
When Prospects Give You The "Silent Treatment"

If you've been selling for a while, you've probably had at least one experience in which your prospect suddenly started giving you the "silent treatment."

This dilemma usually goes something like this:

"I don't know what to do when I get hit with the silent treatment—you know, when I've worked with a prospect for quite a while, and we've had great conversations, and they've expressed interest in our solution—and then all of a sudden everything stops.



I tried calling them back once or twice. I even sent a follow-up e-mail, but nothing. They just disappeared. I figure I've lost the sale, and I don't know what I did wrong, or what to do next. It makes selling feel like such a painful and arduous process."

If this has happened to you, you may have felt anxious and confused. You may have told yourself, "It's not as if I'm the one who did anything wrong. I put everything into building the relationship. How can I rescue the sale if I can't even get them to talk to me?"

The "Hopeium" Trap

There is a pressure-free way to re-establish communication when your prospect starts giving you the "silent treatment." But first, it's important to understand why the situation has happened in the first place.

Most of us who sell get caught up in "hopeium," a comical term that means we focus our hopes and desires on making the sale. But "hopeium" can be a trap because it's impossible for you to keep in mind your most important goal: to learn your prospect's truth.

When we fix our minds on the outcome—making the sale—we automatically begin anticipating how the process will go, and we also begin expecting that things will happen as we hope they will.

If we're in that mindset and our prospect suddenly breaks off communication, we feel lost, anxious, frustrated, discouraged, and confused. We become preoccupied with what went wrong. We may even feel betrayed.



Is there any way to clear up the mystery?

Yes, by giving up your agenda and learning the truth about where you stand with your prospect—and being okay with whatever the truth may be. "But how can I learn the truth when they're avoiding me?" you may ask. "And why do I need to let go of the sale?"

Let's take the second question first. If you approach your prospect while you still hope the sale will happen, you'll introduce sales pressure into the relationship. This will push your prospect away from you and destroy any trust you have developed with them. Instead, you can eliminate sales pressure by telling them that you're okay with their decision if they've decided not to move forward. In other words, you take a step back instead of trying to chase and follow up with calls because you're focused on getting a "yes."

The bottom line is: When a prospect gives you the "silent treatment," it doesn't mean you've lost the sale. It just means you don't know the truth yet. What you need to do is call and learn the truth.

Why is learning the truth so important?

Here are four important reasons:

You stop losing confidence in your selling ability. The "silent treatment" threatens our "hopeium." We start blaming ourselves. We don't know where we stand—a painful state of limbo. Our self-talk is negative and full of self-blame. We're on pins and needles wondering whether the sale will still somehow come through.

You increase your selling efficiency and decrease your stress level. Once you learn the truth about your prospect's situation, you can either stay involved with the prospect or move on. I often say, "A no is almost as valuable as a yes." Why? Because it frees up your time to find prospects who are a better fit with your solution. This lets you work much more efficiently because you can quickly weed out prospects who aren't going to buy. Knowing the prospect's truth lets you walk away without that guilt-laden voice whispering, "If you give up, you don't have what it takes." Learning your prospect's truth translates into tangible results that equal real dollars. You'll also put an end to the self-sabotaging stress that comes from living in "silent treatment" limbo.

Sales pressure pushes prospects away. When you respond to the "silent treatment" with calls and e-mails, you're really telling them that you're determined to move the sales process forward—which means you're looking out for your needs, not theirs. This makes them mistrust you and run the other way.

The "silent treatment." Totally breaking off communication is how prospects protect themselves from sales pressure when they don't feel comfortable telling us their truth. The more we press, the more they run.

But the opposite is true too. The more we relax and invite the truth, the more straightforward they'll be with us. Prospects feel comfortable sharing what's going on with them when they know we're okay with hearing it.

How to Reopen Communication

After Anthony and I had talked about some of these issues, he said, "This all makes a lot of sense, but I'm still not sure what to say when I make that call."

It's simpler than you might think.

First, simply give your prospect a call. (E-mail and voicemail are very impersonal, so use them only as last resorts if you can't reach your prospect after several phone calls.)

Second, take responsibility and apologize for having caused the "silent treatment."

Below is an example that will help prospects feel safe enough to open up and tell you the truth about their situation:

"Hi, Jim, it's Anthony. I just wanted, first of all, to call and apologize that we ended up not being able to connect. I feel like somewhere along the way maybe I dropped the ball, or I didn't give you the information you needed. I'm not calling to move things forward because I'm assuming you've probably gone ahead with other options, and that's perfectly okay. I'm just checking to see if you may have some feedback as to where I can improve for next time."

When you respond to the "silent treatment" this way, the results will probably surprise you. You may even learn that the prospect has legitimate reasons for not having gotten back to you.

You'll also find yourself more productive and less frustrated. It'll make a world of difference in your productivity level, your stress level, your income, and how much you enjoy what you're doing. Remember, you haven't lost the sale, you just don't know the truth yet.