

A Sales Primer for the Novice

KNOW YOUR PRODUCT

Only by being an expert on the product you wish to sell can you effectively educate your prospective client on the value of their purchase. The ease at which you can address essential product issues and effectively communicate them will help instill confidence that you are the right person to talk to and that the conversation is worthy of your prospect's time and money.

DO YOUR HOMEWORK

Prepare for the initial contact by researching your prospects, their companies, their product lines, corporate structure and who their key decision makers are. The Internet is a valuable resource for this type of information. Additionally, you should always attempt to gather information from other prospects and clients within the same industry.

THE SALES PERSPECTIVE

Look to *fulfill a need* rather than to *reach a quota*. If you are quota driven first and foremost, your approach could be a deterrent to the savvy consumer. Ill-perceived motivation may tip the scales towards a competitor with little or no effort from that competitor. In general, as you satisfy the needs of your prospects, the numbers will obviously follow accordingly.

COLD CALLING

Many salespeople dread the essential act of cold calling. However, approached properly, it is an extremely productive use of time and one of the most cost-effective methods of acquiring new business. Remember to:

- a. Keep initial contact brief and cordial;
- b. Introduce yourself and your business;
- c. Make friends, *don't sell!*
- d. Take notation of all information that might be useful on future encounters;
- e. Suggest to your prospect that he/she may expect a follow-up call in the future.

This brief, initial call has successfully done several things for you:

1. You've informally met a new sales prospect and quite possibly a future friend;
2. You've removed the pressure to push a sale;
3. You've gathered key information making that next conversation more comfortable than the first;
4. You have an inside contact to mention in conversations with other people in the industry.

Your second contact with this prospective client should lead to a **face-to-face meeting**. Some tips to get in the door are:

- a. Keep the second contact equally brief and cordial;
- b. Again, keep it friendly, *don't sell!*
- c. State that you will be in the area on a specific date and would like to stop by briefly to meet X in order to "put a face to the name." If not on that day, suggest an alternative or ask your prospect to provide one that is convenient for them.

NETWORKING

How do salespeople connect with more potential leads over a short period of time within any single venue? They network! This is a tremendously beneficial way to meet peers, new prospects, current clients and make new friends. Attack networking with enthusiasm and a positive attitude and as you gather information, both professionally and personally, remember to give as much as you get. The mutual exchange of knowledge and/or favors will make people seek you out and make your job easier in the long run.

1. Venues

Potentially, any business or social gathering can turn into a sales opportunity if you talk to people. Professional associations, civic groups and even parties are important venues for networking within a more relaxed atmosphere and can be quite fun. To successfully network within any venue:

- a. Do your Homework! Know your purpose, determine who you're likely to meet, research the group's agenda and be prepared with a quick "bio" on you and your company;
- b. Bring plenty of business cards;
- c. Act natural, but confident. Stay within your personality "comfort zone." Keep conversations somewhat brief and meet as many people as possible, increasing your visibility. Others will want to do the same;
- d. By now, the Internet should be as essential to you as your phone and pen. Websites of manufacturers, suppliers, prospects, clients and competitors will help keep you abreast of new products, events or changes within the industry.

2. Repetition

Always follow up! Prospects need to forever remember who you are so they think of you first when they have need.

- a. Email is a great way to exchange information and keep in touch. With a few keystrokes you can send notices to an infinite number of people at once;
- b. A brief, three minute follow-up call to a business acquaintance today may yield large dividends tomorrow;
- c. Check in with past clients even after a sale has closed or when no new sale is on the horizon. This maintains relationships and lets the client know you haven't abandoned him/her after the product has exchanged hands.

THE GATEKEEPERS

There are many gatekeepers within every company whose cooperation will either help or hinder your progression towards the decision maker. Treat every person you encounter as a potential client because a bad reputation travels faster than a good one.

1. Assistants and/or Reception

While the assistants are often seen as a simple conduit to your prospect, they will undoubtedly assess your appearance, demeanor and professionalism and relate their impressions to others within the organization. Also, a casual conversation with an assistant could yield additional insight to your prospect and/or the company. Your initial likeability factor is important and may open doors that might otherwise be closed. For example:

<i>Dislikeable</i>	Phone Calls	<i>Likeable</i>
Miss Smith is busy right now - please call back.	-or-	It's been pretty busy around here, but hang on and I'll put you through.
<i>Dislikeable</i>	Impromptu Visits	<i>Likeable</i>
John is not available right now but I'll tell him you stopped by.	-or-	Hello there! Let me tell John you're here and see if he can meet with you.
Sorry but Mr. Lopez just stepped out. You might want to call first.	-or-	Mr. Lopez just stepped out but let me see when he'll be back - you may want to wait.

2. Department Managers

You will find that every company empowers their employees differently based upon their level of expertise and the dollar amount of their decisions. Department Managers are generally considered the technical experts or at the very least, they know the needs of their division.

Begin your conversation with friendly banter and work up to the purpose of your meeting. Observe your surroundings while doing so - the pictures on the wall, magazine subscriptions or figurines on the desk. You may find a common interest that can help you break the ice or give you some insight into the character of your prospect. If this person is not the final decision maker, at the very least he or she will be a great ally in your pursuit.

Educate managers as to the efficacy of the technology; it's ergonomics, time and manpower reductions (a key concern). When a question arises that you're not sure of, do not fabricate an answer. Your integrity is at stake and without it, the game is over! Admit you are not sure and find out promptly. If the manager has a good grasp of your product and is receptive to your presentation, he/she will feel more confident to discuss your business with colleagues and introduce you to the "key decision maker."

3. Executives and Owners

Unless decisions are made with the consent of a Board of Directors, high-level executives and the owners of the companies are the “key decision makers.” Try to gain some insight into the demeanor of the key decision maker from the personnel that you have met with previously and adjust your presentation style accordingly. When presenting at this level, briefly describe your product’s utility and technical advantages, but be sure to emphasize the all-important “bottom line” issues such as cost effectiveness, revenue generation, market advantage and asset valuation. Be sure to address any other issues that were presented to you via previous staff encounters.

You may come across an executive who needs a “quantitative incentive” to conclude a hard fought negotiation or in layman’s terms, “Why should I?” When this scenario arises remember that **“Give and Take = Win-Win.”**

So, if you’ve reached your *sales price limit*, look to make a possible concession on service, supplies, product delivery, warranty, training, etc. Perception may be paramount to this individual and often there is wiggle room with your distributors and manufacturers, as they want you to make the sale, as well.

IN CONCLUSION

The sales industry is tough and we all know that thick skin is required. Yet the role a confident, persistent salesperson plays is essential to the success and growth of any and every organization. A seasoned salesperson is considered an indispensable asset wherever their pursuits may take them.

I wish you good fortune!