in your business in order to "close the deal", together with the beliefs we hold and whether they support or hinder sales performance.

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