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When we try to shortcut the sales process, we make sales harder and stressful. The first step is getting ready, creating a foundation. The second step is getting in. If you can't get in, you can't sell anything.

Keep your initial contact concentrated on this purpose: Get an appointment. If you try to actually sell your product during this call, you jumped three steps. You are focused on yourself instead of your client. The prospect doesn't care about you until he or she sees what you can do for them. Besides, until you know what their needs and challenges are; not what you think they are, but what they told you they are; you cannot show them how you can help them meet their goals and overcome their challenges. Again: Your purpose at this point is for them to agree to meet with you.

Your Introduction Either Eliminates or Creates Hurdles

"I'd like to speak with the person in charge of advertising." If your opening line sounds anything like this, you're probably hearing responses like, "What are you selling?" "Send a media kit to me." "I'm not interested." "My budget is spent," and "How much is it?" within seconds. These responses at this stage are intended to send you packing. If the opening question is "I'd like to speak with," who's the focus? Of course, it's you. But prospects don't care about you at this point. So talking about your magazine is not productive. Instead your opening statement needs to focus on them, be interesting to them, and not be at all about you. How can you do that?

Offer a benefit. Offer it as a question or statement. At this stage, you know little about your prospect. So ask yourself, "What would they most likely be interested in?" Advertising buyers want: To increase sales, establish name recognition (if they're new in business), reposition their business, remain top of mind. Choose the benefit most likely to be of interest to them, and offer it to them as your opening statement. Something like this: "I'm calling to see if we can help increase your sales, like we've done for other companies like yours." This will create interest in furthering a conversation. This is the sole purpose of your opening statement. If they won't talk to you, you've got no possibility to make a sale.

Get Past Gatekeepers, Voice and E-mail

"I'm calling to follow up on the proposal I sent you." "Have you made a decision about advertising with us?" The truth is; and you know it; is if a decision had been made you would have been called. What can you say that will create willingness to speak with you?

Focus again on the benefit you think the prospect will be the most interested in. This is the opening for your voice and e-mails, even though you said it already. Prospects don't remember. Your prospect is certainly important to you, but you're not important to him at this point. Remember: If you sound like everyone else, you will be treated like everyone else.

Befriend gatekeepers. Call them by name. Ask them for "help." It's a magical word. Gatekeepers are fantastic resources. Ask them lots of questions to be better prepared. And remember to thank them for their help. If you talk down to gatekeepers you'll turn them into bouncers.

If voice mail is not working on your prospect, send a fax, letter or e-mail. Send a funny note: "Bigfoot has been sighted. Elvis has been seen. Why can't I see you?" Make them feel good, and they'll be willing to speak with you.

Get Permission to Meet On Your Terms

"Please schedule 45-60 minutes." Are you asking for this amount of time for your first meeting, or are you taking whatever you get? Be confident to turn down an appointment if you will not have adequate time. Tell your prospect why the time you're asking for is important to them. Then ask them to "Please write my name and number in your agenda in case you need to reschedule." Before you hang up, reconfirm the date and time, and why you'll be there.

Skipping a good introduction makes it difficult to get in. Spend time crafting an introduction before you make your next call and all your calls after that will be easier.

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