

Seven Nice Ways Your Prospects Say “No, Thank You” and What to Do about It

By [LawVision](#) on August 25, 2015

Ask any nine-year-old kid what it means when his mother says “I’ll think about it.” He knows what it means—it means no. As soon as he hears it, he knows his chances of getting what he wants have decreased to near zero. Why is it so easy for a nine year old to decipher that phrase and translate it into a no, but it is so hard for us to understand we’ve been told no in the business development process? A subtle, nicely worded “no thank you” is called a *continuation*, and if you aren’t careful, such words can waste a lot of your time. Here are some nice things a prospect might say to you when she/he means no:

1) “Thank you for coming. We’ll keep you in mind.”

What does “we’ll keep you in mind” really mean anyhow? Does anyone ever go home, dim the lights, assume the lotus position, and “keep you in mind”? No. Trust me, no one keeps you in mind; they just told you no. They aren’t yet convinced, and you have more work to do.

2) “I like it. Let’s keep talking, Jim.”

Great news! They want us to keep talking. But chances are, unless you do something, by the end of the month, you’ll become a stalker, leaving voice mails like, “Hi, remember me? We were going to keep talking. Please call me back when you have a chance.” This is common—we call it a “positive non-committal.” It’s often coupled with other types of continuations.

3) “That was an excellent presentation. Please stop by and visit us again next time you are in Little Rock.”

Double whammy—positive but non-committal, coupled with a reminder that you are probably not coming back to Little Rock soon, so we won’t have to deal with telling you no again.

4) “This could really work for us. We’ll be in touch if we want to take things further.”

Positive non-committal, coupled with a nice way to say “don’t call us we’ll” You know the rest

5) “We really like you. We are going to look for a matter that is right for you.”

Yes, and we are going to find that matter two years from now and give it to someone else because by then we will have forgotten all about you.

6) “You really made us think. Our current counsel never discusses these issues with us.”

Wow, they liked us way better than their current counsel! I think we have a good chance at this one. Hold on there, ace. Everyone likes to whine about current counsel, but that doesn’t necessarily mean they are going to jump ship anytime soon. Keep working.

7) "I can see us working together in the future."

Define future.

In the classic sales tome "Spin Selling" Author Neil Rackham defines "continuations" as moments where no specific action has been agreed upon to move the sale forward. Continuations don't move a deal forward, they help prospects politely evade a commitment. An "advance" on the other hand, moves a business relationship and a transaction forward. An advance is not necessarily the close of the transaction but it is a commitment from your prospect to do something that moves you closer to that goal. Here are some examples:

- Agreement to come to an upcoming seminar
- Agreement to introduce you to a prospect's superior
- Agreement to meet your superior
- Agreement to read a proposal and discuss on a date certain
- Agreement to find additional information and discuss it on a date certain

The next time you meet with a client be aware of the difference between a continuation and an advance. Don't let the meeting end when you hear a continuation. Back up and take the steps to get some small commitment that keeps the deal alive and gives you a chance to continue to match your capabilities to your prospect's needs.