

AGENT | BROKERAGE

## Special Report: The art of handling objections in real estate

Every client question is an opportunity to prove value

BY GILL SOUTH ★  
TODAY 11:00 A.M. 

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### Key Takeaways

- Listen more than you talk, apply empathy, coach or lead the client, and reframe the objection to move forward.
- Don't be defensive and overly scripted.
- Pushback from your buyer or seller is an opportunity to educate.

“If you’re not solving problems, you’re not selling real estate.”

That’s according to one Massachusetts agent who made it clear that overcoming objections is “an all day, everyday activity.”

Most will agree that **objections** come with the territory in real estate — some agents may even dream restlessly to common refrains:

“I’m not ready to sell.”

“Why should I pay that commission?”

“I was hoping to sell my house for more.”

“**We want to go FSBO.**”

And during the waking hours, agents may find themselves knocking down these statements like devilish pop-ups in an intense game of Whac-A-Mole.

Objections are a part of any sales process, but the job of a real estate professional to advise, guide and work with clients over a long period of time on such a monumental transaction requires the highest level of communication finesse.

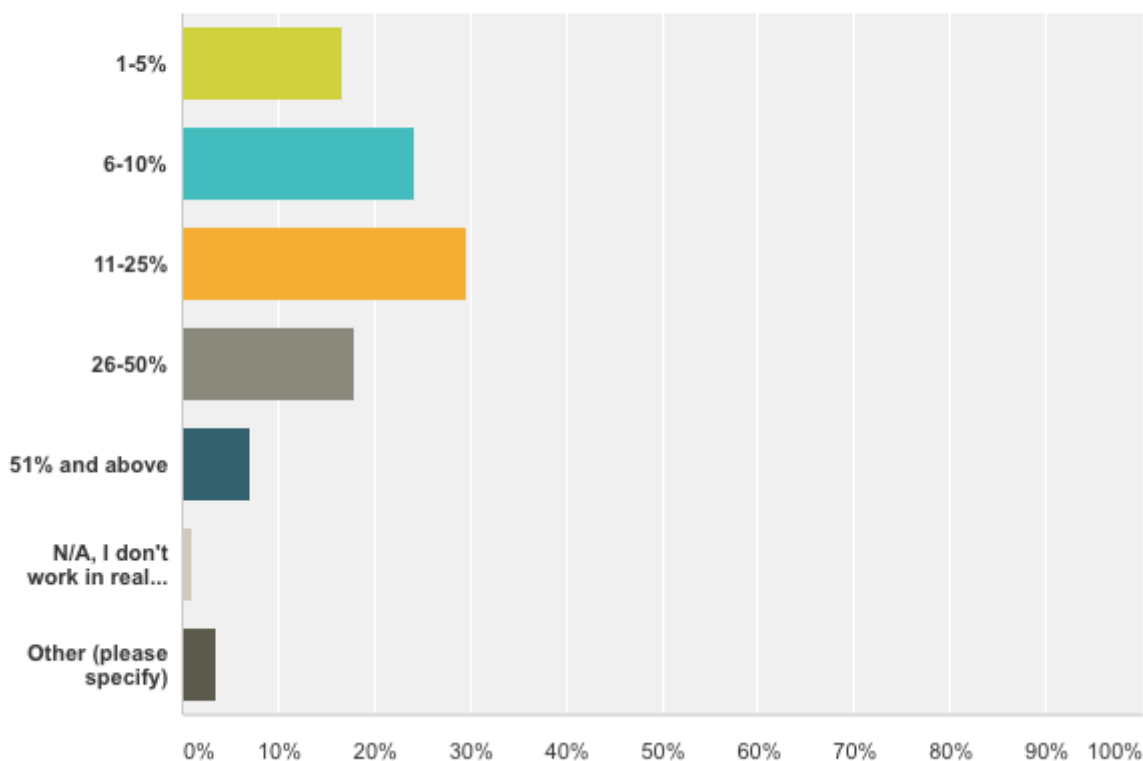
The best in the business have learned to develop compelling and convincing rebuttals to objections to keep the sales process on track and help clients past their concerns from the agent selection process to close.

## Expect objections in these scenarios

Respondents indicated that handling objections takes up a good part of their day in real estate; for nearly a third, it's around 11 to 25 percent.

### How much of your time working in real estate is spent handling objections?

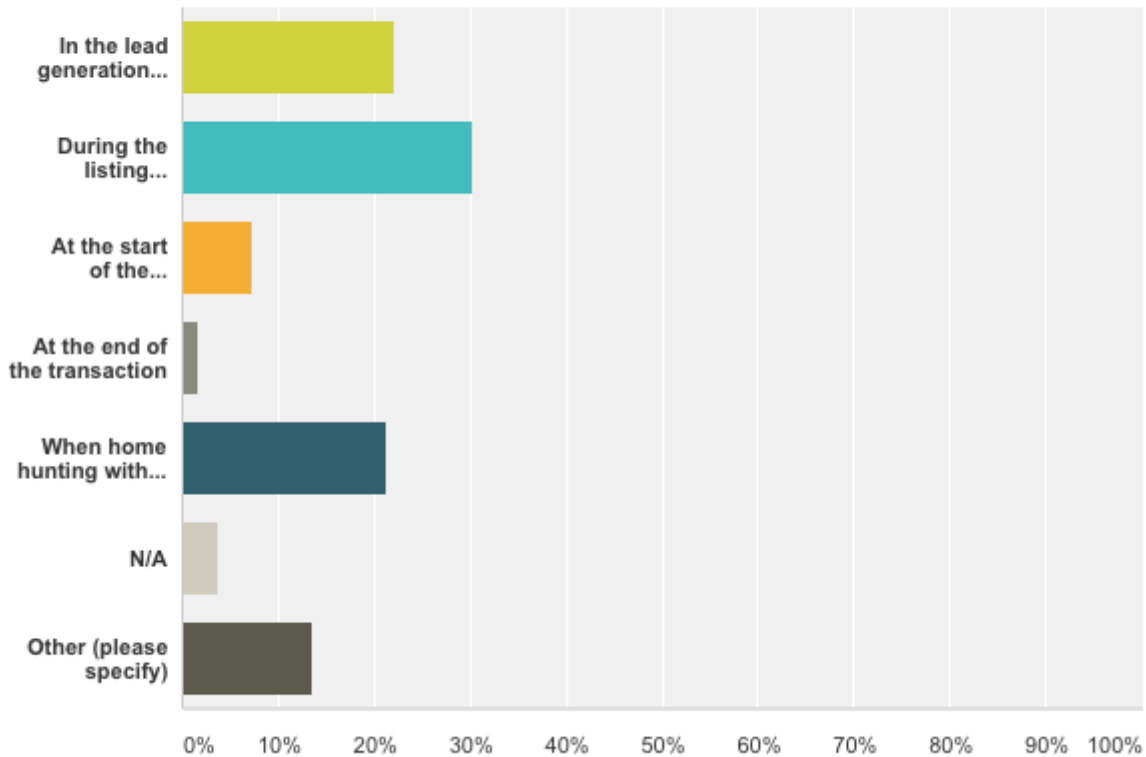
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Objections are most likely to sprout up during the listing presentation (according to 30 percent of respondents), in the lead generation phase (22 percent) and when out house hunting with buyers (21 percent).

## When are you most likely to get objections?

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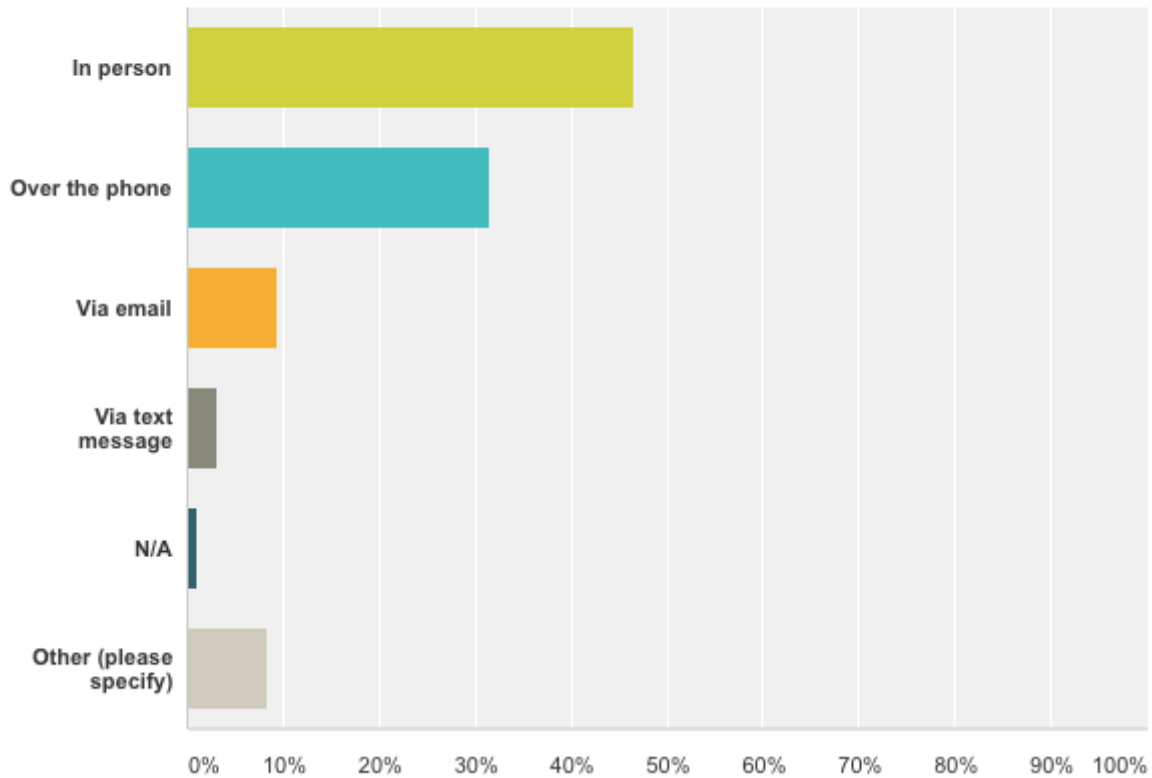


Despite the digital age we live in, nearly 50 percent said they were most likely to receive these pushbacks in person; for a third, it was over the phone, and 9 percent said email was their most frequent objection handling playing field.

“All prospecting is objection handling, as are the listing appointments, contract negotiations and so on,” said one successful Georgia-based agent. “I view objections as someone fishing for information.”

## Where are you most likely to receive and handle objections?

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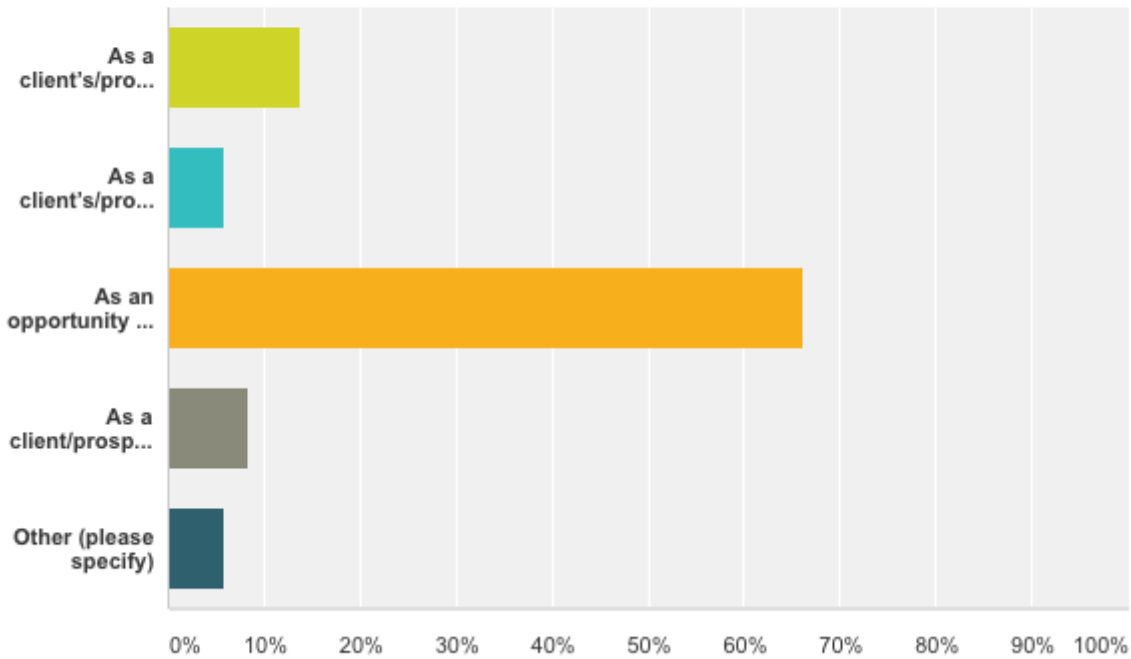


### The objection as opportunity

According to the survey, most real estate professionals are approaching objections, whether valid or not, with a positive attitude; two thirds see them as an opportunity to educate a client or prospect.

## How are you most likely to perceive an objection?

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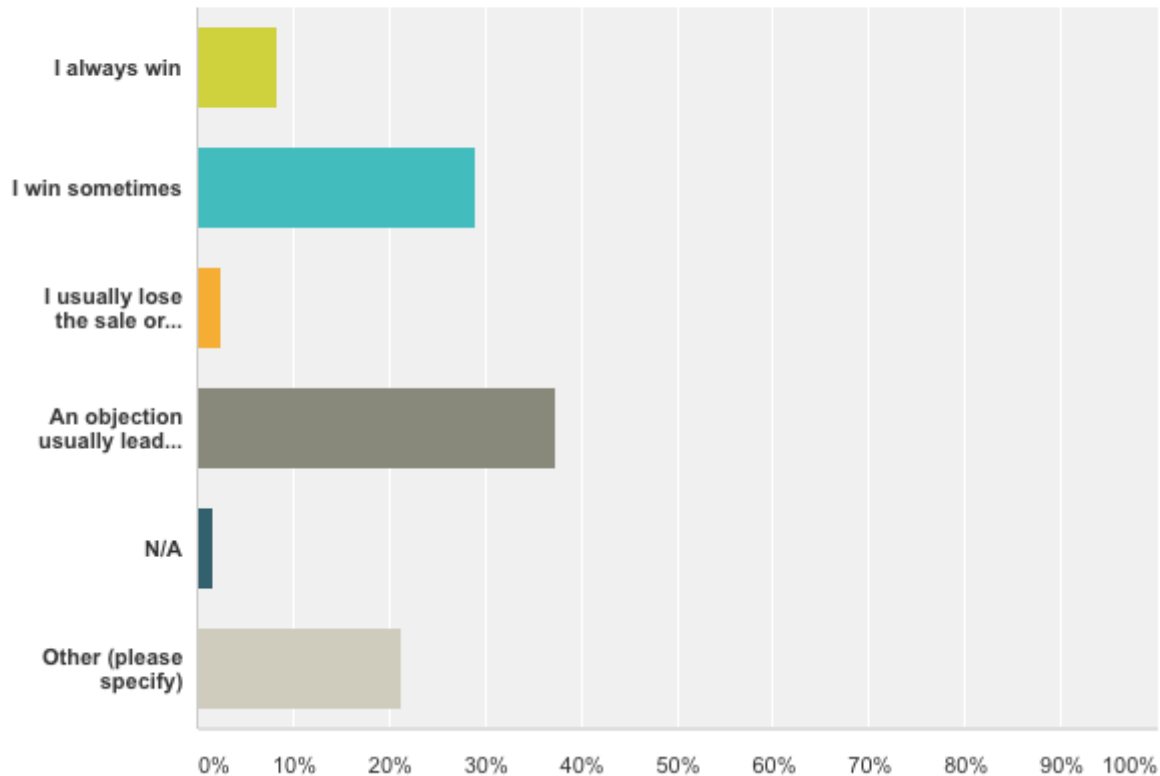
How successful are real estate professionals at handling them? According to nearly 40 percent, an objection usually leads to a compromise, while close to 30 percent said: “I win sometimes.” Only eight percent said they “always win.”

A number of respondents didn’t like the term “win” because sometimes objections are valid — not necessarily things to be conquered.

As this seasoned Myrtle Beach-based broker said: “If the objection is valid, there is no win or lose scenario.”

## Which of the following best describes your objection handling success?

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“I don’t see it as win or lose but successfully or unsuccessfully handling the objection,” added a Pennsylvania-based agent.

Define what kind of objection it is, cautioned one Rhode Island agent: “Seek to understand before trying to answer the objection. Is it a valid objection or an excuse objection? Does the problem exist? Empathy can go a long way.”

Consumers may push back against the traditional brokerage model because there are more discounters on the market today. And due to the proliferation of property search websites, homebuyers often feel they are doing more work in finding a home while attributing less value to the work a buyer’s agent does to make their bid a success.

“Although objections are an opportunity to educate, what we have found is the typical people that raise objections to us, specifically, are looking for discounts, rebates, and are just not seeing the value in our service proposition. We are in a hot market up against many discounters,” said an experienced Denver-based broker.

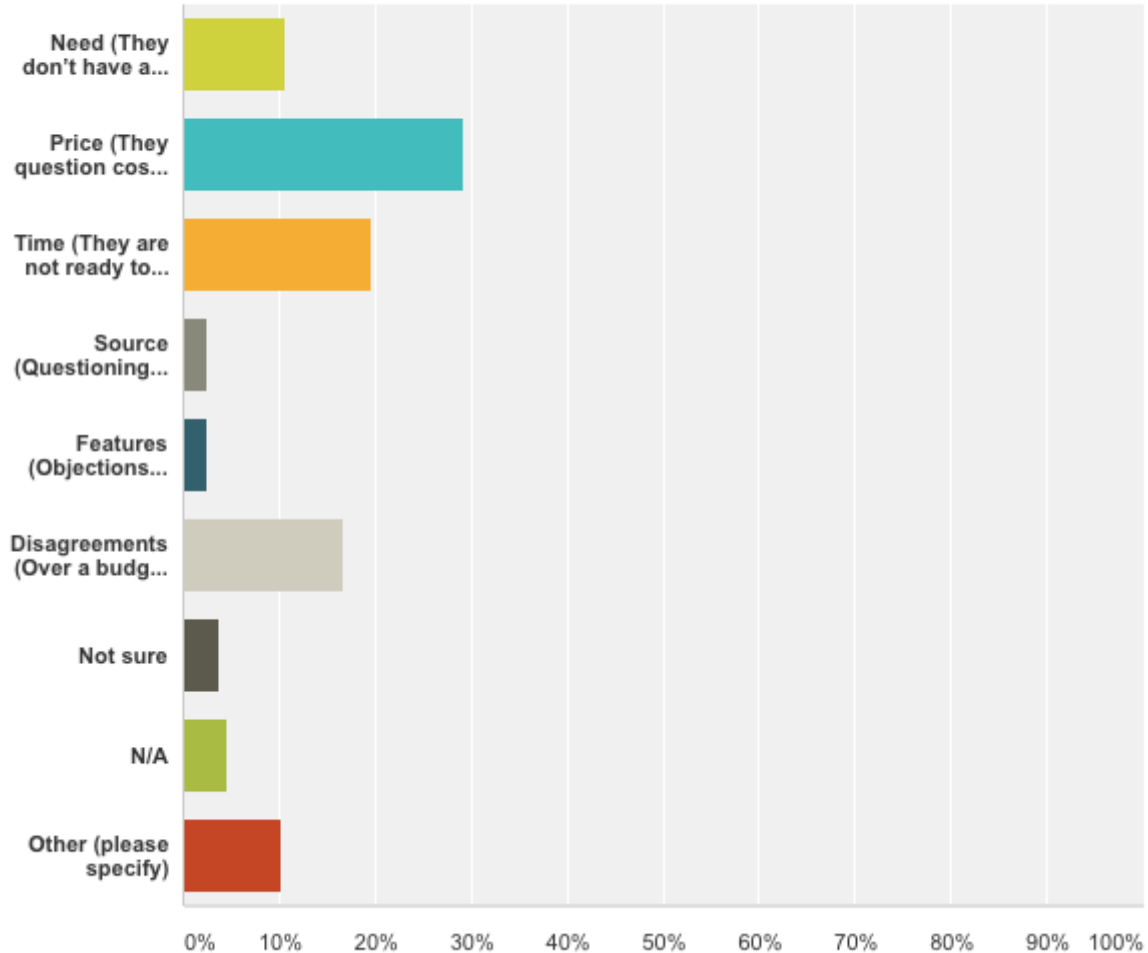
Some of the most types common objections real estate professionals face today include:

- Price: The cost of using an agent (30 percent)
- Timing: On being ready to sell or buy (20 percent)

- Need: Prospects who did not feel a need for an agent’s service or they already had someone else in mind (11 percent)

## Which of the following types of objections do you face the most often?

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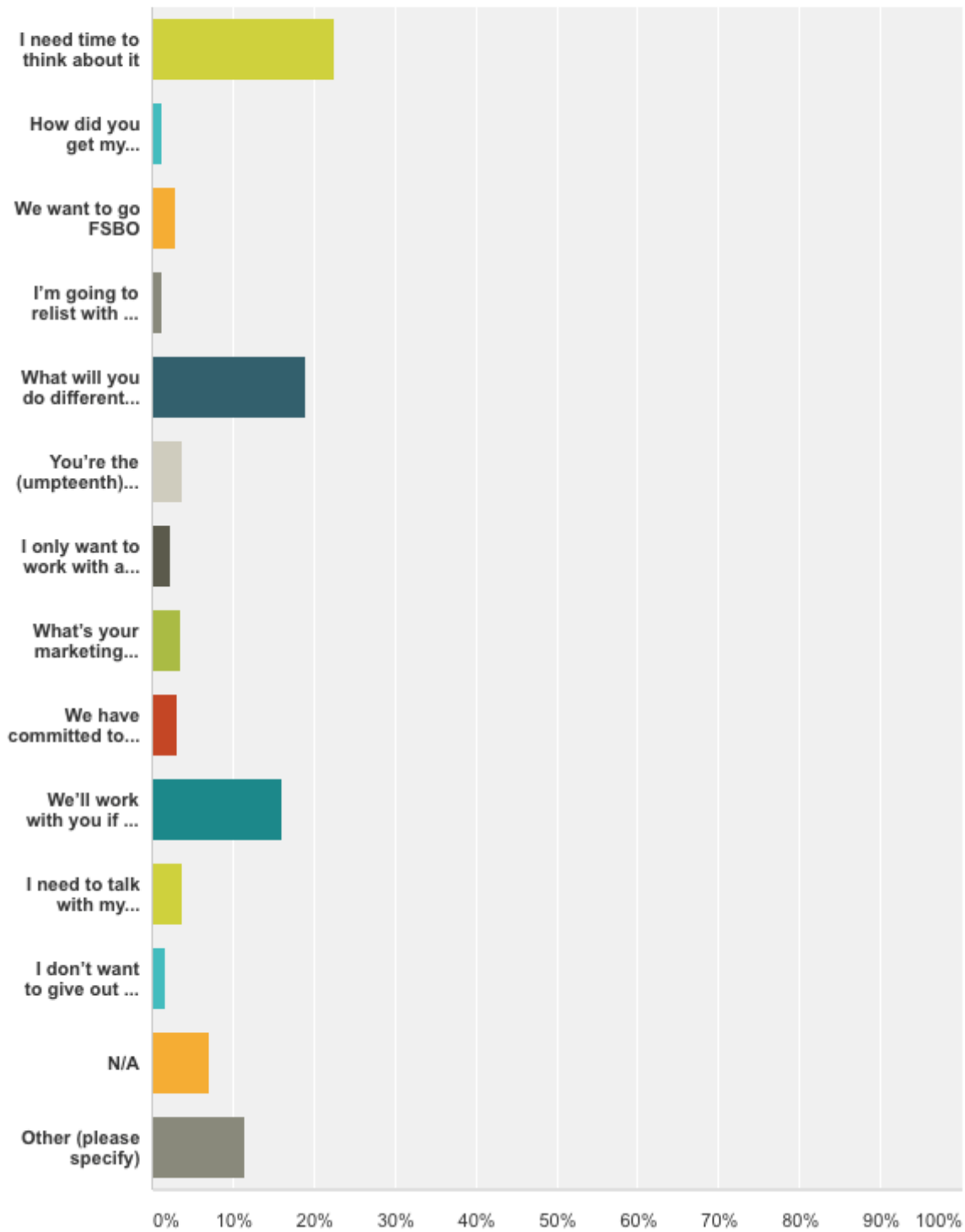


Meanwhile the most common objections respondents hear — and agents would be wise to anticipate — include:

- “I need more time to think about it.” (23 percent)
- “What will you do differently from other agents?” (19 percent)
- “We’ll work with you if you cut your commission.” (16 percent)
- “You’re the umpteenth agent to call me.” (4 percent)
- “I need to talk with my significant other/family first.” (4 percent)

# Which of the following most accurately describes the most common objection you hear?

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What's beneath the surface of an objection?



concern (82 percent), like a doctor who unearths the disease rather than just treating the symptoms.

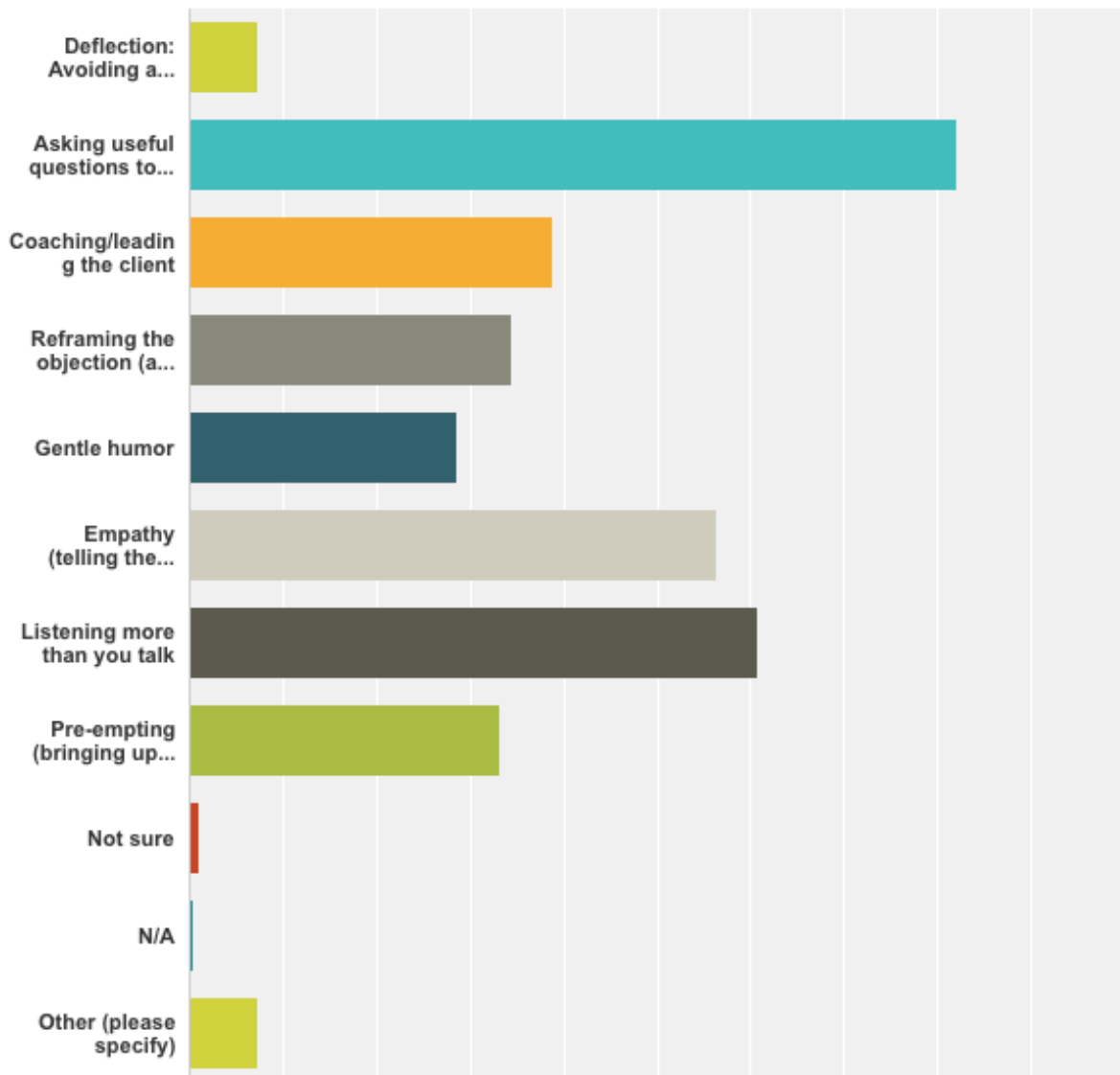
“Try and figure out what’s really bugging them, which is usually something else,” said one respondent.

“I look at an objection as either an opportunity to remove an obstacle to move ahead or to smoke out an excuse and find the real objection,” added an experienced Florida agent.

Other popular methods were listening more than you talk (61 percent), using empathy (56 percent), coaching or leading the client (39 percent), re-framing the objection as a misunderstanding or turning the subject around (34 percent), and pre-empting an objection (33 percent).

### Which of the following objection strategies do you use? Check all that apply.

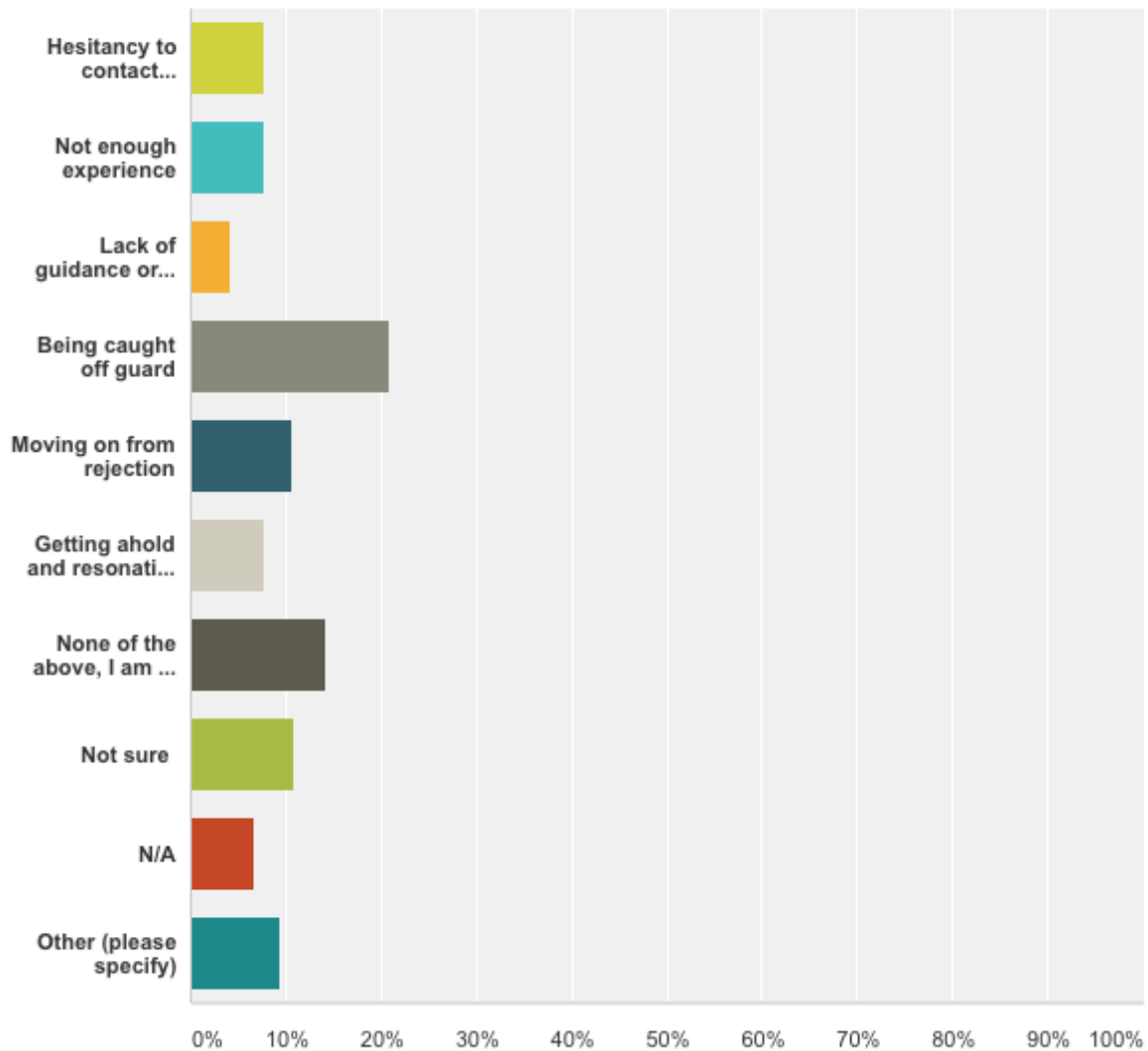
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The biggest roadblock to successful objection handling, according to respondents, is being caught off guard (20 percent), while 14 percent said they were “objection handling masters.” A little over 10 percent had trouble moving on from rejection and 7 percent did not enjoy contacting strangers, with an equal number of respondents feeling as though their lack of experience hampered them.

## What do you think is the biggest roadblock to your successful objection handling?

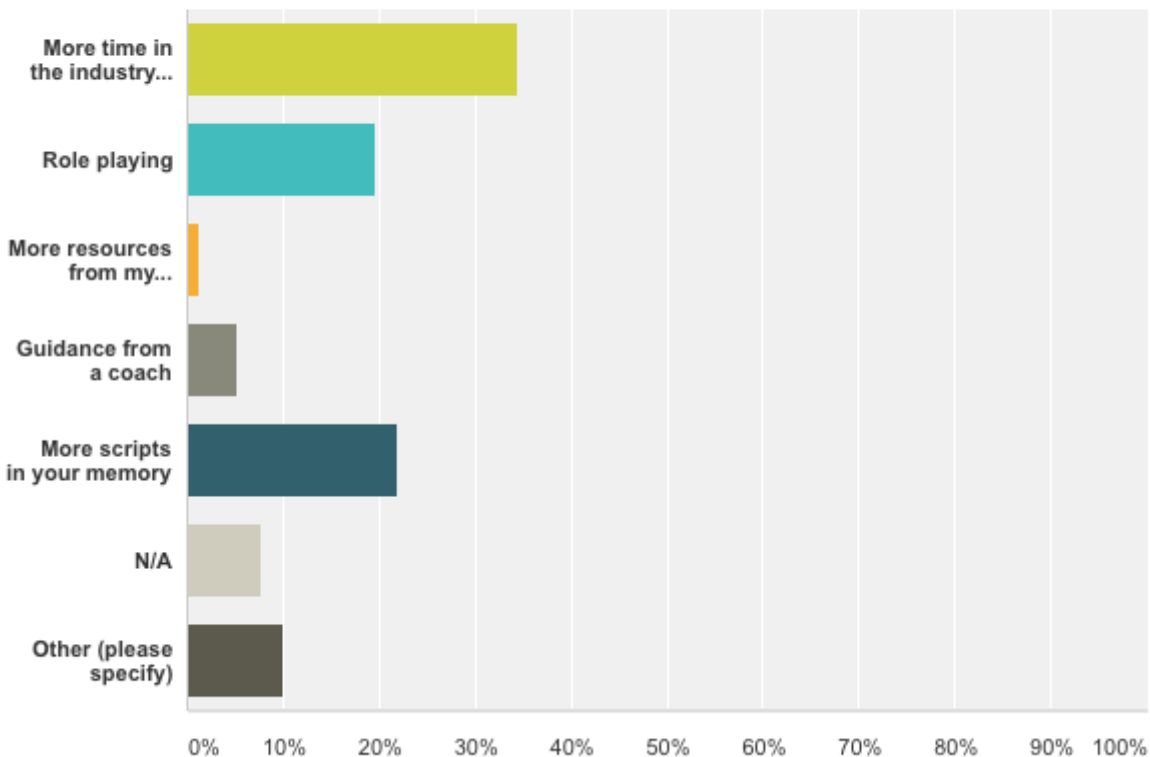
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What stands to boost one’s objection-handling prowess in real estate? More time in the industry, said 34 percent of respondents, in addition to having more scripts in their memory (22 percent) and role playing (20 percent).

## Which of the following stand to increase your objection handling success?

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### Feeling defensive? Resist the impulse

Human instinct is to get defensive when approached with conflict, but it's an adviser's job not to.

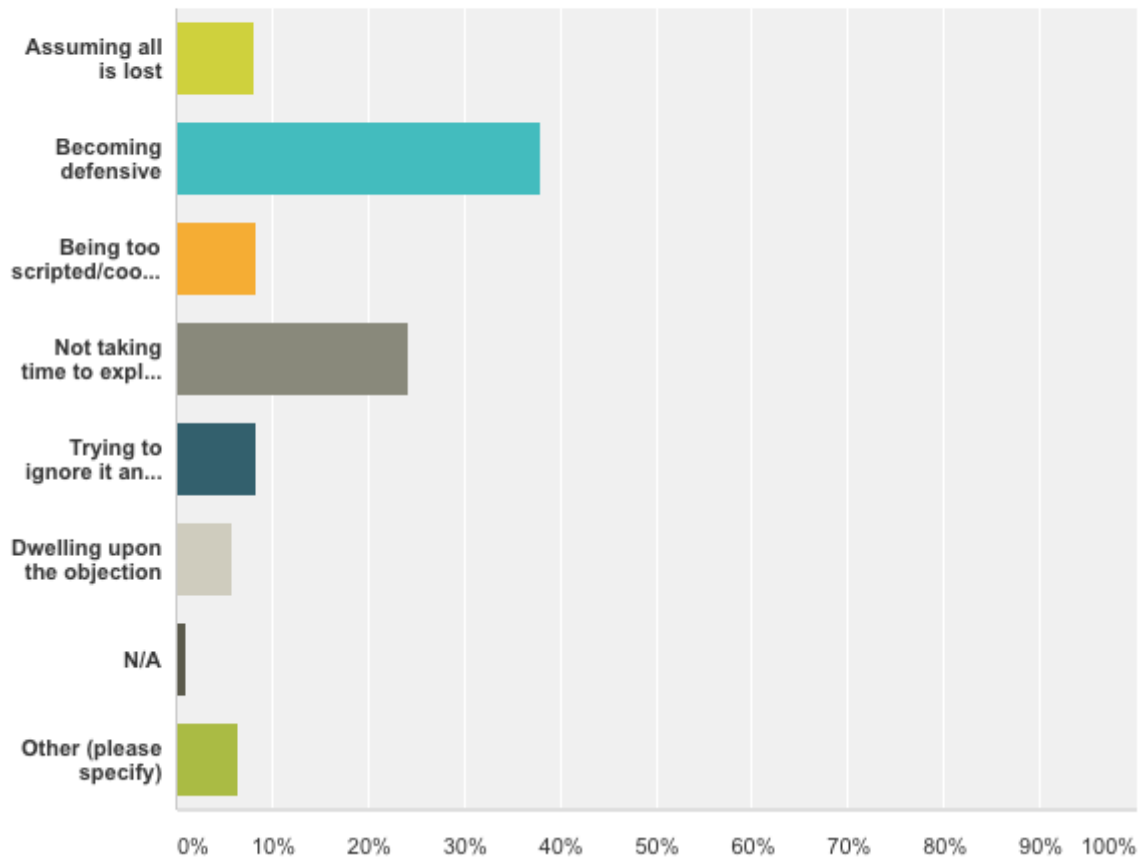
The no. 1 mistake respondents cited is becoming defensive when faced with an objection they couldn't answer (38 percent).

Whatever you do, don't take an objection as an attack.

"Objections are not personal," said one respondent. "Answer the objection by acknowledging the fear and presenting the benefit."

## What's the biggest objection handling mistake real estate professionals make?

Answered: 311 Skipped: 0



The objection may be personal to the buyer, however. As a rookie Florida-based agent advises: “Know your buyer and their needs so as to minimize objections. What you perceive as an objection may be something very important and personal to your buyer.”

Moreover, it’s the agent’s role to keep emotions to a minimum.

“You have to keep the client focused on the end result and provide the options within the walls of the contract to get them there,” said an experienced South Carolina-based broker.

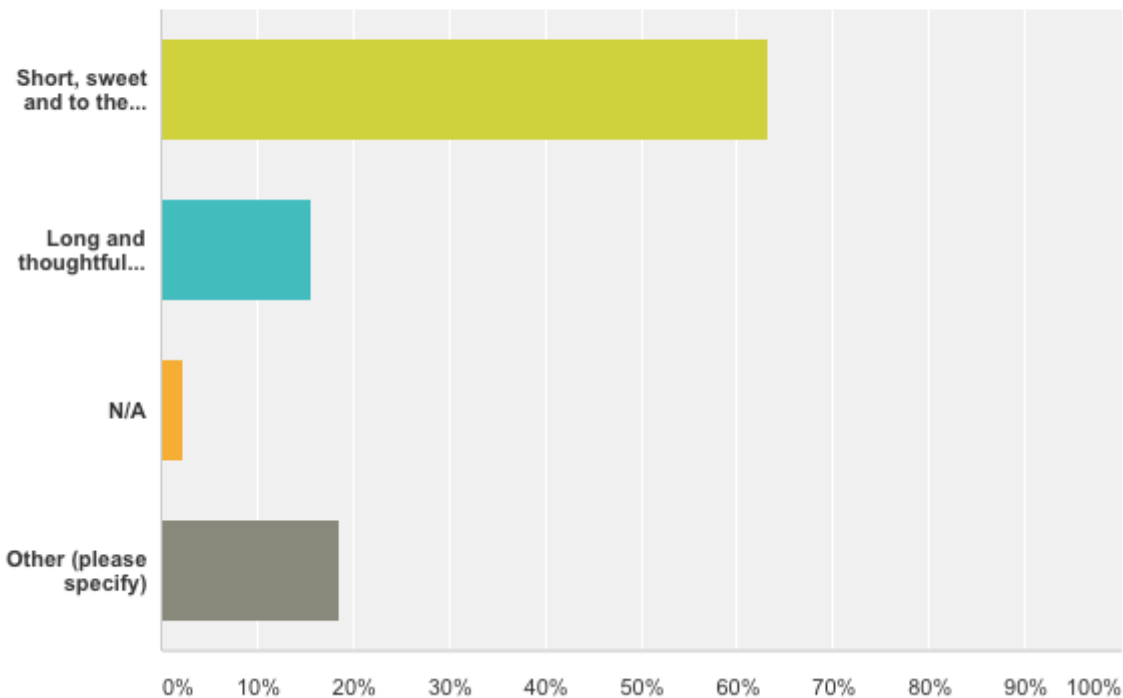
“Presentation is everything when handling objections.”

Failing to take the time to explore an objection before addressing it is agents’ second biggest mistake, according to the survey, followed by being overly scripted or cookie cutter and moving on without properly addressing a concern.

Two thirds of respondents felt that short, sweet and to the point answers were better than long, thoughtful ones.

## What kind of objection strategy do you find to be the most effective?

Answered: 311 Skipped: 0



### Agent as teacher

They say that an agent wears many hats, and in the case of objections, one of them is teacher. For many agents surveyed, responding to objections begins with education, a positive mindset and being well-equipped with the facts.

Acting as if you've heard objection before (you probably have!) and answering confidently is a good idea. And having a can-do attitude that calms the client's nerves can work well, too.

A long-established Florida-based broker has actually changed his vocabulary to make this happen: "My mindset starts with banishing the word 'objection.' It's only a request for more information or telling me I have gotten something wrong." Another survey participant echoed a similar sentiment in choosing to think of objection handlers as "conversation continuers."

"An objection can be an opportunity to allow your client to understand that they are truly heard. And, it's an opportunity to educate," said a North Carolina-based agent. "I have found that most objections can be handled with facts. The objection usually comes from a lack of knowledge. I have the mindset of a teacher during those moments."

An experienced California-based agent relishes the opportunity: "I absolutely love objections because it's a way for me to set myself apart from other people vying for their business and

An experienced Sarasota, Florida-based broker urges agents not to patronize their clients when they are setting out to educate.

“Don’t be that know-it-all that nobody likes, and remember that some objections just can’t be overcome, so be disciplined enough to pick and choose your moments with buyers or sellers,” he said. “I would tell every Realtor in the country to recognize it is not about them and that it’s exclusively about the customer.

“So make a good impression, act with accountability, get the facts, interpret the facts and close in agreement.”

And before you can get your message across, you have to have made a good connection with the client, added a Boston-based coach, who sees consumers having unrealistic expectations shaped by the media: “TV and internet influences a lot of people, but not always in a realistic sense. So you need to bring clients, especially first-time homebuyers, to realize the truth. But you have to first connect with them and show credibility before they will really listen.”

There is a certain amount of psychological digging that needs to be done in the agent-client relationship, suggested some respondents. Put the ball back in their court, and open your ears.

“Objections are best handled by listening and asking additional questions to get a clearer understanding of the client’s questions or concerns,” advised a company founder and coach.

“When I respond with questions, it is an unexpected response and puts the responsibility of explaining and justification back on the client.”

## How to do your homework

How does an agent best prepare for the inevitable and predictable objections? Come armed with persuasive data and practice your responses until they’re ingrained like muscle memory.

“Being an expert in your market means you should have answers to objections the client hasn’t even asked yet,” said an Atlanta-based agent. “Make this work for you. By properly educating and getting ahead of those objections, not only do you look more intelligent and professional, but more trustworthy as well.”

In many cases, empathy is the place to start.

“I put myself in the other person’s place and think of the questions and objections they might have depending on their knowledge, background, personality and develop answers to those,” a Chicago-based agent shared. If she knows an objection will come up, she tries to introduce it into the discussion first to address the issue before it becomes a problem or source of irritation.

As in all relationships, people bring baggage, and agents should take this into account when preparing for a new client, advised one experienced broker: “Look at all sides of a situation if you feel you may receive pushback from your client. This will give you an open mindset to talk

A San Francisco Bay Area executive broker described his method for professional development, a system that allows the best ideas to make their way to the top: “After each interview, I write down the objections, then four good responses, then memorize every one. Then, test, improve, over and over again until the best answer is exposed to any question.”

An agent in the Hamptons will bring overpriced listing examples (not his own) that sold for much less, much later and compare them to homes that have sold near or at listing prices quickly.

## **You’re in the moment: What now?**

Once you’ve done the prep, what works when you’re on your toes, face-to-face (or on the phone) and it’s game time?

Popular suggestions were listening well, reframing, pre-empting, coaching/leading and asking questions. A number of respondents stressed that it’s not one-size-fits-all when it comes to the best approach.

“All strategies work, just not every time. Every strategy has its own purpose and place,” said a coach/trainer based in Cincinnati.

Pre-empting can diffuse a situation before it starts, and as one respondent put it “literally take words out of their mouth.”

Another respondent explained that being upfront, rather than trying to downplay, the negative actually builds trust: “We can all see the flaws or cons in something. Say them out loud before the client does. Point out the benefits of a home but also the defects you see that need attention; the clients will know you’re looking out for them.”

One major obstacle that real estate professionals face with clients is time delays. So come into your conversations knowing that, and illustrate to sellers and buyers how their hesitation can hurt them.

“We currently are in a predominantly seller’s market, and I try to educate on DOM [days on market], quick sale of desirable homes and the possibility of multiple offer situations,” said a seasoned Alabama-based agent. “It only takes losing out on a home (once) for them to see the need to act quickly.”

An approach where your client feels empowered, thanks to you coaching and leading them, is best. “When armed with accurate facts and information, they will make the best choice for themselves. It is best when they make the decision instead of the agent making it for them,” said a successful Chicago-based agent.

## **Commissions, calls and comebacks**

We asked respondents to give some examples of how they handled commonly encountered objections. One biggie, of course, was the cost of using an agent.

A Seattle-based broker has a clever approach to the age-old commission cutting question: “I point out what I offer for the rate I’m charging. I then ask: ‘What would you like me to eliminate in order to meet your request?’”

A Minnesota agent gives concrete examples to demonstrate value: “I say: ‘Here is a list of the homes I’ve sold recently — as you can see, my listings sell for an average of 6 percent over the market, so working with me is almost like getting your house sold for free.’”

In addition, when it comes to frustrated leads who have already heard from a dozen agents, showing you are human and have a sense of humor when calling for a potential listing can be a simple but effective way to win a new client’s trust.

“I frequently ask them how many calls they’ve received so far, and then express empathy for what they’re going through. I find that this quickly separates me from the pack, that they’ve not [been] dealing with a script-reading caller,” said an established Charlotte, North Carolina-based broker.

In some cases, the client doesn’t intend to put up a permanent roadblock, if you listen closely and hear them out.

“Sometimes they aren’t really objecting at all,” said a Massachusetts-based broker. “They just may be thinking out loud and will offer their own solution. It makes you look brilliant for ‘coming up with it.’”

## Memorable moments

Everyone looks back on some moments in their career and cringes at the missed opportunity. “If only I’d said *this!*” you think to yourself, replaying an encounter in your head before bed.

Then there are times when you totally crushed it. We asked respondents to share those memories, as they relate to objections in real estate, and they produced some excellent takeaways.

A successful Raleigh, North Carolina-based broker’s story shows how important it is to stay calm and not succumb to getting defensive.

Asked by a curmudgeonly seller why he should hire her, she smiled and said: “I’m not sure that’s the purpose of our meeting today, which is to get to know each other to determine if we are a good fit.” She presented her CMA and marketing strategy and got the listing.

“I did not let his question frazzle me but responded organically because hiring someone you respect will make the transaction that much easier,” she said.

Sometimes sticking to the script can work in the most unexpected ways, as a seasoned



Sold scripts. As I reached the question where it says to ask the seller: 'If they were to move, where would they move to next?' The prospect, an older senior citizen, replied 'Rose Hills,' which is a very well known cemetery here in Southern California.

"When he said that, I paused for a second and simply asked the following question on the script which is: 'Wow, and when will that be?' The prospect paused and laughed for a good minute. He said that out of all the agents whom had ever called him, I was the first to actually not hang up the phone or have a comeback for his answer to my question."

Three months later, this agent sold his home after he decided it was time to retire and move out of state.

Other times, it's just about getting your buyer out of the car when you are parked in front of a home that doesn't look like the pictures, as was the case for a New Hampshire-based broker: "My client said, 'I will not buy this house because of the horrible backyard,' which was important to him. I talked him into going into the house, and he and his wife loved it.

"We discussed how to improve the yard issues; they bought the house and love it to this day. They thank me over and over for talking them into this awesome home when he didn't even want to go inside."

This Texas-based agent found education, some preparation time and a common background to be an effective combination.

"When scheduling a marketing consultation, I was asked if I would reduce my fee. I told the client that I was negotiable but would not discuss it over the phone. This gave me time to plan for his objections.

"Once we got to discussing the fee, I explained how it was divided up and how much my actual fee was, and because I knew he was also in commission sales, I then pushed the listing agreement to him, handed him my pen, and told him to write the commission percentage I should be paid. He wrote in 6 percent."

A relaxed yet persistent approach worked well for a Portland, Oregon-based Realtor.

"I presented a full price offer to the seller and agent. They decided they needed to think about it.

"I said, 'I'll go in the other room so you can talk it over.' They started speaking in Spanish. I have no idea what the objection was. But after a few minutes I heard the Realtor say, 'I'll go tell her we need more time.' I thought, 'More time for what?'

"So I laid down on the couch and pretended to be napping. The other agent was shocked. He told me they need more time; they'd get back to me over the weekend. I told him it was OK, I'd just nap until they decided.

"He went back into the kitchen and there was a lot of frantic Spanish going on. He came out

Sometimes negotiations break down over very small amounts of money and a good agent has to somehow break the impasse, even if it means — worse case scenario — throwing money at the problem.

A New York agent, in the business for years, remembers a buyer and seller stuck at a \$5,000 difference: “I asked both of them independently if they were really willing to walk away over a manageable amount of money, then told them that I would even put something into the negotiation to make it happen.

“They were both surprised that I made that offer and it made them feel that they could both afford to meet in the middle without my financial input.”

## **Strategies consigned to the scrapheap**

Asked to describe what strategies they had ditched over the years, more than 20 percent of respondents said not to use scripts.

As one put it: “I never read scripts. Scripts are for actors. Scripts are not natural.”

An Illinois trainer/agent has strict rules: “I have ditched anything that everyone else is using. Once a customer has heard the same objection handling script, they think it is a sales technique.”

But don’t throw the baby out with the bathwater; there might be an opportunity to use scripts to your advantage.

“Scripts will often provide a good angle that you might not have considered, but absorb the gist and lose the robotic response,” advised a Vermont-based broker. “Make it your own.”

This can also prevent you from pulling out a cookie-cutter response in circumstances when it doesn’t quite fit, which is likely to come off as inauthentic.

In addition to using scripts wisely and carefully, other suggestions from the survey included avoiding condescending or belittling answers, using deflection with extreme caution — as it might appear that you don’t know how to answer a client’s question — and steering clear of any “manipulation or fear-based speech,” as one Massachusetts-based agent advised.

## **What brokerages offer in this realm**

In general, agents are receiving resources from their brokerages on handling objections.

Our respondents said the best help comes in the form of scripts (nearly 30 percent) classes or group training (18 percent), and one-on-one training (about 10 percent).

A number said they then had to amend scripts to fit their own style.

“Keller Williams BOLD classes are great, but you have to tailor every answer to fit your

one respondent.

Agents said they were looking to coaches for ideas and support, including Mike Ferry, Brian Buffini, Chris Smith at Curaytor, and Larry Kendall's Ninja Selling.

## Masters of the objection

In addition to the survey, Inman reached out to a couple of industry pros who you could say have mastered the art of objection handling.

In fact, there's not a lot about real estate objections that Aaron Wittenstein, Realtor with Keller Williams New York Realty and facilitator of the Lead Gen Scripts and Objections Facebook group, doesn't already know.

He arrived in White Plains New York four years ago with few contacts and hit the phones for three months straight to generate leads. He finally collected eight listings in the fourth month. He still does lead generation every morning from 8 a.m. to 11 a.m.

He says that people get scared about cold calling or find it hard to deal with a conversation going south, but his top piece of advice is to not take it personally.

"You are being rejected by someone who didn't want to hear from you in the first place,"

Wittenstein said.

And it's worth the pain when you get that lead.

Wittenstein, who has done stand up comedy and improv, is an advocate of doing "script workouts."

He suggests doing these with a couple of people better than you and a couple worse than you — "so you are being taught and you are the teacher," he explains.

He also records his phone calls so he can listen back and learn from them.

Consumer objections have never changed, but now they are handled in a more concise fashion, he says. Agents should look for ideas everywhere in handling these pushbacks. An agent's brokerage may have great training, but at the end of the day, agents need to find what works best for them.

"Find which one suits you and then find people who can help at a high level," he said.



Aaron Wittenstein



Beverly Ruffner

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conversation calmly and to treat every client as next of kin.

Her best script to a seller who is skeptical about the agent's commission fee goes like this:

"Is the real question how much I am going to make or how much you are going to make? We do not have an offer on the table to even look at numbers to discuss the cost of utilizing an agent services.

"Our job is make sure you are walking away with the most amount of money possible. If an agent can't negotiate their own value, do you

really want them negotiating your largest investment?"

To those who stress over the endgame and the possibility of losing a lead over saying the wrong thing, Ruffner has this to say: "Don't be attached to the appointment; enjoy the conversation and listen. The appointment will happen if you listen, have empathy, patience and follow up."

*Inman conducted the survey between May 17 and 23, 2017. There were 311 respondents, with 213 (68.49 percent) identifying themselves as agents, 62 (19.94 percent) identifying themselves as brokers, 10 (3.22 percent) identifying themselves as coach/trainer and 26 (8.36 percent) identifying themselves as other.*

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