

Reluctance revisited

What is sales call reluctance and could it apply to you or your team?

A long while back in the early days of *Salesforce* we featured the concept of sales call reluctance and its academic underpinnings. Not too much has been heard about it since, partly because the methodology has not been marketed heavily here and certainly not to the IT sector. Now a UK firm, Remap, aims to put that right as one of the few authorised practitioners in the country, having already gained traction in one of the more identifiable sales sectors, namely pharmaceuticals. The company would like to find an IT partner in the UK to establish initial metrics specific to our industry.

The science of sales call reluctance goes back at least to the 1970s, and the flagship implementation is a 110 question assessment called SPQ*GOLD (SPQ stands for sales preference questionnaire) developed by behavioural scientists George Dudley and Shannon Goodson. The theory concerns the rather alarming Inhibited Social Contact Initiation Syndrome (ISCIS), “an aggregation of emotion-based escape and avoidance behaviours particularly associated with the act of initiating first social contact”.

The idea is that this is a set of separate barriers to making contact, distinct from general social anxiety, and which “subside or cease altogether once first contact has been successfully established”. SPQ*GOLD measures 12 call reluctance types in total (and apparently more may be identified), and also three call reluctance “impostors” that managers may think are down to reluctance but are not. Outputs include three scales – one is the “brake” score, aggregated from the 12 diagnostic sub-categories, and “is interpreted as an estimate of the effort that could have been available to support sales prospecting but is diverted into non-productive coping behaviours intended to reduce emotional discomfort associated with prospecting for new business”.

As Ian Saunders, a call reluctance expert at Remap says, the test is only one part of the psychometric picture that can assess new hires or existing salespeople, but it’s a part that is not addressed or barely at all in other mainstream models. “There are three cornerstones for identifying a high performing salesperson – skills, knowledge and attitude – and it is very specifically the attitude to how you feel about sales that the SPQ addresses.



It is a detailed exploration of one avenue – the behaviours that salespeople may not even have admitted to themselves and what they try and avoid.”

In pharma, Saunders says Remap has found that 70% of 2000 reps (about 20% of the UK number) show call reluctance with pronounced peaks in two of the behaviours – yielding (reps being uncomfortable about say overcoming objections and closing) and role rejection (being unhappy about being in the sales role – which from other research by the SPQ developers is a British trait).

A graphical report quickly shows a traffic light score across the 12 types of call reluctance. Three “impostors” can compound poor performance (which as Saunders says can be things like tiredness, home life and lack of goal focus, and which are not inherently about call

reluctance). There are also accuracy and honesty filters. At the Prudential, Saunders says applying the test on the 200 best performers still showed call reluctance – and fixing the behaviours resulted in a 17% sales uplift from these reps.

This is a tool that has an impressive research base behind it, with the primary source being Behavioural Sciences Research Press, in Dallas. The data is growing and various spin-offs such as the international comparison of sales motivation have been carried out, and the book, *The Psychology of Sales Call Reluctance*, has recently been issued in a fifth edition, in which authors Dudley and Goodson note the biggest recent change is the soft-sell training revolution. “Soft-selling has created a backlash. Instead of what the public has in the past perceived as pushy, intrusive salespeople, we now have ‘relationship managers,’ ‘product advisers’, etc. who are taught not to close sales, but to ‘build relationships’ and fill needs. Consequently, we’ve seen increases in yielder, role rejection, over-preparation and hyper pro call reluctance.” **SF**

Email Ian Saunders if you would like to be an IT test partner – ian@remap.co.uk – and see www.remap.co.uk and www.bsrpinc.com

Choose your weakness – the 12 types of call reluctance

- Yielder – a preference to not “spoil relationships”, and to back off rather than pursue a matter until a satisfactory result is achieved.
- Role Rejection – unresolved feelings of dissatisfaction, discomfort or guilt about your career choice.
- Over Preparer – a tendency to be hooked into unnecessary tasks; disproportionate amounts of detail allocated to preferred tasks; over-amplified amounts of analysis.
- Hyper Professional – needs to manage people’s perceptions of them in order to look above average; often used to disguise self-doubt and proficiency gaps.
- Stage Fright – a debilitating dislike of presenting to groups that can, in extreme cases, cause physical illness, stress or absenteeism.
- Social Self-conscious – a self-imposed rule engine that prevents effective interaction with certain customer target groups. In extreme cases it prevents meeting them at all.
- Telephobia – the inability to use the telephone as a promotional tool to move your sales objectives forward, while use for “emotionally low risk” calls will be unimpaired.
- Doomsayer – an extremely over-amplified form of pessimism that dominates thought processes and decision-making activity.
- Oppositional Reflex – a need to retain control of a career and treatment at all times.
- Referral Aversion – dislike or reluctance to ask clients to help you extend your sales network or influence due to worries of conflict or rejection.
- Separationist – dislike or reluctance to ask friends or peers to help extend your sales network or influence due to worries of conflict or rejection.
- Emotionally Un-emancipated – dislike or reluctance to ask family members to help extend your sales network or influence due to worries of conflict or rejection.