



Oh, the Humility! Are You OK Being Not-OK?

.....

In the Navy, I was a tough guy: captain of an attack submarine, the nemesis of many Soviet skippers, ready to go toe-to-toe with any enemy, and willing to face death on a daily basis. If the bad guys weren't enough, every second of every day, Mother Ocean was trying to get in my submarine and swallow me whole. No problem! Bring it on, Mother! Davy Jones' locker (that age-old sailors' euphemism for drowning)

did not scare me. I was truly in my element at sea, and I was definitely OK.

How quickly all of that changed when I came into sales and tried to make my first cold call. Suddenly I was not-OK. My hands were shaking, my voice was quivering, I stumbled and stuttered through my script, and I was so relieved when the lady I called said, “No thanks!” and hung up.

The irony of being terrified by a phone call set me on a path to discover the source of my fear and anxiety. Here’s what I figured out.

The prestige associated with my role as a submarine officer always helped me feel very OK about myself. I was respected, revered, and obeyed. In case of doubt, I sported my sheriff’s badge that read “Commanding Officer,” i.e. “Big Shot.”

In sales, trying to get leads, trying harder to get leads to return my calls, fighting to keep customers who were being wooed by competitors, prospects taking my valuable proposals and entering that witness protection program, hearing “no” on a daily basis—all made me very not-OK. I was not respected, revered, or obeyed; I wasn’t the captain, and I wasn’t a big shot.

So, at the ripe old age of 40-plus, I had to dig down deep and find something to like about myself beyond my titles and status in the world. I had to learn to be OK being not-OK.

If you ever find the frustrations, humiliation, and embarrassment of sales seem to outweigh the successes, consider these points:

- Selling is a Broadway play put on by a psychiatrist. Buying is and should be an emotional experience for the prospect, not the seller. If you become emotionally involved in the outcome of a sales call, it will be hard to close. Keep your composure and objectivity as a psychiatrist does.
- Always let your buyer preserve their dignity. You don't have to let people abuse you, but it is also not smart to focus on your own feelings. Help others feel OK about themselves.
- Stop trying to look so professional; try struggling a bit. One way to get people to be comfortable around you is to not have all the answers—don't be too polished, too know-it-all. Learn to struggle naturally, and prospects will want to bail you out. Be not-OK on purpose.

It took a long time, but I finally arrived in a place where prospects and selling no longer control how I feel about myself. I'm OK without my sheriff's badge, and I'm OK being not-OK.

How about you? Are you OK in the world of sales? You are a winner because of what is inside you, not what's happening on the outside. Remember that and you will always be OK being not-OK.

