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# Rejection Coping Strategies

Five ways to greet rejection with affection *By Stanton Royce, MBA*

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**With everyone from accountants to service reps now expected to sell, the following two questions need careful consideration.**

*Why do most salespeople leave the profession within a few years? Why are most of the people who stay in sales consistently outsold by a small percentage of their colleagues? Every sales professional knows the one word answer to these questions is **rejection**.*

**C**ompanies that are better at minimizing the negative consequences of rejection have a competitive advantage over those who aren't. A lot of research has begun focusing on rejection. It turns out there's a reason why rejection feels so deadly. Here's why, plus a look at the rejection coping strategies you can use to make your salespeople more productive, more profitable and stay on the job longer.

Rejection is a special type of failure that includes social disapproval. Research suggests there is a genetic predisposition to be innately sensitive to rejection. Throughout most of human existence, people were highly dependent on the goodwill of others for survival. In fact, most people alive today have no government support programs and are still dependent on the good will of others in hard times. People who were insensitive to rejection, to the disapproval of others, became outcasts which decreased their chances of survival and mating. Sensitivity to rejection and rejection avoidance behaviors have traditionally been critical for survival.

We can relate this to people surviving over thousands of generations who were efficient at getting the most from a few calories and nutrients. But in many developed nations now with plentiful fatty and high calorie sugary foods, that genetic strength becomes a liability in the form of obesity, obesity related illnesses and diabetes. In the same way, we have been bred to be sensitive to perceive rejection as a threat to survival. Somewhere within most of us, rejection triggers some degree of deep seated concern, and

even feelings of fear of ostracism, abandonment and death. Of course like in the food example, in a time when opportunities for financial prosperity and increased personal safety and security are dependent on experiencing large amounts of rejection to attain greater sales, equating rejection to death is maladaptive and counterproductive.

While rejection resulting from sales calls does not create an imminent threat to survival or income, how one perceives and reacts to all forms of failure, including rejection, can be hazardous to one's health. There are two different types of reactions to rejection experiences, *rejection affection* and *rejection defection*. People in the first group, rejection affections (RAs), are literally inspired to redouble their efforts to achieve. In contrast, rejection defections (RDs) are psychically and emotionally wounded by rejection. RDs seek to avoid rejection. RDs may appear to be persistent over the long term (macro-persistence). However, careful observations of their moment-to-moment behaviors reveals a lack of productive focus in initiating and completing behaviors essential to achieve a high level of success (macro-persistence). This is why rejection defection salespeople are less productive, less profitable and have a higher rate of turnover than rejection affections do.

***Rejection affections are inspired by rejection with renewed determination to achieve their goals.***

Of course, no one really loves rejection. We would all love to win and get a sale every time we ask. The difference between RDs and RAs is how they perceive and react to rejection. Perceptions and reactions in turn depend on an individual's fundamental assumptions about the way the world works. These assumptions are used to automatically analyze and interpret experiences out of (sub) and before (pre) conscious awareness. Our behaviors are then a consequence of our perceptions which result from our assumptions filtering and coloring how we consciously think and feel about our experiences. RDs tend to see rejection coming even when it isn't there and they are compelled to varying degrees to avoid, to run away from what their 'gut' tells them is a situation threatening their survival. RAs see rejection

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as a challenge to prove themselves and they act to prove the rejecter wrong. Here are four things you can do to boost the performance of rejection defections and to prevent RAs from becoming defections.

### **Motivational and inspirational experiences**

Motivational and inspirational (M&I) experiences work primarily through human emotion. They involve the primarily passive exposure to situations intended to lift one's spirits and inspire action. They involve reading, audio, video and/or interpersonal experiences that typically involve little or no conscious effort or human interaction. M&I content can typically produce some temporary, short-term boost in performance. While M&I content is certainly useful, additional strategies are recommended for significant, long-term achievement. One disadvantage of M&I is the necessity for regular and varied experiences to boost mood. Another disadvantage is expecting too much from M&I experiences.

### **Conscious coping strategies**

Conscious coping strategies work through intentional effort. They require some degree of involvement and typically provide structure, direction and either increased confidence or avoidance of diminished confidence. They include mental activities such as affirmations, positive thinking, goal setting, reviewing feedback and explaining the cause of rejection to minimize the impact of the rejection. One of the biggest problems of conscious coping strategies is the investment of our resources in strategies that are ineffective, or worse, counterproductive.

**Conscious and physical coping strategies can increase our tolerance for rejection, but they don't make us immune to it.**

For example, research on rejection shows there is an inspiring, productive way and a discouraging, destructive way to explain rejection when we experience it. To understand this better, here are two contrasting explanations for a rejection experience.

Bill calls to follow up on a lead. The prospect answers the phone and responds curtly. She tells Bill she had a bad experience with his company and is not interested in talking with Bill. The prospect then hangs up as Bill attempts to learn more about the previous incident.

### **Personalized Explanation with**

**Long Duration:** Bill explains this rejection to himself thinking, "What a jerk. She's would be nothing but trouble as a customer. I don't want to do business with someone like this."

### **Situationalized Explanation with**

**Short Duration:** Bill explains this rejection to himself thinking, "She must have a lot going on there right now. I'll contact her again later to learn about her experience and find out how I can make things right for her."

Research shows that most people believe about 70% of behavior results from a person's personality. But research also shows that about 70% of behavior is a response to the situation the person is experiencing. That's important information for salespeople because by changing the situation, we can often change the result. Personalized causes tend to have long durations. That is, if a person is really a 'jerk,' then you can frequently expect him or her to behave like a jerk for the rest of his or her life. Situations however, by their very nature, are often changeable and therefore of short duration. Situationalized explanations inspire hope and stimulate ideas about how we can act to get the results we want. Personalized explanations tend to cut off the possibility of a better outcome with a particular prospect.

But more insidiously, personalized explanations tend to become self-fulfilling prophecies. They get us expecting that the next prospect might be a jerk too. When that happens, subtleties in our body language (including subtle facial expressions and tone of voice) will tend to communicate that attitude to our prospects. Recent research has also shown it really takes less than one-fourth of one second for a first impression to form. That same research also found that even with regular contact 2 or 3 days a week, months later people tend to perceive us the same as they did during that first less than one-fourth of a second when we met. Conscious coping strategies are important for coping with rejection. But to be effective, we need to understand how to use them correctly.

### **Physical coping strategies**

Physical coping strategies work by increasing the overall psycho-physiological capacity to cope with distressing experiences, including rejection. They

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include restful sleep, diet, aerobic fitness and relaxation response. An adequate amount of restful sleep increases our capacity to tolerate increased levels of distress, including rejection. Inducing fatigue, including through sleep deprivation, is the universal technique to break one's spirit in all forms of brainwashing and interrogation. Being rested is an important physical coping strategy. It helps prevent rejection from breaking the salesperson's spirit and thereby reducing their productivity, profitability and likelihood of giving up on the profession. Regular exercise, if not done too close to bedtime, can improve restful sleep. Diet and some medications can interfere with restful sleep.

Diet doesn't directly impact our response to rejection. Diet does however have a roll in one's energy level, alertness and overall health and longevity. The types of foods and beverages consumed and quantities consumed can increase energy levels and healthfulness or leave us feeling lethargic, fatigued and cause chronic health conditions. These distresses increase one's susceptibility to rejection. Always follow medical advice with respect to diet. However, some general tips include eating more fruits and vegetables. Also, limit intake of salty, starchy and fatty foods and foods high in refined sugars such as pastries, cakes and cookies. It takes about 20 minutes before the brain gets the signal we've ingested enough food. Plan what to eat then stop before feeling full. If we keep eating until we feel full, we'll overeat. Limit portions to allow 4 or 5 smaller meals or healthful snacks without exceeding optimal total daily caloric intake. A full meal makes for a slow salesperson.

Aerobic activities, performed regularly, increase one's distress tolerance. That means rejection has less negative impact both in immediate intensity and in duration- we recover faster. Aerobics also increase creative problem solving capacity, energy levels and healthful longevity. The longer we live, the more we can sell, the more we can earn, the wealthier we become, the more options we have to play! Being aerobically fit doesn't require hours of Mister or Miss Universe workouts. Walking briskly for 30 minutes at a time once or twice a day, or for 20 minutes three times a day, is an excellent way for most people to maintain a beneficial degree of aerobic fitness. However, not all aerobic exercise has its place in the corporate workday.

A best selling book recommends a good way to motivate employees during exercise is to set up a punching bag with the boss's face on it. Contrary to that recommendation, research has found an

increased tendency toward aggression and violence after participating in striking and punching activities. As an employer, I don't want to do anything to increase workplace violence and especially don't want to condition people to my face being the target. Do you?

**Restful sleep, diet, aerobic fitness and relaxation response are physical strategies that can increase our capacity to cope with rejection.**

Relaxation response is a psycho-physiological state that provides definite long-term healthful benefits. It counters and neutralizes the harmful effects of the numerous distressing demands and experiences of modern civilization. Using the relaxation response a few times each day is like taking out the trash so our psyches don't overflow and have more room to pile up bigger heaps of rejection each workday. Relaxation response takes consistent, persistent practice daily for 12 weeks or more to condition. However, once it has been conditioned, it can be called up with a word or gesture almost as quickly as the middle finger calls up a hostile emotional response for some people. While relaxation response can be achieved with hypnosis or complex meditation rituals, here is the most direct, simplest way to do

Chose a word or sound you will use to elicit the relaxation response. Instead of or in addition to a word, you can select a gesture or hand movement such as placing the non-dominant hand (the left hand for people who are right-handed) gently on top of the dominant hand (the right hand for people who are right-handed). Say the word quietly out loud and or perform you gesture as you relax all your muscles, slow and deepen your breathing and visualize a peaceful, tranquil setting. Do this for five to ten minutes, three times a day for at least 12 weeks. Soon you will find by saying the word and or performing your eliciting gesture, within a few seconds to a couple of minutes your body and mind will calm, relax and de-stress. Use the relaxation response in non-survival situations whenever you notice cues of distress including anxiety, fatigue and muscle soreness. Also use it when you find yourself clenching muscles, like a fist, shoulders or jaw. Continue to condition the response one to three times a day to increases it's effectiveness.

Restful sleep, diet, aerobic fitness and relaxation response are physical coping strategies that increase the overall psycho-physiological capacity to cope with distressing experiences, including rejection. Their

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major disadvantage is the time they take. However, with some creative planning and discipline, they can rather easily be fit into one's daily routine.

### Psychological immunization

Motivational and inspirational experiences and conscious and physical coping strategies all help protect us against rejection. However, they don't address the critical role subconscious assumptions and their resulting expectations have in determining *if* we will actually perform the behaviors necessary to achieve our goals. We all have subconsciously conditioned assumptions about how the world works. These assumptions create expectations that in turn filter how we perceive, interpret and react to our experiences. Some assumptions about rejection and acceptance have proven to be more conducive to higher levels of achievement. We can determine our subconsciously conditioned assumptions by learning to tune into our subconscious self-talk. We can then apply disputational analysis to the content of the self-talk to identify the qualities of the assumptions on three dimensions. Using a process called preconscious assumptive reconditioning (PAR), we can modify our subconscious assumptions to produce behaviors that are optimal for greater achievement.

**Psychological immunization protects us from the usual negative effects of rejection, and transforms *rejection defections* into *rejection affections*.**

Most salespeople spend their careers coping with the consequences of rejection. For them, increased amounts of rejection tend to diminish performance. In fact, for some even making a sale can be demoralizing because after a sale they tend to expect rejection. These salespeople are called rejection defections. Whenever the amount of rejection experienced reaches the individual's critical rejection threshold, his or her sales career is over. If the salesperson doesn't quit immediately, performance drops off sharply until the sales person eventually does either quit or is terminated. There is however a small group of salespeople, the rejection affections, who are actually inspired by rejection to redouble their efforts. This difference in response to rejection results from differences in subconscious assumptions between these two types of salespeople. PAR literally changes the assumptions of rejection defections, transforming them into rejection affections.

### Ultimate coping strategy

Motivational and inspirational experiences and conscious and physical coping strategies help protect us against rejection. Preconscious assumptive reconditioning (PAR) immunizes us against rejection so rather than feeling discouraged by rejection, it inspires us to redouble our efforts to achieve. But the ultimate rejection coping strategy is to use all four of these together. PAR immunizes us against rejection while the other three coping strategies are like booster shots strengthening that immunization. Combining them makes the salesperson truly Rejectionproof® guaranteeing he or she will enjoy a long productive, prosperous career.

### About the author.



*Stanton Royce, MBA is an expert in sales rejection who specializes in immunizing sales professionals against rejection so they sell without stopping. He is president of Extreme Achievers® which offers consulting, coaching, keynotes, breakout sessions and workshops to make*

*salespeople more productive and profitable. Stanton knows first-hand about persisting through adversity. He has over 30 years of sales and management expertise in addition to earning three degrees; in psychology, engineering and business, each with academic distinction. His business experience includes serving as Chief Engineer then Director of Operations for a \$500 million asset management company, which he helped grow into a \$12.5 billion company in a decade. He also managed a start-up commercial real estate management and construction company that received the Chamber of Commerce's Fastest Growing Business award, and was recognized as an Inc 500 company within just 5 years. Stanton is a professional speaker and member of the National Speakers Association.*

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