

Stop Sounding Like a Self-Serving Salesperson

By Jill Konrath

After several months of leaving a series of voicemail messages for a prospective customer, she finally picks up the phone. "Marie Trent speaking," she says in a flat tone.

Startled by the human voice on the other end of the phone, the message you spent hours crafting disappears instantaneously from your memory bank. Instead, you blurt out:

"Hi. My name is __ and I'm the sales rep for Generic Industries. You've probably heard of us. We're the fastest-growing firm in the market right now and we have locations in 13 different cities. The reason I'm calling today is I'd like to get together with you to explore your needs and show you ..."

"Excuse me," she interrupts. "We're already working with another company."

"Which one?" you ask, fingers crossed.

"Newco. And we're quite happy with them."

"What do you like about them?"

"They take good care of us, they know our firm and their pricing is great."

"Would you be open to considering other options? I'd be glad to show you what we could do for your company."

"Not at this time," she answers curtly.

"When should I call you back then," you ask politely.

"Why don't you try calling in six months."

"Thank you so much. I really appreciate the time you took with me today. I'll get back to you then," you say, smiling inside because you "KNOW" it's only a matter of time before get lots of business from this firm.

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What's wrong with scenario? Actually, just about everything. If you were the seller, I'd tell you that:

- You suffer from a bad case of delusional thinking. The buyer brushed you off, plain and simple.

- You interrupted someone's business day with no thought as to what they were doing when they picked up the phone.
- You lacked a peer-to-peer approach. Intelligent buyers immediately sense you're a lightweight when you're so eager to settle for a "fictional" appointment six months from now.
- You solidified your prospect's positive feelings about the competition by the questions you asked.
- You were entirely focused on "what's in it for you" - not the value your prospect gets from your using your product or service.

Certainly that wasn't your intention. You were trying to be nice, conversational and perhaps even avoid sounding like a typical salesperson. Unfortunately, that's not how you came across. You sounded pretty self-serving.

Tips For Getting High Quality Appointments

1. If you're sick and tired of getting yourself caught in situations like this, use these tips to help you change the game. Plan out multiple contacts before you even pick up the phone.
 - Develop multiple scripts highlighting various aspects of your value proposition.
 - Then, write out various emails you can depending on your prospect's business situation.
 - Finally, develop a campaign you can roll out over time.
2. Make sure your message focuses on your value proposition. Ensure each contact states the clear business value that clients receive from working with your firm.
 - "We work with clients to significantly reduce time-to-market on new product introductions."
 - "One of our customers saved over \$1/3 million in just the past year by eliminating the redundancies in their system."
3. Treat the person you contact like a human being, not a prospect. In calling a friend, you'd:
 - Automatically ask if you were interrupting: "Is it a bad time?"
 - Notice if they sounded distracted and address it head on: "Hey, if you're swamped right now, I don't want to interrupt. I'd rather catch you when you have a few minutes to talk."
 - Immediately suggest a future contact, initiated by you: "When is a good time to call you back?"
4. Prepare for the common obstacles prior to the call - and eliminate them if at all possible.

- "We already use ____." You respond: "Well I assume a company of your size would be working with another firm. (pause) AND that's why we need to meet ... "
- "We're really busy right now. We couldn't possibly take time to look at options." You respond: "You and I know that six months from now your workload isn't going to be any lighter. AND that's exactly why we need to get together ..."
- "Your prices are too high." You respond: "Yes our prices are higher than others on the market. AND that's exactly why we need to meet ..."

Please note that the second sentence starts with AND, not BUT! Because 'and' doesn't negate your prospect's perspective, they're interested in learning more.

Then, reel off 2-3 valid business reasons that this prospect should get together with you. They need to flow out of your mouth without hesitation, so prepare them ahead of time. These are true statements, not slippery manipulations, so make sure you state them with quiet confidence.

If you (or others in your company) can't come up with any reasons, then you'd better take a serious look at the sustainability of your business model. Just because "you want their money" is just not a good enough reason for them to meet with you!

Recently I interviewed Amy, the "Vice President of First Impressions" for a small technology firm. Using the phone and email, she arranges meetings between her company's sales reps and Chief Technology Officers from Fortune 1000 firms.

In less than 8 months, she's set up appointments with over 50 of these big companies. She's a real telesales professional. If you heard her conversations with prospects, you'd think they were her long-time friends.

Amy focuses on business, treats these C-level executives as equals and enjoys her conversations with them. But, she also has at least 4 voicemail messages and 3 emails at her fingertips, ready to use as needed.

In addition to the above strategies, Amy recommends that you:

5. Piggyback off competitors, if at all possible. When you're trying to get into an account, don't immediately try to displace long-standing incumbents. Instead, position your offering as one that co-exists alongside their current supplier or even enhances it.
6. Keep "tweaking" your "message" till you get it right. In her first three months on the job, Amy didn't set up one single appointment. Yes, she was extremely discouraged. AND, she kept trying new approaches till she found ways that worked.
7. Be yourself! Laugh with your prospects, enjoy them - and let them know you'll be coming back.

SUMMARY

Sounding like a sleazy, well-oiled seller will not get you an appointment in today's market. Think of your phone calls as business-to-business conversations with peers. That may be a hard mind shift to make, but it's where you need to be. If your business acumen is lacking, start reading up on the subject so you can become conversant.

And, most importantly keep working at it! Try focusing on different aspects of your value proposition. Try reframing what you say. Change a word or two, if need be. But don't keep doing the same thing, again and again. That's insanity.

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Jill Konrath, author of *Selling to Big Companies*, helps sellers get their foot in the door of large corporations, create demand and win profitable contracts. Get a free *Sales Call Planning Guide* (\$19.95 value) when you sign up for the Selling to Big Companies e-newsletter. Just send an email with "subscribe" in the subject line to jill@sellingtobigcompanies.com. For more info, visit <http://www.SellingtoBigCompanies.com>.