

Why Won't They Sell?

The Inside Story in
Call Centers

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“I just don't get it. We do everything under the sun to motivate our agents to offer something on every call, but nothing seems to work. What's so darned hard about it? I just don't get it. Why won't they sell?”

You may have heard this before, or said this before.

The answer lies in two Sales Call Reluctance® assessment scores that have been rampant for every call center client I've ever had. I'll bet they're affecting your call center, too.

The assessment tool used can identify twelve distinct types of Sales Call Reluctance® that limit salespeople's prospecting results. These behavioral types were discovered through 25 years of research by Behavioral Sciences Research Press.

What are these costly scores? And how can you overcome them to increase sales from your thousands of lucrative incoming calls?

The first is score is “Low Goals.” It means that your agents are not driven by their own internal desire to meet well-defined financial rewards. They come to work to put in their hours, get their paychecks and go home to their “real” lives. Their behaviors appear to be driven by fears, but in actuality, they don't care about the reward enough to change behavior. You might even call it a commitment to indifference.

This score explains why a jump in your incentive design motivates your same top performers (who probably *do* have a higher Goal Level); while your medium performers remain unaffected, and your Low Performers don't even know you've changed the incentive.

What can you do about solving the Low Goals problem?

Besides hiring people with a higher Goal Level, you can do two things: (1) monitor their calls, both remotely and in person, and (2) put the "sale initiating" behavior in their performance plan. You need to do both. This group wants to do a good job, but they may not think the sales portion of a call is part of servicing your customers.

If you've already taken these two actions and you're still missing sales, they haven't heard and internalized your job requirements. They don't *want* to do it to maintain their job, or to receive their desired performance rating.

The second sales-affecting score I've found is the "Yielder" behavior. (Notice this is a *behavior*, not a personality type.) Yielder behavior types probably rush to your job posting because they're good at quickly developing rapport with customers. But their issue is that they have a deep-seated fear of appearing pushy or intrusive. And *they* decide what "pushy or intrusive" means.

Yielders are just *too* nice to approach even the borders of pushiness, or even successful assertiveness. They hate conflict, and avoid it at all cost (except, possibly, for an infrequent burst of aggression after "giving in" one time too many).

So what do Yielders do when you call them on their sales performance, or their lack of consistent product offering? You guessed it - they agree with you. Management was never so easy. No arguing, no complaining, only a promise to do what you ask.

But they leave your office, saying to themselves, “She/He has *got* to be delusional! No way am I going to do that! I SWEAR they never told me this was a sales job!” Then they head to the break room (just for a drink of water, of course) to tell everyone else how ridiculous your meeting was. They may also engage in a conversation that ends with: “What do they want around here, customer service or sales? I wish they’d make up their minds! This job is so stressful!”

When you realize the Yielder is still light-years away from doing what they said they’d do, *you* are left wondering how the consensus of opinion in your meeting didn’t seem to make a difference in behavior or performance.

After multiple meetings with no impact, you consider taking disciplinary action. But you remember all the letters you’ve gotten from customers, stating how wonderful these Yielders were in providing customer service. Not only that, but those letters are hanging on the office walls, for everyone to see, along with notes of congratulations from you and other executives.

Is this sounding all too familiar? If so, you have a call center full of Yielders. Many had the Yielder behavior when you hired them, and many more learned it from their peers or trainers once on the job.

What **actions you can take with Yielders**, before depression overwhelms you?

First, you can give them assertiveness training. It will probably help them in their personal lives, too. They will start becoming aware of their pervasive loss of personal power. Once people take insights into their personal lives, it adds momentum to behavioral changes at work.

Second, you can have someone teach them how to offer products on every call. Yes, I know you’ve already done this, too. But if they’re not doing it, it didn’t become a *habit* for them. They didn’t get to that magical point where it was easy.

For call center coaches: learn from athletic coaches, who *stay for practice*. Your hard work in coaching may have been in pointing out areas to change, then going on to the next person so you can meet your observation requirements. You have a tough, demanding job, but a few bigger chunks of coaching can save time later.

Third, as managers work with people in improving their assertiveness, they can help the reps find wording that fits with the reps' own unique vocabulary.

I'm not talking about scripted words. Those will just annoy the customer, stress out the rep, and cause more turnover. I'm also not referring to requiring that calls end with, "Is there anything else I can do for you?" It's a nice touch, and may decrease repeat calls, but it won't result in your customers asking the rep to tell them what's on sale this month, or what new service you have.

An example of successful wording might be as simple as, "I want to make sure you know what our specials are this month." Or, "By the way, we just introduced a new product you might want to know about."

Developing individual wording can sound like "service" to the reps (and to your customers), if you take the effort to find the right words. When you do, you'll see a light go on, and they'll say something like, "Oh, I can do *that!*" Then... **stay for practice.**

Staying for practice means sitting with them, side-by-side, coaching them to use those words over and over, until you know they've mastered the behavior. Then follow up a few days later to listen again and make sure they're cementing the habit. If you did this with one rep per week, how much new revenue would you have after a few months? A lot.

So the next time your management team is grumbling about lost sales opportunities and inconsistent sales efforts, you can demonstrate your unending brilliance by explaining the cause... *and* some solutions.

May you earn what you deserve,

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Jeffrie Story helps organizations and individuals achieve the earnings they deserve, and the money they want. A summa cum laude graduate of the University of Iowa, Jeffrie spent 25 years in sales leadership at a Fortune 1000 corporation, where she was known for getting results. Combining scientific tools with experience and a passion for transformation, Jeffrie helps create behaviors that are consistent, sufficient and effective.