

# the grape zone

Don't let clients – or yourself – squash your motivation.

When you meet someone who is prospectively interested in your product or service, there are a variety of possible outcomes. You're familiar with the first two: yes and no. A third option, which I covered in last month's column, is that the prospect could become your ambassador and recommend you to someone else. The fourth option is that the prospect could end up in what I call the Grape Zone.

Anyone who has a role in sales will tell you that "yes" is their favorite word – but the masters will tell you that "no" ranks right up there with "yes." Getting to "no" is actually more critical to the overall sales mindset.

Imagine yourself in a situation wondering why a prospect hasn't called you back. Sound familiar? In actuality, voice mail often turns into "voice jail." Think about all the energy you spend just waiting for someone to make a decision. The zone between "yes" and "no" is the Grape Zone, and it's where most people in sales burn up most of their time, energy and mindset. The Grape Zone is the single most divisive force for the 80 percent of the sales reps who are on the downside of the Pareto Principle (the 80/20 Rule).

Now, imagine for a second that all things are equal between you and your competition: products, prices, etc. If that were true, then all you'd have is your mindset as a competitive advantage. We lose that advantage when our clients are in the Grape Zone, because we get in there with them. We start telling ourselves stories about why the proposal hasn't been signed, why our calls haven't been returned, or why they just can't seem to make up their minds.

Why the Grape Zone? Let's return to the genesis of the idea. In the movie "The Karate Kid," the following dialogue unfolds between Daniel and Mr. Miyagi, after Daniel has gotten his butt kicked a few times at school and Mr. Miyagi is willing to begin Daniel's training in the art of karate.

**Mr. Miyagi:** Now, ready?

**Daniel:** I guess so.

**Mr. Miyagi:** Daniel-san, must talk. Man walk on road. Walk left side – safe. Walk right side – safe. Walk down middle – soon-

er or later, get squished just like grape. Same here. You karate do "yes," or karate do "no." You karate do "guess so," squish just like grape. Understand?

**Daniel:** Yeah, I understand.

**Mr. Miyagi:** Now, ready?

**Daniel:** Yeah, I'm ready.

Are you ready to walk on the right side or left side of the sales road? In sales, more people are going to say no to you than yes. Let them say no. Be okay with no. It gets you



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out of the middle of the road, mentally, and that's where your mindset is being squished. On the face of it, Mr. Miyagi was asking Daniel to make a decision, to get to a destination: yes or no. But remember, Mr. Miyagi was a master, and masters are masters because they teach. And in order to teach, they have to enroll students. This is much like the job of a professional salesperson who enrolls clients.

So in a sense, Miyagi was asking Daniel to make a decision, yes or no, and get out of the Grape Zone. But at the same time, Mr. Miyagi was getting himself out of the Grape Zone (and not letting his time and energy be wasted). He de-graped this prospective student enrollee. Mr. Miyagi would have been content to hear no, too, and would have been good with that, relieved even, because it would no longer be a question. It would be an answer.

Maybe Mr. Miyagi could have asked for a referral. Maybe as Daniel was turning to

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leave the courtyard, he could have said, "Daniel-san. You know anyone else getting his butt kicked?" After all, Mr. Miyagi still needed his fence painted.

Yes is best, but no is good, too. No is good when the one-time prospect becomes your ambassador. And no is good when it's just simply no.

De-graping prospects is simple. You never even have to talk to them, which is great for prospects that don't return calls. Just leave them a completion call, or send them an e-mail. In it, give them permission to say no. Let them know that no is okay. Don't burn any bridges, just stay in rapport, say no for them if you must, and remember to ask them to be your ambassador. What you'll find is that sometimes they really have been busy, and your effort to de-grape them actually refocuses them on the solution you have offered to the problem that the two of you identified, talked about, or negotiated over, but ultimately let slip into the Grape Zone.

Depending on your market, your product, your service or your technology, there might be several steps to the process of enrolling a new client. And yes, there is a Grapes Zone between each step in the process, and often a big one right before the papers get inked, but you can get through the Grape Zone.

If you find that most of your prospects are in the Grape Zone in one way or another, then chances are that you're not asking them to go to the next step in the process, whatever that is. And if you don't ask, they can't say yes. If you don't ask them for the sale or to take the next step in the sales process, or if you don't let them know that no is okay, you will be "squished like grape."

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