

MASTERING THE REAL SALE: GETTING THE APPOINTMENT!

There rarely is a sale without a face-to-face encounter with the prospect. Now that that's settled, let's talk about what salespeople can do to improve their sales performance. Let's start by looking at securing the infamous sales appointment. If you're hearing your prospects say something to the effect, "I'm not ordering" or "I'm perfectly happy with my current supplier", take it personally!

Salespeople who are less than successful in securing appointments are sometimes told by others, "It's not you; we're just in a bad economy." My contention is that maybe it is you.

Think about it a minute: When you get a real person on the other end of the phone line in place of a voice recorder, what are you actually saying and in what order?

After introducing yourself and your company, are you immediately launching into a litany of reasons why your product or service is just what the prospect needs? Are you so thankful to have a live person on the other end of the phone that regardless of the prospect's resistance you're going to get an appointment? If so, beware: You may already be perceived as a person who cares more about yourself than you do about your prospect.

The real question is, "Do you have a plan or a telephone script that works?" You may know what your goal is (to get the appointment) but if you don't have a clue how to go about increasing your chances for arranging a face-to-face meeting, why pick up the phone?

Most salespeople who are in it for the long haul and who love the thrill of the hunt as much as the victory of closing the deal know exactly what they're doing right. They aren't randomly trying this approach or that until something sticks to the wall. They've already been through the heartaches and have learned to not only avoid them but to predict them. They have a plan.

Here are some solid ways in which to increase your appointment-closing ratios:

- Always, always, always ask if the person you're speaking with has a moment to talk with you. If not, ask when is a better time for you to call back. I've often heard salespeople say they don't want to ask this question for fear of being told not to call back at all! If you follow this line of thinking, ask yourself, "Am I

entrapping my prospect into talking or meeting with me?" If so, you may once again have your own agenda in mind.

- Always state the purpose for your call. Never forget that initially your goal is to gather information and build rapport. You want to see if what you offer might be of interest or benefit to the prospect, from the prospect's perspective, not yours. Notice that I didn't mention selling ANYTHING! You're not making a sales pitch. You simply want to find out if what has worked for your clients might similarly work for your prospect.
- Ask only 3-4 questions that may lead you to a problem or challenge the prospect may be experiencing. Remember that your immediate goal is to LEARN! You may discover during this mini-telephone assessment phase that this particular prospect is truly not a good target prospect for you, in which case you can send off some literature and save everybody a lot of time.
- Be sure to indicate a benefit to the prospect if the two of you decide to meet face to face. For example, if you've learned in conversation that your prospect is overloaded with work, time strapped, having to deal with employees who have morale issues, or is simply tired, think of ways to take him or her out of pain that ties in with your product or service.
- Ask for the appointment to see if there might be a mutual fit between your companies—period! When prospects aren't threatened by a salesperson, they're more likely to be open for a visit. By gaining control over the sales process they feel empowered to decide whether or not to work with you. You've given them permission to say, "No". The truth is you're not sure yourself at this point that you can meet their expectations, so why pretend you are?
- Try to match the prospect's communication style at every turn. If the prospect speaks rapidly and you don't, pick up your pace a bit. If the prospect appears to be detail oriented, know your product or service well to cover their questions. If the prospect has a sense of humor, relax and show your humorous side. If, however, your prospect is a no-nonsense person, get to the point quickly.

So the next time you think you're not getting appointments because of a poor economy or because of your competitors' margin-shrinking mentalities, think again. You have within your power the abilities to build rapport with anyone you encounter. Take

the time to understand where your prospects or customers are coming from--then proceed with caution. There's rarely a sale made that isn't preceded by an appointment.

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