

Higher Apprenticeships Support Service

Template: Approaches to overcoming employer objections

This material was developed collaboratively by Making the Business Case for Higher Apprenticeships' project participants, informed by ideas learnt from the consultative selling skills training provided by Mentor as part of the LSIS Higher Apprenticeship Support Service.

A key challenge often faced in promoting a new product to employers is how to overcome employers' objections. During the course of the Making the Business Case for Higher Apprenticeship, project participants identified the types of objections that they were commonly encountering from employers in taking on higher apprentices. Working in small groups, participants sought to develop a response to how they might overcome each of these objections. Figure one (see below) summarises the outcomes of this work.

As part of its Higher Apprenticeship Fund Support offer LSIS has run a series of skills training sessions for pilots including sessions on selling and marketing. The session on Consultative Selling Skills (see accompanying presentation) identified two useful techniques for overcoming objections.

■ Approach one: Pre-empting objections

This works for an objection that you know that you will receive, so instead of waiting for them to say it, you get in first. Jo Gourley-Froome from the Mentor Group provides the following advice.

"A lot of sales people make the common mistake of thinking that preparing for presentations was a waste of time. However what many have realised is that NOT preparing causes the biggest amount of rework. The key part of this is enabling the employer/customer to perceive that they might hold a misperception- the 'mistake'. People have egos and if they are told that it is a mistake to think like this, they won't

then use this as an objection (research suggest this works in 99% of cases). This is not an offensive approach because they have not yet stated their objection. Do not use this approach if they have given you the objection!"

■ Approach two: Following a five stage model

This involves following each of the stages identified below.

Stage 1: Change your mind set about objections. They are not saying no, they are telling you that you haven't raised their interest levels sufficiently. They are **helping** you by giving you another opportunity to convince them.

Stage 2: Don't react/be defensive and try to answer immediately.

Stage 3: Ask questions to delve deeper (e.g. if they say they've tried it before and it didn't work for them, ask details of when that was, what happened etc.)

Stage 4: Empty the bucket - make sure there are no other objections lurking.

Stage 5: Resolve and move back to the close.

Figure 1: Crib sheet for handling employers' objections to taking on a Higher Apprentice

Objection	Possible responses
<i>'It's just too expensive to take on a higher apprentice.'</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ It might be less expensive than you think – let me explain the costs and benefits.■ You might find it is cheaper than other forms of training/CPD – what are your current costs?■ Developing one of your own members of staff might prove cheaper than recruiting someone from outside.■ Developing a member of staff might increase productivity and bring business benefits in both the short and long term.

Figure 1: Crib sheet for handling employers' objections to taking on a Higher Apprentice

Objection	Possible responses
<i>'People will leave once they have completed their Higher Apprenticeship.'</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Considerable research shows that staff who have benefitted from investment tend to be show greater company loyal and commitment and are less likely to leave. ■ Evidence from Tesco, Cross Rail and British Telecom where former Apprentices have gone on to become CEOs. ■ You may run the risk of staff choosing to leave you if you don't offer them any development opportunities.
<i>'A Higher Apprenticeship will be too difficult and at too high a level for the type of employees we employ.'</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Have you identified anyone in the company who might take on a more senior strategic role in the future? ■ You might find the company would benefit from a higher level of skills ■ Your company might fall behind competitors if you choose not to develop higher level skills.
<i>'There is not enough work on in our company at the moment to justify the cost.'</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ You may be able to access grants to support the costs of training a higher apprentice or the apprentice might take on some of the costs themselves. ■ Enabling a member of staff to develop a higher level of skills might benefit the company in the long run.
<i>'We're too busy and cannot afford the time to train a higher apprentice'</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Training is flexible and can be undertaken both on-the-job and off-the-job and through other methods such as e-learning, blended learning.
<i>'We already work with another training provider.'</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Can they offer what we provide? ■ Do they have access to funding?