

Warming up the Cold Call: Generating Interest Through Asking Questions

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*“Sales are contingent upon the attitude of the salesman, not the attitude of the prospect.”
-William Clement Stone*

You're about to make a cold call, and you have it all covered. You know your product inside and out. You've got all the technical stats memorized. You know why your company is a leader in its field. You are loaded with confidence and enthusiasm. You are certain you are going to win, and you are dead wrong.

You missed one essential piece of the puzzle: the customer. You might have begun the pitch thinking about covering a generic list of features and benefits.

You forgot to ask one question: “What does the prospect want or need?”

It's not about you...it's about what's in it for them.

There are some things you can take for granted. Everyone has some basic needs: food, shelter, clothing and health. Most important, everyone wants to achieve these things with as little stress as possible.

It's not about your widgets, and what you think is so dandy about them.

Your job is not to sell widgets.

Your job is to make your prospect's life easier.

Who are you...and why should I listen to you?

You begin your cold call by identifying yourself and your company, then move quickly to giving your prospect a compelling reason to listen further.

Start at the end.

You'll want to begin by offering him at least two or three end results that will help him visualize that stress-free solution to a long-standing need or challenge. For example,

“Mr. Prospect, I know you are busy, so I'll be brief. In just a few minutes, I can show you how to avoid production down time and increase profits, with higher customer satisfaction.”

You haven't yet told him exactly what you do. You've just begun to paint a picture of positive expectation. At this point, you will want to ask a question to get him involved. Your question will both pique his interest, and lower resistance, by asking for permission and establishing a timeline.

“Mr. Prospect, I don't know if you need non-rusting widgets. May I take a moment to ask a question? Do you experience rusting problems with your underwater gadgets?”

It's not about the answers; it's about the questions.

Instead of pitching, try conversing. Use that conversational time to find out what *he* wants and needs.

Is he short on time, short on money or both? Does he have production issues that your product or service can solve? What are his objectives and challenges? Your conversation will explore his needs, focusing on those areas where he has difficulty, and how he currently handles those problems. This is when you want to spend more time listening than talking.

'What's in it for me?'

No, not you. Your prospect. By now, you should have an idea of what your prospect needs and what is in the way of his objectives. Use "active listening" techniques to make sure you have understood his challenge.

"Mr. Prospect, if I understand, you currently have a problem keeping the underwater gadgets running because of long down times to replace rusty widgets. Am I right?"

'I can help.'

Now that you know your prospect's concerns, you can confirm that he is interested in moving ahead, with the goal of eliminating the challenges, by taking advantage of the benefits of your product or service.

"Thanks for the opportunity to talk to you about how we may be able to reduce your gadget downtime, and increase your profits with our rust-proof widgets."

Then, make the appointment, establish confirmation of the date and time, and end on the positive expectation...not of your sale, but that you can help Mr. Prospect solve his problem. By the time you are done with your cold call, you will have moved, in your prospect's estimation, from being a salesman to being a hero, who can help him have a better day.

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