

Case History: There's Always Money

"It just isn't in the budget. We can't afford it this year."

You just read an excuse, a way of saying no without saying, "No!" It really means that they want to purchase something else. But, if you comprehend their purchasing motivations, you can often change this soft "No" to a yes.

An orthopedic surgeon designed knee protection for football players to prevent ACL and MCL injuries. The products then available had not been designed for athletes and hindered their speed and agility.

The market for the knee protection is with high school athletes. That's where the players are:

	Teams	Players
Professional	51	2,400
NCAA (College)	612	64,000
High School	13,509	1,038,300

But the dollars weren't there. The typical high school spent approximately \$350 for the entire equipment package per player – helmet, shoulder pads, two game uniforms, two practice uniforms, and a few other pads. The knee protection cost \$800 per player, over twice as much as all the other equipment combined. Furthermore, high school budgets had been hit hard by the economic difficulties from 2000 through 2003. The schools had been cutting budgets with the athletic budget hit hard. So how was the coach going to afford knee protection for his team?

Coaches have a secondary source of income, the parent's booster club and the money they raise. However, the coach has come to expect this money and usually has mentally committed it well before the season starts. And the money is donated by the club and they must approve its use. The challenge is to convince the coach to use some of this booster club money for our knee protection and to work with us to win the parents' approval.

Our research with the parents to determine drivers of their decision was clear. The same basic drive that causes the mother duck to attack you when you near her ducklings, the maternal protective instinct, drives the mothers of football players. They are terrified their son will be seriously injured in this violent sport. The price of \$800 is a minor cost for the safety of their son as long as they can put it on a credit card. And as long as the coach endorses it.

The coach has to introduce us to the booster club and endorse the product. The selling of the coach is key. And if he has a higher priority for these funds, we won't get to see the parents. What will motivate the coach to change his priorities?

Our research with coaches uncovered a drive almost as strong as the maternal instinct. While a strong confidentiality agreement prevents us from publishing the findings, we can tell you this much:

- It has little to do with winning games
- It has no connection with the athlete's pain and suffering
- It has nothing to do with the importance of a player to the team
- It has everything to do with the very personal interests of the coach

We put this to the test, incorporating our research findings into the sales efforts. It worked and is still working. Where there is no budget, coaches are finding funds and purchasing knee protection.