

## Make Every Call Count

By Caterina Rando, MA, MCC

After years of coaching sales and business people in a wide variety of industries, there is one thing that stands out as an important differentiating factor between those who have average success and those who consistently soar. It is not enough to go on appointments, send out fancy packets and pass your card around. You have to be willing to become masterful at using the phone. Review these "quick tips" for making every call count, and see if you are not more masterful the next time you dial.

### Psyche Yourself Up

Do not simply locate the number and begin to dial. Visualize the result you want before each call. See the person picking up the phone, saying how glad he or she is to hear from you.

### Preplan Your Points to Make

You do not need to script every word you want to say. If you do, you will sound like those telemarketers who call you during dinner. Instead, jot down key words that remind you of the points you want to make. Keep your desired outcome from the call in mind.

### Smile

Some phone experts suggest putting a mirror in front of you so you can see yourself smiling. If you are listening to someone on the phone, you can always tell if the person is smiling; people sound different-better, more inviting.

### Ask for Agreement to Talk

Most people hate to be called by someone who starts a spiel as soon as the phone is picked up. Once you reach your party, state your name, why you are calling, and ask if the person has a minute to talk. If the person says no, ask when a good time to call back would be. Make sure you call back at that time. If you do, the person will gladly give you his or her attention.

### Acknowledge the Person You are Calling

Personalize your conversation and develop rapport by taking a moment to acknowledge or appreciate something about the person you are speaking to. Say something like, "I appreciate you taking the time to speak with me" or "Thanks for being at the meeting last week" or "It was great to meet you the other week at the conference." Find something to

say that is a genuine acknowledgment of the person you have called. This transforms a sales call into a conversation.

### Read the Level of Rapport

You want to build rapport with the person you are speaking to. Some people play "Relationship Geography," asking people questions to try and find a person they know in common. This is fine if the person is friendly, interested and has time to spare. Other people find this intrusive and frustrating. You have to be able to gauge the level of warmth, interest and enthusiasm of the person and match that level, plus just a bit more. If they seem stoic, be a bit warmer than stoic. If they are enthusiastic, be a bit more enthusiastic.

### Be Brief

In order to hold the attention of listeners and keep them engaged, speak in short sentences. Do not use a marketing monologue. Be the kind of person who others will determine they can speak with on the phone for only a few minutes. Most people do not want to "shoot the breeze" during business hours.

### Be Benefit-Focused

Whatever you say, it has to matter to your potential customer, and it has to be of benefit to him or her. Think client-centered, rather than self-centered.

### Open-Ended Questions

Ask questions to help you identify how to better serve each potential customer. Avoid yes or no questions; ask open-ended questions that require an explanation for an answer. For example, instead of asking "How long have you been using product X," ask "What has been the most valuable benefit of using product X?"

### Ask Questions that Identify Challenges

Your job is to solve the client's challenges, make the client's life easier, or make the client's business more profitable. Ask what the biggest problems they are facing in their business are, and figure out how to address those challenges. If you can do that, you will have many loyal customers.

### Ask for What You Want

Do not hang up the phone before you ask for what you want. Even if you think you will not get it, ask anyway. You may be pleasantly surprised with the answer. If you do this consistently and you are making enough calls, eventually you will be successful.

### Use an Accent to Your Advantage

If you have an accent and have mastered the other tips discussed here, use your accent to your advantage. People with accents sound appealing, and other people like to listen to them. If the people you are calling ask you about your accent, use it as an opportunity to ask them about themselves and build rapport.

### Call When You Said You Would

Make sure you call exactly when you said you would. Even though your potential client may not remember when you said you would call back, by doing so, you create urgency and trust.

### Follow Up Immediately

If you have agreed to send out information or fax over a registration form, do it immediately. This also creates urgency-and if you act with urgency, the potential client may also respond with urgency, allowing you to get your goal sooner.

### Track Your Calls

Set a goal for yourself every week and decide how many calls you are going to make. Estimate how long it will take you to make that many calls, and block the time on your schedule. Act as if this time block was an appointment with a client-the call time you set aside to develop new clients must be viewed as very important.

### Pick Up the Receiver

The more you place calls, the easier it gets. The more you place calls, the better you get. The better you get, the better the results. The only way to get masterful at using the phone is to use the phone and apply these tips to make every call count.

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