

Brick Walls

The late Carnegie Mellon Professor Randy Pausch refers to objections as “Brick Walls” in his book *The Last Lecture*. Although Professor Pausch was passionately referring to the courting of his wife, this segment of the book emphasizes his belief that “People do not put up walls to keep us out. They put up walls to see how bad we want it!” The parallels in business to this insightful statement are easily made. Walls in the workplace are erected for a variety of reasons and may encompass just about everyone involved in a company.

Walls have a place in business and in our lives. If we choose to confront them instead of allowing them to turn us away, walls can make us stronger by sparking creativity and promoting growth. Some of the most obvious walls in business have to do with the selling process.

Prospective customers often put them up as a way for you to know they’re not an easy mark. When they say, “I’m not interested”, maybe they’re really just trying to be sure you’re not going to make the same empty promises the last four sales people made. When they say, “We’re already using someone else”, perhaps you just need to work harder to convince them that what you have to offer is different and better than what’s currently being offered. While it may take time to scale their wall of objections, the rewards are often worth the effort.

Employees build walls when they don’t share their thoughts and ideas openly with others in the company. Sometimes the walls are erected to keep others from knowing what they’re doing—not necessarily because they’re doing anything wrong, but to protect themselves from possible disapproval or to keep the boss from looking over their shoulder.

Sometimes walls are built to lay claim to what’s perceived as their personal territory. Employees often don’t realize the same walls that isolate them and make them feel secure can actually hinder the

company's productivity.

Finally, business owners can build walls within their own companies. Sometimes they build them to keep people from seeing what's going on behind the wall. They may have learned early on to keep their cards close to their vest. Other times, in a variation of the mushroom theory (keeping people in the dark), they build walls to keep their employees from knowing too much about what's really going on within the organization. In order for us to penetrate these walls, the owner must be able to trust that we will not carelessly handle the business he spent years building.

There are two sides to every wall and regardless of which side you're on, it's important to remember why the wall is there. If you're the bricklayer, make sure you're building walls for the right reasons. If you're the one on the other side confronting the wall, then maybe it's time to take a step back, survey the obstacle, and determine if there is a way to go over or around it. Although walls can be challenging, it's helpful to remind ourselves they may be there just to see how badly we want what's on the other side.