The LAER Model

Idea In Short

Sales teams often treat objections as obstacles to overcome rather than opportunities to build trust. Leaders should train teams on the LAER model, moving deliberately through Listen, Acknowledge, Explore and Respond before offering any solution. Responding before fully exploring an objection's root cause routinely costs deals that patience would have won. The immediate decision is this: audit your team's next few recorded sales calls and count how often reps respond to an objection before genuinely exploring what caused it.

The LAER model, standing for Listen, Acknowledge, Explore and Respond, originated within sales training as a structured method for handling objections during the sales process. Carew International, a sales and leadership development firm, markets a trademarked version of this approach under the name LAER: The Bonding Process, positioning objection handling explicitly as an opportunity to strengthen trust rather than a hurdle to clear before closing.1

The model's foundational premise reframes how salespeople should interpret an objection in the first place. Objections are not necessarily a sign of rejection, but rather represent an opportunity to address the concerns and needs of a potential buyer directly.2 This reframing matters considerably, since a salesperson who treats every objection as an obstacle to defeat will approach the conversation defensively, while a salesperson who treats the same objection as a request for more information will approach it with genuine curiosity instead.

LAER emerged specifically to give sales professionals a repeatable structure for that curiosity-driven approach, rather than leaving objection handling to instinct or a memorized script. Not all objections carry equal weight or require the same depth of response, and a structured model helps reps calibrate their approach to the specific type and severity of concern a prospect raises, rather than applying one generic reaction to every objection regardless of its nature.

Listen: The Foundation Step

The first step, Listen, requires far more than simply refraining from interrupting while the other party speaks. Genuine listening within this model means paying close attention to tone, body language and the emotional register behind the words themselves, not just the literal content of what the prospect says.3 A prospect who voices a price objection with genuine frustration is communicating something different than a prospect who raises the identical objection almost as a reflexive, low-stakes comment.

This step also demands active restraint from salespeople who feel confident about their solution and want to jump immediately to defending it. That impulse to interject with a rebuttal, however well-intentioned, undermines the entire purpose of the Listen step, since a prospect who senses they are being rushed past rarely feels heard, regardless of how technically correct the eventual response turns out to be. Reps should treat this step as genuinely finished only once they have absorbed the objection completely, not merely once the prospect has stopped talking.

Listening carries forward into the later stages as well, since the specific details noticed during this first step often become essential material for the Explore step that follows. A salesperson who listens only for the surface-level content of an objection, missing the emotional cues layered underneath it, arrives at the Explore step with far less useful material to work from than a salesperson who listened more attentively from the start.

Acknowledge: Validating Without Necessarily Agreeing

The second step, Acknowledge, requires recognizing the prospect's concern in a way that makes them feel genuinely heard and understood, regardless of whether the salesperson ultimately agrees with the substance of the objection itself. Acknowledgment can take verbal form, such as directly stating understanding of the concern, or nonverbal form, such as a simple, attentive head nod that signals continued engagement without interrupting the prospect's flow.

This distinction between acknowledging and agreeing matters considerably, since salespeople sometimes avoid acknowledgment out of a mistaken worry that recognizing a concern amounts to conceding the argument. In practice, acknowledgment accomplishes something different: it encourages the prospect to continue elaborating, since people

generally share more openly with someone who has visibly demonstrated they are listening than with someone who appears to be waiting for their turn to counter-argue.

Acknowledgment also functions as an emotional de-escalation mechanism when objections carry real frustration behind them. A prospect who feels dismissed or rushed tends to become more entrenched in their position, while a prospect who feels genuinely acknowledged often relaxes enough to engage in the more collaborative, information-sharing conversation the Explore step depends on.

Explore: Uncovering the Root Cause

The third step, Explore, moves the conversation from simply receiving the stated objection toward actively investigating what lies beneath it. This step relies on asking open-ended questions specifically designed to dig past the surface-level complaint and reach the actual underlying concern driving it, since the objection a prospect states aloud does not always match the deeper issue actually motivating their hesitation.

A prospect who says a product costs too much, for example, might genuinely be concerned about raw price, but might equally be uncertain about return on investment, skeptical about a specific feature's value, or constrained by a budget approval process entirely unrelated to their personal opinion of the product. Without exploring further, a salesperson has no reliable way to distinguish between these very different underlying concerns, each of which calls for a substantially different response.

This step demands genuine patience, since the temptation to skip straight to a solution runs strongest precisely when a salesperson feels confident they already understand the real issue. Reps should treat that confidence with some suspicion, since assumptions formed before adequate exploration frequently turn out to be wrong, and a response built on a mistaken assumption about the prospect's actual concern rarely lands effectively, however polished that response might sound in isolation.

Respond: Delivering a Tailored Solution

The fourth and final step, Respond, involves providing a solution or benefit that directly addresses the specific concern the Explore step actually surfaced, rather than a generic answer disconnected from what the prospect said. This step should draw explicitly on

everything gathered during the prior three steps, tailoring language and content to the particular objection rather than reciting a standardized talking point regardless of the specific conversation.

Effective responses at this stage often reference concrete evidence relevant to the prospect's specific concern, such as customer testimonials, comparative data, or a direct explanation of how the offering differs from alternatives the prospect might be weighing. This specificity demonstrates that the salesperson genuinely engaged with the prospect's particular situation throughout the conversation, rather than simply waiting for an opening to deliver a pre-written pitch regardless of what the prospect actually said.

Responding effectively also means resisting the urge to close immediately after delivering the solution, since the goal of this step is addressing the objection credibly, not forcing an immediate decision. A prospect who feels their specific concern was genuinely resolved, rather than merely talked past, moves closer to a decision naturally, without requiring aggressive pressure to reach that point.

Applying LAER Beyond Sales

Although LAER originated and remains most prominently used within sales training, its underlying structure applies directly to conflict resolution and difficult conversations in other professional contexts as well. Teams navigating internal workplace disputes can apply the same sequence, listening fully to each party's perspective and feelings, acknowledging those perspectives without necessarily agreeing, exploring the underlying causes of the disagreement, and only then working toward a resolution that addresses what the exploration actually revealed.

This cross-context applicability reflects the fact that LAER's real contribution is not sales-specific content but a general discipline for handling resistance or disagreement productively. Any professional facing pushback, whether from a customer, a colleague or a stakeholder, benefits from the same core discipline: resist responding prematurely, invest genuinely in understanding the concern's root cause, and only then offer a solution shaped by what that investigation actually uncovered.

- 1LAER: The Secret To Handling Objections Like A Pro, Carew Sales Training
- 2The LAER Model, FasterCapital

- 3The Laer Model, FasterCapital

Summary

LAER structures objection handling into Listen, Acknowledge, Explore and Respond, resisting the instinct to answer before genuinely understanding a concern's root cause. Applied with discipline, it turns objections into trust-building conversations rather than obstacles to defeat.