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No Sales Appointments? Try the 'Aha!' Formula

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Do you often hear the prospect saying, "I'm not interested", "I'm happy with what I've got", and then "We don't have any money"? The 'Aha!' Formula helps you anticipate and handle the objection properly before asking for the appointment, and always asking for the appointment after handling the objection. Learn how to set great appointments, using the 'Aha!' Formula, that will translate into energy and confidence on the phone.

Do you often hear the prospect saying, "I'm not interested", "I'm happy with what I've got", and then "We don't have any money"? The 'Aha!' Formula helps you anticipate and handle the objection properly before asking for the appointment, and always asking for the appointment after handling the objection. Learn how to set great appointments, using the 'Aha!' Formula, that will translate into energy and confidence on the phone.

Anticipate the objection, **H**andle the objection, **A**sk for the appointment. The 'Aha!' Formula works every time for securing qualified appointments with decision-makers. It sounds simple, and it is. But so often we're intimidated by the word 'No', so rather than handle the objection or perceived rejection, we simply thank the prospect, hang up the phone, and make the next call. Imagine, though, having to make fewer prospecting phone calls because you have improved your appointment-setting skill level.

As good as your opening script is, most of the time you will encounter objections from your prospect while setting the appointment. After years of conducting The Blitz Experience, as well as taking some good advice from Stephan Schiffman, author of a fantastic book on cold calling called "Cold Calling Techniques… That Really Work!" the most common objections you will hear, fall into the ten categories below:

- "No, thanks. I'm happy with what I have."
- "I'm not interested."
- "I'm too busy."
- "Send me some literature."
- "I once had a bad experience with your company."
- "We don't have money to buy anything right now."
- "What makes your company so good?" or "Why should I switch to you?"
- "Just give me the thirty-second version of your presentation."
- "We're not in the market right now."
- "How much is it?"

As I mentioned in the ‘Aha!’ Formula, the key is to anticipate and handle the objection properly before asking for the appointment, and always asking for the appointment after handling the objection. Keep in mind that you may hear more than one objection in any given phone call. In other words, the prospect may say, “I’m not interested” and after handling that objection you might hear, “I’m happy with what I’ve got,” and then you might hear, “We don’t have any money.”

Prospects may give multiple objections, some of them true, some of them false, and just used as a tool to get you off the phone! While it’s important not to take the first ‘No’ for an answer, I don’t recommend overcoming more than three objections in any given phone call. Sometimes, the answer is ‘No’. However, by learning how to overcome the most common objections, you’ll significantly increase your appointments ratio. In this chapter, I will give many examples of exactly how to overcome each of the most common objections you will hear when making phone calls to schedule appointments with qualified decision-makers.

“No, thanks. I’m happy with what I have.” Also known as ‘status quo’, this is probably the most difficult objection to overcome, because people don’t want to change unless there is a compelling reason to do so. The key to handling this particular objection is to describe how your product or service complements, enhances, or supplements what the prospect is already doing.

In other words, don’t put yourself in the position of competing with the prospect’s current vendor, and possibly insulting the prospect’s earlier decision to go with your competitor; instead, your solution will actually enhance what they’re already doing. This works so well, because now the prospect doesn’t have to choose one or the other, but can instead have both: the former decision they made regarding the same products and services you offer can simply be enhanced by what you provide. By using this technique, you’re actually reinforcing what the prospect is already doing by showing that your solution will fit into their particular plan. You can also try the tactic of “We don’t mind being second,” which indicates your interest in having at least some of their business, if not all of it.

This tactic in overcoming the “I’m happy now” objection works well in my business of sales training. Often, the prospects I call on are already doing something in regards to sales training, but because of the specific appointment-setting techniques training I do, my Blitz Experience program often complements or reinforces other training programs the prospect might already have in place.

To understand the practicality of this technique, the example below demonstrates exactly how this technique can be used:

> **Andrea:** “Hi, Mr. Prospect. My name is Andrea Sittig-Rolf, and I’m the creator of The Blitz Experience, an activity-based sales training program that empowers salespeople to schedule appointments with qualified prospects the day of the training, resulting in a pipeline full of new opportunities at the end of the day. The reason for my call today is to schedule an appointment to learn more about your sales organization so we can determine whether there is a fit for The Blitz Experience within your firm. How does Thursday at 10:00 a.m. work for you?”
>
> **Prospect:** (**A**nticipate the objection) “We’re all set with sales training for the year. In fact, we just signed up for a program yesterday.”

Andrea: “That’s great! May I ask what kind of program it is?”

Prospect: “Sure, it’s sales process training, and it’s conducted by XYZ Company.”

Andrea: (**H**andle the objection) “Well, that’s perfect actually, because The Blitz Experience will enhance that program beautifully by focusing on the very first phase of the sales process; setting the appointment.” (**A**sk for the appointment) “Why don’t I come by next Wednesday at 10:00 a.m. to learn more about your company and your new sales training program so we can determine whether The Blitz Experience will enhance what you’re already doing?”

Prospect: “Okay.”

Notice the ‘Aha!’ Formula used throughout the script. By anticipating the objection, I was ready to handle the objection and then ask for the appointment. Easy, right? It’s actually not too bad when all you have to do is overcome one objection and then get the appointment. However, as I mentioned previously, sometimes prospects will give more than one objection. Using the same example above, the multiple objections script might go something like this:

Andrea: “Hi, Mr. Prospect. My name is Andrea Sittig-Rolf, and I’m the creator of The Blitz Experience, an activity-based sales training program that empowers salespeople to schedule appointments with qualified prospects the day of the training, resulting in a pipeline full of new opportunities at the end of the day. The reason for my call today is to schedule an appointment to learn more about your sales organization so we can determine whether there is a fit for The Blitz Experience within your firm. How does Thursday at 10:00 a.m. work for you?”

Prospect: (**A**nticipate the objection) “We’re all set with sales training for the year. In fact, we just signed up for a program yesterday.”

Andrea: “That’s great! May I ask what kind of program it is?”

Prospect: “Sure, it’s sales process training, and it’s conducted by XYZ Company.”

Andrea: (**H**andle the objection) “Well, that’s perfect actually, because The Blitz Experience will enhance that program beautifully by focusing on the very first phase of the sales process, setting the appointment.” (**A**sk for the appointment) “Why don’t I come by next Wednesday at 10:00 a.m. to learn more about your company and your new sales training program so we can determine whether The Blitz Experience will enhance what you’re already doing?”

Prospect: (**A**nticipate the objection) “Why don’t you just send me some literature?”

Andrea: (**H**andle the objection) “I’d be happy to send you more information, and I have found it to be more useful when it’s targeted to your specific needs.” (**A**sk for the appointment) “Why don’t I just come by Wednesday at 10:00 a.m. to learn more about your sales organization, and I’ll bring plenty of literature with me?”

Prospect: “Okay.”

In this scenario, if the prospect had given me one more objection, I would handle it and ask for the appointment for the last time. Beyond overcoming three objections in a row, your prospecting phone call turns into an argument, which is the last impression you want to leave with the prospect when hanging up the phone! After hearing three objections, simply thank the prospect, hang up, and make your next call.

Another way to handle the ‘I’m happy now’ or ‘status quo’ objection is as follows:

Prospect: (**A**nticipate the objection) “We’re all set.”

Andrea: (**H**andle the objection) “That’s great! We actually don’t mind being second, and we can offer alternative pricing to keep your primary vendor honest, or we may find out we offer something your primary vendor does not.” (**A**sk for the appointment) “Why don’t we get together Tuesday at 9:00 a.m. so I can learn more about your existing solution and how we might work with what you already have?”

Let’s move on to the next category, “I’m not interested,” probably heard more often than any other objection when prospecting for appointments. The key here is to describe the result your solution provides and, more specifically, the result your solution has provided someone else (i.e., another customer). Here’s what I say when I have Anticipated the objection and the prospect tells me he’s not interested:

Andrea: (**H**andle the objection) “You know, Mr. Prospect, that’s what many of my customers said before they understood that The Blitz Experience would actually double the number of appointments with qualified prospects their salespeople were able to set as a result of the skills and techniques taught and practiced during the Blitz.” (**A**sk for the appointment) “Why don’t I just come by at 3:00 p.m. next Tuesday so I can share with you some actual results other customers have enjoyed by participating in a Blitz Experience of their own?”

Notice here I explained a typical result my customers have had from The Blitz Experience. I said, “You know, Mr. Prospect, that’s what many of my customers said before they understood that The Blitz Experience would actually double the number of appointments with qualified prospects their salespeople were able to set as a result of the skills and techniques taught and practiced during the Blitz.”

Offering a sales training program that can double the number of appointments typically set for a sales team is a compelling argument when talking to a new prospect for the first time. By immediately explaining a compelling result, I am more likely to get the appointment.

In addition to offering the general results that can be expected from The Blitz Experience, I might give a specific result that a named client or client industry has experienced. Using the same objection as above, here’s what that conversation would look like:

Prospect: (**A**nticipate the objection) “I’m not interested.”

> **Andrea:** (**H**andle the objection) “You know, Mr. Prospect, that’s exactly what ABC Bank said until they tried The Blitz Experience and closed over $10 million in sales as a direct result of the qualified appointments scheduled during the Blitz. They have since rolled out the Blitz program to their entire company!” (**A**sk for the appointment) “Why don’t I just come by at 10:00 a.m. next Wednesday so I can share with you some more incredible results other customers have enjoyed by participating in a Blitz Experience of their own?”

Next, the “I’m too busy” objection is also quite common. The beauty of this objection is that you don’t want to talk to them now anyway; you want to set an appointment to talk in person! If they’re too busy to talk, that’s the very reason to set an appointment, so you can talk face to face when they’re less busy and have scheduled you in their calendar. Another technique that works well here is if they’re too busy to talk and they ask you to call back to schedule the appointment, suggest that you tentatively schedule an appointment now and that you’ll call back to confirm. Microsoft conducted a study that showed there is a 70 percent greater chance an activity will happen if it’s scheduled in the calendar. So, in our scenario, there is a 70 percent greater likelihood the prospect will honor the appointment and meet with you if you can get him or her to put it in their calendar. With multiple objections given on this particular call, it might go something like this:

> **Prospect:** (**A**nticipated objection) “Andrea, you’ve caught me at a time when I’m too busy to talk.”
>
> **Andrea:** (**H**andle the objection, Ask for the appointment) “Okay, well then rather than taking time now, why don’t I just come by next Thursday at 11:00 a.m.?”
>
> **Prospect:** (**A**nticipated objection) “Well, why don’t you call me back to schedule an appointment?”
>
> **Andrea:** (**H**andle the objection, Ask for the appointment) “I’d be happy to, but why don’t we go ahead and tentatively get it on the calendar now, and I’ll call back to confirm?”
>
> **Prospect:** “Okay, what did you say? Next Thursday at 11:00 a.m.? See you then.”

Even with up to three objections in one call, each should be Anticipated and Handled, and you should always Ask for the appointment. This is the ‘Aha!’ Formula in action!

The next popular category of objection is “Send me some literature.” I actually quite enjoy this objection, because I have a funny way to handle it. Feel free to use this one for those of you who are brave enough to do so! When the prospect has told me, “Send me some literature,” I have Anticipated this objection and here’s how I Handle it: “I’d be happy to send you some literature, but just so you know the package it comes in is five feet eight inches, 150 pounds, with dark hair (**A**sk for the appointment), and it’ll be there Friday at 9:00 a.m.!” Obviously, the package I’m describing is myself and not an actual package, but it gets a laugh every time and gets the appointment most of the time! The point is to use humor when you can. Most people will appreciate it, and it will break the ice and give you leverage to actually getting the appointment.

On a more serious note, another way to handle the “Send me some literature” objection might go like this:

> **Andrea:** (**H**andle the objection) “I’d be happy to send you some literature. However, until I learn more about your company and its needs, I won’t know what to send.” (**A**sk for the appointment)

> "Why don't I come by at 2:00 p.m. on Thursday so I can learn more about your company and possible solutions we can provide so that I know what literature to share with you?"

This works well because, after all, you won't know what literature to send unless you find out more about your prospect and what their needs are, and how do you do that? You set an appointment!

Hopefully, the objection you will hear least often is, "I once had a bad experience with your company." If you hear this particular objection, the way to handle it is to first empathize with the prospect, then talk about how your company has changed since their bad experience. Now, if their bad experience was yesterday, you're in trouble because your company did not change overnight. However, if their bad experience was several years ago, chances are your company has changed since then, and that's the very reason you should meet, to remedy their bad experience and learn more about how you might do business with them now. Here's how this might sound:

> **Prospect:** (**A**nticipate the objection) "We once had a bad experience with your company a few years back."
>
> **Andrea:** (**H**andle the objection) "I'm sorry to hear that. You know we've actually changed quite a bit since then." (**A**sk for the appointment) "Why don't I just come by next Thursday at 10 a.m. to learn more about your company and discuss how we've changed in a way that might be of benefit to you?"

Another reason the prospect may have had a bad experience with your company is that he or she was mistreated by the salesperson he or she was working with at the time. If that salesperson is no longer with your company, that is a perfect reason to meet, so you can make up for whatever the original salesperson did wrong at the time. Here's how that would go:

> **Prospect:** (**A**nticipate the objection) "We worked with a salesperson from your firm years ago who did a terrible job for us."
>
> **A**ndrea: (**H**andle the objection) "I'm really sorry to hear that. That person is no longer with our company, which is exactly why we should meet." (**A**sk for the appointment) "How does Friday at 2 p.m. work for you?"

Another common objection you might hear is, "We don't have money to buy anything right now" or "It's just not in the budget." During one of my Blitz Experience role-play exercises, I used the objection, "I don't have any money," with the salesperson. I loved his response. He said to me, "Well, neither do I. That's why I'm calling you!" He said he actually uses this technique and it works most of the time because he gets the prospect to laugh, thus letting his guard down, allowing the salesperson to get the appointment.

A more serious way to handle this objection might sound like this:

> **Prospect:** (**A**nticipate the objection) "It's not in our budget right now."

Andrea: (**H**andle the objection) “In that case, now is the perfect time to meet, before you’re even in the market for a program like ours so we can take our time to learn more about your organization and how our Blitz program will be of benefit.” (**A**sk for the appointment) “Why don’t I just come by at 10:00 a.m. on Thursday so I can learn more about your sales team and share more about how our Blitz program has doubled the number of appointments a typical sales force will schedule in one day?”

Prospect: “Okay, see you then.”

Another way to handle the “We don’t have any money” objection goes like this:

Prospect: (**A**nticipate the objection) “We don’t have any money.”

Andrea: (**H**andle the objection) “Actually, we have several payment plans that make our sales training programs quite affordable. Also, we’ve found that most clients sell upwards of $100,000 in products and services as a direct result of the appointments they schedule during the Blitz training.” (**A**sk for the appointment) “Why don’t I come by next Tuesday at 2:00 p.m., and I’ll share some of the amazing results our clients have had in participating in The Blitz Experience?”

Prospect: “Okay.”

With the “We have no money” objection, there are many ways you can go. You can discuss payment plans, leasing options, no money down, ninety-day payment, and other terms that may make your solution more appealing to your prospect. Your willingness to work with them and their budget will increase your chances of getting the appointment and ultimately getting the sale. Also, if you’re able to show how your solution actually increases your client’s profitability, you will be more likely to get the appointment and get the sale. Prospects aren’t as impressed with you saving them money or making them more productive, because they’ve heard it all before. If you can prove your solution will increase their revenue or profitability, you’ll have their attention.

Another situation you may run into with prospects is having them ask you, “What makes your company so good?” or “Why should I switch to you?” This is the prospect’s way of getting you to give your entire pitch over the phone, making the appointment unnecessary. Don’t get caught up in this scenario. Instead, it should go something like this.

Prospect: (**A**nticipate the objection) “What makes your company so good?”

Andrea: (**H**andle the objection) “I do! That’s the very reason we should meet!” Or (**H**andle the objection) “Lots of things make us great! That’s exactly why we should get together, so I can learn more about your company and determine a fit for our solution.” (**A**sk for the appointment) “How’s Thursday at 11:00 a.m.?”
Or

Prospect: (**A**nticipate the objection) “Why should I switch to you?”

Andrea: (**H**andle the objection) “Well, there are many reasons, which is the very reason we should meet in person.” (**A**sk for the appointment) “How’s Wednesday at 9 a.m.?”

Another trick prospects often use goes like this:

Prospect: (**A**nticipate the objection) “Just give me the thirty-second version of your presentation.”

Andrea: (**H**andle the objection) “I would be doing a great disservice to you to try and do that, which is exactly why we should get together.” (**A**sk for the appointment) “How’s Friday at noon for lunch?”

Another common objection you may hear is: “We’re not in the market right now.” Here’s how this should go:

Prospect: (**A**nticipate the objection) “We’re not in the market right now.”

Andrea: (**H**andle the objection) “Great, because now is actually the best time to meet, before you’re in the market, so you can take your time to learn about the best solution for your company and so I can help you determine the best solution based on your specific needs.” (**A**sk for the appointment) “How’s Tuesday at 3:00 p.m.?”

Finally, another objection that sounds like a buying signal goes like this:

Prospect: (**A**nticipate the objection) “How much is it?”

Andrea: (**H**andle the objection) “We offer a variety of programs and solutions, and I’d be doing you a disservice to try and quote you a price over the phone.” (**A**sk for the appointment) “Why don’t we just get together Thursday at 2:00 p.m. so I can learn more about your company and your needs to determine the appropriate investment?”

In a situation where you’ve already had your initial appointment and the prospect asks, “How much is it?” it truly is a buying signal. However, when making the initial phone call, it is usually a tactic used by prospects to get you off the phone, so don’t be fooled!

Andrea Sittig-Rolf is President of Sittig Incorporated. Andrea is the author of 2 compelling sales books called ‘Business-to-Business Prospecting: Innovative Techniques to Get Your Foot in the Door with Any Prospect’ and ‘The Seven Keys to Effective Business-to-Business Appointment Setting’. She is also the creator of The Blitz Experience, a results-oriented, activity-based sales training program that empowers salespeople to schedule appointments with qualified prospects the day of training, resulting in a pipeline full of new opportunities at the end of the day. For article feedback, contact Andrea at ***andrea@sittiginc.com***