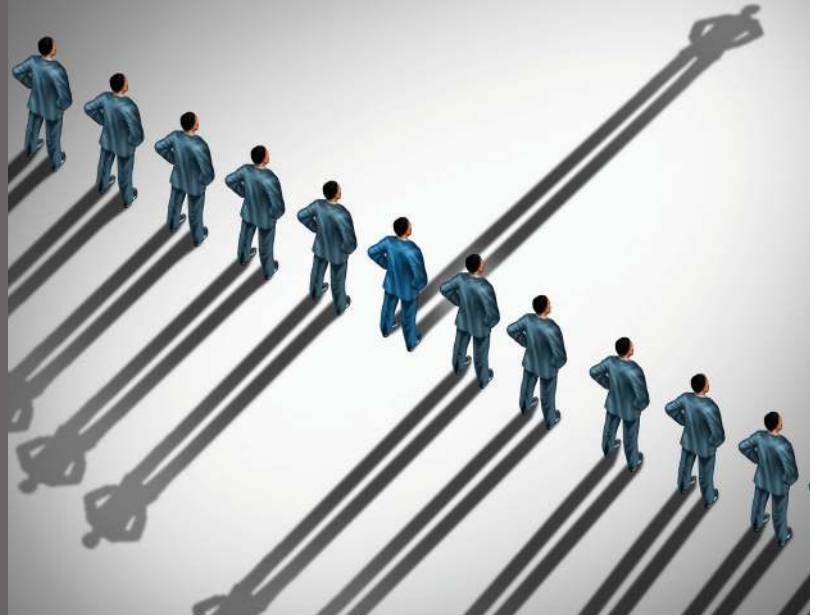


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THE EXCEPTION

By Russell M. Rush, R3R1 Consulting Group



Throughout the years I have encountered the unrealistic prospect. You know the type that I am referring to – the individual that believes his situation is unique and he is the exception to the “norm.” Behaving as if one is the exception involves all aspects of human behavior and affects decision-making. It influences the thought processes of individual prospects and is a common thread among what I refer to as the “delusional prospect.”

The delusional prospect is an issue in most businesses; however, some industries see a more significant number of prospects that will fit this description. It can even be the case in business-to-business sales when there is one primary decider with multiple subordinate advisors, and the principal contact influences the others and causes them to act or respond similarly.

During a sales presentation, it may become apparent that your prospect believes that his situation is an exception, and he can deal with the problem on his own or delay solving an issue altogether. Such a development can derail your sale since your offering needs to be the solution to the prospect’s problem now to close the sale. Oddly, this behavior

may surface even when a prospect takes the initial step to seek you and your product out as a potential solution.

So, what do you do during a sales presentation when you determine that the prospect is being unrealistic?

You need to develop a strategy to reason with the individual, to bring them back to reality. Yes, you may need an arsenal of statistics as part of social proof to use with this kind of prospect, or with the group of deciders in the business-to-business sales situation. If you are well-prepared to reason with a delusional prospect, you may still persuade them to move forward.

Social proof is compelling since it is using statistical data or the outcomes and successes of current customers to reason with a prospect. Social proof is one of Dr. Robert Cialdini’s six principles of persuasion. It goes along with reciprocity, commitment/consistency, authority, liking, and scarcity; all principles taught in his book, *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*. Cialdini maintains that people are especially likely to perform specific actions if they can relate to the people who performed the same steps before them. In other words, he is saying that individuals like to follow the herd and do

not want to be trailblazers. In many cases, this line of reasoning, using social proof, can become the antidote to the unrealistic prospect.

After you attempt to reason with someone who thinks that their situation is the exception, you may ultimately determine that the prospect won’t respond to statistics or any other logic. If this is the case, then it might be the best course to find another prospect. Just move on. Why do I make this recommendation? An unrealistic prospect can be the most challenging individual to convert because it is tough to present sound reasoning arguments to someone that believes they are the exception.

So, watch for specific behavior where the prospect believes that their situation is unique, and they are the exception to the rule. Even though very few prospects are legitimately the exception, this does not matter. It is the individual’s situation, and it is the perspective of the individual prospect that matters. Unfortunately, you may not be able to persuade them to move forward even if you have a good strategy. However, if you develop a specific plan to address “the exception” you will most likely improve your overall sales performance.