

Sell the Appointment!

March 2008 Newsletter

A recent news story caught my eye with a startling fact. Here it is:

80% of all new businesses fail in their first 5 years of operation. Well, you say, that's pretty obvious. But can you guess why? It's a failure to acquire NEW CUSTOMERS.

In established businesses, the picture changes slightly: 78% of their failures are due to Poor Leadership or Lack of Planning. And that leads directly to a failure to attract new customers.

Let's face facts: the lifeblood of ANY business is new customers. Your success as a salesman, as a business owner, or as a corporation is tied directly to your ability to acquire new customers. Without fresh new customers, your business stagnates, withers, and dies. Your business growth and your survival demands new blood!

There are dozens of ways to acquire leads (prospects) for your product, but your sales process will invariably require that someone in your organization must initiate CONTACT with the lead and set an appointment. And that's where, time and time again, the process breaks down.

Today's column focuses on how to increase your success at setting appointments.

WIFT

Before you ask for that first appointment, you must first put yourself into the world of your prospect and think like they do. He or she is a busy executive with a crowded schedule, a list of action items a mile long, dozens of messages to return, and probably over 100 emails waiting for a response. They are hurrying into their next meeting and planning what they intend to discuss when the phone rings and YOU are on the line.

"Hi.....you stammer (surprised that the phone was actually answered by a live person), is this Ms. Anderson?"

"Yes, who is this?" (impatiently)

"Uhhh, this is Bill Jones with ACME Corporation. I'd like to tell you all about our latest gizmo, which will change your life and improve things around the office. It's the latest and the greatest, and we're so excited about it. Blah, blah, blah."

"Sorry, I'm not interested!" (CLICK)

This is an all too familiar scenario and illustrates some of the biggest mistakes salespeople make when attempting to set appointments:

-- prematurely trying to sell their product

- failure to sell the benefit of an appointment
- only thinking about WIFM (What's in it for Me) not WIFT (What's in it for them?)

You're interrupting their busy schedule, and you're asking for some of their valuable time. You must give them a compelling reason WHY, and it must appeal to what is important to them (WIFT).

If you're calling to set an appointment, your objective is to sell the benefits of **meeting** with you, not the benefits of your product! This is a two step process. The first step is to sell the benefit of simply meeting with you. Now is not the time to discuss your product or service or how it can benefit the customer. Now's the time to explain the benefit of simply meeting with you!

SELLING THE APPOINTMENT

Spend some time preparing your offer and the benefit to your customer of meeting with you. This appointment, by the way, could be a face-to-face or over the phone, depending upon your product and your sales process. Higher end products (such as consulting services, real estate, or insurance) almost always require one or two in person appointments. Simpler products (courses, books, computers, and home electronics) can often be sold over the phone, but do require scheduled blocks of phone time.

Here are some sample benefits your prospect might enjoy from simply meeting with you:

- Free
- Convenient Time and Location
- You'll give them 3 new ideas about _____.
- Complimentary meal or coffee
- Break from their normal routine
- Exchange of Ideas with an Expert (you)
- Fresh look at _____.
- Find out what's happening outside their company.
- Brainstorming

You get the idea. Simply meeting with you will be a BENEFIT to your prospect. If they choose to spend 20-30 minutes with you, you will deliver something of VALUE to them at that initial meeting. Before the prospect will agree to meet with you, they must be convinced that it will be more valuable than all the other activities they planned for that time slot.

Of course the meeting will be valuable to you. But what's the value to the prospect? Why should he/she interrupt their schedule to meet with you? WIFT?

Give careful thought to your appointment offer. Craft a message that has impact and value to your prospect, and watch your appointment close ratio zoom!

Here's to your Success!

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