



Cold Calling is Like Shaving – If You Don't do it Every Day You're a Bum!

When I was selling and then managing salespeople at Time-Life, we found inspiration by calling a recorded line that had a daily message from the telephone sales guru, Jack Schwartz.

Jack was a successful life insurance salesman before launching his telephone training business, and he used every provocative line he could conjure.

One of the most memorable was: "Selling is like shaving, if you don't do it every day, you're a bum!"

I used to laugh at this one, because my face hosted a full beard at the time.

But I got his drift.

I'd like to make this very same point about cold calling, if I may.

It is akin to what the legendary coach Vince Lombardi said about victory.

"Winning isn't a sometime thing; it's an all-the-time thing."

Cold calling isn't something you do because you're desperate or because you've run out of referrals or easy leads. It's the kind of habit that brings in sales; but more important, it toughens you and sharpens your skills. In fact, there's no better time to cold call than when you're on a winning streak, feeling especially confident. That can-do aura will make you unstoppable, and your presentations even more engaging. With cold calling, everything else about selling gets easier, especially returning calls and following up. Even voice mail and paperwork are tamable.

Here are five tips for making cold calling more effective and enjoyable

LISTS ARE CRUCIAL: MAKE SURE YOU HAVE ENOUGH PEOPLE TO CALL!

Back at Time-Life, we'd assign calling lists to reps before every shift.

"I want Canoga Park!" one seller would shout.

"Is there any Mar Vista left?"

"Just give me something that hasn't been called a million times," another would wisely request.

Lists were, and still are, a big deal.

And while, as a manager I'd downplay their influence on sales outcomes (because, after all, there is only so much Malibu to call), in my gut I knew, and still appreciate, that a good list is a gold mine.

Lists are powerful for several reasons, apart from the potentially pre-qualified nature of the names you'll find on them. For one thing, they organize your work and address the show-stopping and time-wasting question, "Who can I call next?"

Though we want to come across to prospects as spontaneous and not robotic, still, having an "assembly line" of callable people right in front of us optimizes the clock, reducing downtime, while discouraging us from dwelling on the ones we failed to close. Lists are also momentum builders. When you're hot, you're hot; and having the next name to call lets you carry that confidence you just earned over to the next contact. Lists are also slump-busters. As I've noted in my Nightingale-Conant audio series, "The Law of Large Numbers," if you do enough of anything, you'll succeed.

Do still more and you'll grow rich. Outdo that, and you'll become a legend.

Lists enable you to reach the greatest number of prospects in the least time, so they're productivity tools, like no others.

APPRECIATE THAT SPEAKING TO STRANGERS IS REALLY A BENEFIT!

One of my part-time jobs during undergraduate school was selling advertising for a magazine. We'd cold call out of the Yellow Pages, and one afternoon I phoned a boating store on California's coast, pitching the owner on a medium-size ad.

Later that afternoon as my shift ended, my boss let out an enthusiastic "Yah Hoo!" at a decibel level I never expected to hear from him.

"You sold this guy?" he asked me in amazement.

"Yeah, is there something wrong?" I replied defensively.

"No, it's great, I mean I know him!" he chortled, and then said with genuine awe, "I don't know how you did it. He's the most tight-fisted person I've ever met."

That sale completely sold the boss on my abilities.

Looking back on this episode, I'm glad I was clueless about the buyer's hard-bitten qualities before I phoned. Had I known he was a "tough sale," I might have tried too hard, or built up a lot of anxiety, or just as easily skipped his name, moving on to another ad. Which, of course, raises a point: you can learn too much about a prospect and over-think your strategy to the extent that it inhibits and disables you.

You should be loose when you're selling, and feeling self-confident. If you're trying to impress prospects or avoiding mistakes, you'll be uptight, making the buyer uncomfortable and reluctant. While it's nice to have some details at hand about the person you're calling, such as his or her company size, credit rating and the like, it can easily backfire when you're "over-informed" to the point of becoming opinionated about them.

By not knowing the person you're speaking to, you're tapping into one of cold calling's secret advantages.

TRY TO MAKE CONVERSATIONS “FLOW.”

You’ve read bits and pieces about the psychology of cold calling. Most of the popular literature on the subject refers to hurdles that callers face, such as call reluctance, what I refer to as “phone fear.” Rejection is also much discussed. But one of the key psychological ingredients of successful cold calling is overlooked, what is known as “flow.”

Athletes talk about being “in the zone” when they’re flowing. They feel they can do no wrong. One move effortlessly follows another, leading to inevitable success. Baseball batters call it being “locked-in” when they see the ball really well, and somehow it appears larger than usual, and conveniently slower.

Author and Claremont Graduate School Professor Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi defines “Flow” in his best-selling book bearing the same title.

He says it is “the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it.”

Sounds blissful, doesn’t it?

That’s exactly the point. Csikszentmihalyi says flow is the signature of “optimal experience” and for many people, of “happiness.” Anything that is completely involving, that requires a certain concentration and mastery, can be a “flow” inducer, whether it is roller blading, writing an article, contemplating your navel, or yes, even cold calling.

If it seems that cold calling doesn’t belong on this list, you’re tapping into one of the problems that afflicts this crucial sales activity. Most people haven’t figured out how to make it flow, and that’s one of the reasons they’re so unhappy doing it. Part of a flow experience is the sensation that you’re so immersed in an activity that you lose self-consciousness. How often has this happened to you when you’ve been prospecting?

Unless you’re a total pro at it, probably not very often. Have you ever wondered why?

I’ll give you one reason: we haven’t prepared sufficiently for it.

One way to create flow is to script important segments of the conversation in advance. Your goal isn’t to sound “canned,” but rather to relax, knowing you’re going to gently but firmly guide the call from one point to the next, without gaffes. When you’re scripted, and you have the text down pat, you can concentrate more on nuances such as your tone and timing. You can even pay attention to how the prospect is breathing, signaling interest or disinterest.

Remember this secret of a successful cold call: “Make it flow and you’ll earn some ‘dough!’”

“You can learn too much about a prospect, and over-think your strategy to the extent that it inhibits and disables you.”

DEVELOP ORIGINAL WAYS TO OPEN CONVERSATIONS.

I know how hard it is to develop new business if you don’t have an original-sounding hook. That’s why I love what I call THE CONGRATULATIONS APPROACH. It can instantly heat-up the chilliest cold calls.

Whenever I read a newspaper or a business or trade publication, I keep my eyes peeled for names of “comers,” heads of small- to middle-sized firms that are making a splash in their respective ponds, large or small.

For instance, I happened upon an article in *Fortune* that mentioned the owner of a Midwestern distribution company. With a few clicks, I was at the firm’s website, doing a quick study of its products and positioning. Then I called, opted for the company directory, entered the President’s name, and within seconds THE MAN, HIMSELF answered the line.

I introduced myself as president of my own firm, and quite enthusiastically I said:

“Congratulations on the *Fortune* article!”

“Which article?” my contact wondered.

“The one that talks about equipment leasing.”

“Oh, right, that one. I haven’t seen it yet.”

And not one to miss an opportunity, I asked, “Would you like me to fax you a copy?”

“Uh, yes, sure, that would be great!” my once-reluctant but now suddenly grateful and enthusiastic prospect replied.

Before leaving the line, my new friend clicked onto my website and affably agreed to engage in a more detailed conversation in a day or two about my consulting programs.

I think there are at least a few lessons from this type of cold-calling ...

- When people become “public figures” they tend to appreciate that they’re going to elicit attention.
- When you can genuinely compliment someone on an achievement of theirs, they’ll tend to be all ears.
- They’ll respect your approach to them, and generally be much more patient in hearing your initial pitch.
- So, cold calling can be warmed-up considerably, if you’re willing to try using an original opener.

Even successful, very experienced salespeople benefit from cold calling! Lots of businesses insist that novice salespeople cut their teeth by cold calling. Their jobs are to prospect, qualify buyers and to set appointments that the more experienced “pro’s” go out and see. Presuming the initiates pass muster, they’ll graduate to the ranks of regular sellers and it will then be their opportunity to run the leads others set for them. You see this pattern in financial services, real estate, and insurance, to name just a few industries.

There are five reasons I believe everyone should cold call, at least occasionally, and this includes SALES MANAGERS.

- 1. Cold calls build confidence.** Nothing is the mother’s milk of selling, like self-confidence and swagger. Winners exude it, and by making successful cold calls, you’ll earn this money-making aura.
- 2. Cold calls build sales.** Cold calls, properly deployed, build NEW BUSINESS. Nearly anyone can up-sell or cross-sell an existing account, though too few do. But the real dough is in adding new clients to the books, whose upside potential is great.

3. Cold calls build independence. Assemble a decent list, get on the phone, and you’re halfway home. You don’t have to depend on direct mail, space advertising, trade shows, or gosh forbid, the iffiest leads that come from articles and publicity.

4. Cold calls build character. You’re in the ring, exchanging and absorbing hits. Sometimes you reel on the ropes, but you force yourself to come out for the next round. I’ve often maintained that the best cold callers have absolutely no problem getting dates, mates, jobs, and nearly anything else they want, because they’re unafraid to ask!

5. Cold calls build futurity. With fresh accounts, you’re at the very beginning of their expected “life cycle,” not in the middle or end, and therefore they’re worth more than your current book of business. They answer the question that keeps conventional marketers up at night: “Where will tomorrow’s customers come from?”

Finally, and you can make this number six if you wish, but I believe it is even more important than the previous five points:

COLD CALLING FIGHTS COMPLACENCY.

Experienced salespeople are their own enemies. Most retire on active duty, seeing only those buyers that are “lay-downs” or “walk-ins,” the ones that are pre-sold or so docile that it’s like shooting fish in a barrel. That won’t work in cold calling.

The best reward is that you’ll stay at the top of your game, close additional business, and not lose deals to more aggressive competitors. So, cold calling has something for everybody. Not doing it won’t really make you a bum, just a little dumb! **N**

Dr. Gary S. Goodman is a top keynote speaker and the best-selling author of 12 books and more than a thousand articles. A frequent expert commentator on CNBC and radio and TV worldwide, he is quoted often in prominent publications such as The Wall Street Journal and Business Week. President of Clientrelations.com and Customersatisfaction.com, his seminars and training programs are sponsored internationally and he is a top-rated lecturer at more than 40 universities, including West Texas A & M, Texas Tech, U.C. Berkeley and UCLA. Two of his current programs include "Managing Client Relations" and "Best Practices in Negotiation." He can be reached at gary@customersatisfaction.com.