Art Sobczak's

SMART CALLING REPORT

July 2019 Volume 36 Number 7

Despite What You Hear, You CAN and Should Do More on the First Call Than Just Set the Appointment

One thing I've heard for years about prospecting that is just as wrong today as it was then, is a general declaration being stated as if it is the **absolute truth** in *every* situation:

"Just sell the meeting. Nothing else. Just get the appointment set."

In my opinion that is only true in a small percentage of situations, industries, and types of calls.

I agree with it as it relates to an inbound call, where the caller is requesting an estimate on something that realistically requires a physical, in-person assessment. Most often those are B2C type interactions.

For example, my friend Tommy Mello, "The Home Service Millionaire," and owner of one of the most successful garage door service companies in the country teaches that inbound reps should never be able to give quotes over the phone.

Their job is to set the appointment for the service/sales technician.

Because they are in a much better position to assess the problem in person, build personal rapport, make a recommendation, and close the sale.

It Did Not Work Here

Although, this approach failed for the plumbing company that would not even give me a range of prices for a very simple valve-change job, insisting they just couldn't do it over the phone. They had to come out in person.

They did not have an opportunity to. I went with a company that DID provide a range, had them come out, and then went with their middle-recommendation, which was higher than the lowest priced option they gave over the phone.

B2B Example

The other situations where I can somewhat agree that the first call is just for the appointment is when a caller is prospecting for someone else. The modern B2B titles are Sales Development Rep (SDR), Business Development Rep (BDR). They typically work at the same company as the sales rep they are prospecting for, and then hand the qualified appointment over to the rep.

In other situations, there are outsourced callers making calls and setting appointments.

While there are hundreds of possible variations of how the entire processes work from first call to appointment call by the sales rep, my personal feeling always has been that the first call ideally should NOT be "just get the appointment as quickly as possible and get off the phone."

Why?

Just ask any sales rep who calls a supposed "qualified appointment," or worse, shows up in person, and the prospect vaguely even remembers speaking with the initial caller.

Oh, but an appointment was set.

My Suggestion

My stance is, if I have someone on the phone, engaged because I piqued their curiosity with a great value statement, why in the world would I suggest we stop talking now, set up another time to speak in the future, and get off the phone? (I'm somewhat raising my voice as I ask that question.)

The number one problem salespeople have right now is actually getting someone ON the phone.

Isn't it absurd then, when we finally get someone live, to then suggest we stop for now and set up another one instead?

If the music is still playing, stay on the dance floor!

"But Art, people are busy. We might have reached them at a bad time."

Uh-huh. Didn't they pick up the phone?

And if they are indeed too busy to talk, won't they let you know?

Of course.

Benefits of Moving Further

Now, look at the benefit of taking this first call further.

You can qualify them even more. This minimizes the chance you follow up with someone who can't or won't buy from you.

You have the opportunity to get them even more interested in what you have, enhancing the chance of a better outcome on the next call meeting. Using a football analogy,

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Sales Observations

Here are some great suggestions for the "That's expensive" price comment. (Do keep in mind that comment is just that, a statement... not a real objection. Therefore, in many cases you're OK not even responding.)

"Yes, it could be... if you don't use it."

"Yes, if it's not put into practice."

(These are useful when the product value is derived when the product/service is used, such as training, memberships, etc.)

"Not if you factor in the real costs of the alternatives."

"Well, not really if you consider how expensive it will be if you do nothing."

Speaking of money issues, when they make the comment, "Our budget for this is $1500 and no more," a response (depending on the context of course) could be,

"I see. Well, for that, I can give you the stripped down XL model. Of course it won't have the adapter, accessories, and maintenance plan you want, but it would be within that budget."

SMART CALLING REPORT
(ISSN 0882-1461) is published 12 times per year by Business By Phone Inc.To join, go to www.SmartCallingReport.com. Send correspondence, and change of address to **SMART CALLING REPORT**, 14005 E. Cholla, Scottsdale, AZ, 85259. Publisher/ Editor: Art Sobczak; Contributing Columnist: Jim Domanski. Subscriptions: ©Copyright 2019 Business By Phone Inc. All rights reserved. Photocopying of this publication without permission is breaking the law. Please inquire for permission. (480)699-0958. Reprinting of articles in your publication is permitted as long as we're credited with address, website and phone number and a copy is sent to us.

Just because you don't *feel* like doing something, does not in any way mean you are **incapable** of doing it.

Often we let our feelings get in the way of taking action right now on things that we should be doing, instead of others that will have huge long-term benefits.

If you don't feel like making one more call for the day, do it anyway.

If you do not feel like you want to take the time to do the research on that prospect, do it anyway.

If you do not feel like taking the time to listen to that self-help podcast and would rather listen to music, listen to the podcast.

If you do not feel like calling that larger prospect, and instead feel safer calling the smaller one, do it anyway.

Any time you allow these feelings of mediocrity and laziness creep into your head regarding what you know you should do, don't hesitate, **just do it anyway!**

This seems so simple, but often the things right in front of us get overlooked: speak the language of the person you are talking to.

If a person who only spoke Spanish called a company looking for help, they would likely be directed to the person in the company who spoke Spanish. Well, duh, right?

OK, let's put it in another perspective.

A rep for a tech-hardware firm gets a CIO on the phone. He jumps into his value statement with:

" ... and our always-on QoS feature means *you can consolidate radically diverse applications without fear of I/O contention."*

The CIO would likely respond with, "Oh, our IT Administrator would handle that. You need to talk to him."

And now the rep has been referred down to an overworked and underpaid operations person.

Know the language of your buyer. Which typically is based on the results they are responsible for and measured on.

Those are the words that get their attention.

Similar to the previous point, sales pro Tim Spreda stresses listening very carefully to the customer's choice of words, as that conveys the needs and desires of the speaker.

For example, he shared the story of how one prospect, a buyer for a manufacturing operation, repeated the terms "safety and ergonomics" in almost every sentence. Naturally, Tim focused the recommendation for his materials handling equipment on those areas, and used those words.

Personally when I am on discovery calls with prospective training clients I always record them. I'll take notes on their specific words and phrases, but sometimes we miss thngs in real time. By listening to the recording I'm able to pull things out I might have missed, and use them word-for-word in the proposal.

It's almost like they have written it themselves, which of course will resonate with them.

Now go and make this your best month ever!

Art

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The Only Closing Technique that REALLY Works

By Jeb Blount

It doesn't matter where I go or what I do I can't get away from salespeople who quiz me about closing techniques and sales managers who beg me to teach them how to get their salespeople to close. I try to avoid these conversations because philosophically I believe that closing is a process that depends on excellence throughout the entire sales cycle, rather than a point in time where a manipulative line or tactic gets the prospect to say yes.

Everyone in sales is looking for the edge that will help them close more deals.

Unfortunately, most people want the easy way out so they spend their time looking for shortcuts and silver bullets which will miraculously deliver huge commission checks. This is why so many questions I get include statements like, "what's the trick," or "can you tell me the secret" It is also why so many salespeople are duped into buying into seminars and products that promise to deliver these secrets of closing only to find that there really is no secret.

There is No Easy Way

Sales, like athletics requires training, education, persistence, practice, and a winning attitude. That is the real secret.

Universally, though, there seems to be an unyielding desire to find a magic closing pill. There was even a time when I would wear my special closing tie on sales calls. From superstitions to an endless stream of cheesy scripts, closing, much like putting in golf, is shrouded in mystery. There is no shortage of "experts" who are quick to claim that they have the one, true secret for "closing the deal every time."

Here is the brutal truth: There is only one closing technique that really works.

Now what I'm about to share with you is a secret that has been guarded by the Knights of the Sales Round Table for thousands of years. It has been passed down from generation to generation – given only to worthy sales professionals who have sworn an oath to use this powerful secret wisely and guard it with their lives.

I'm going to reveal this secret to you; but, before going further, I need you to you to solemnly swear on Jeffrey Gitomer's Sales Bible to use this information to earn a higher income, become sales rep of the year, go on your president's club trip, get promoted, and earn a massive income.

Get your note pad and pen ready. Here it is. The silver bullet, the real secret, the magic closing pill:

Ask

That's it. The only closing technique that really works. Just ask. Ask for the appointment, ask for the next step, ask for the decision maker, ask for the business. Ask for what you want. Ask.

The fact is, if you are having a hard time getting the next appointment, getting to decision makers, or closing the deal, 9 out of 10 times it is because you are not asking.

Why? Because 9 out of 10 times you are afraid to hear "no."

Rather than admitting our fear and working to overcome it, we blame our failure to close on everything else. We blame our product, our company, the economy, our sales manager, and our luck.

Instead of owning up to our shortcoming we look for secrets, tricks, silver bullets, and turn to cheesy closing scripts that make us and our prospect feel even worse.

Instead of facing our fear of "no" and asking anyway, we hide behind justifications like not being too pushy, or bad timing. Along the way our self-esteem deteriorates, our belief in our self suffers, and ultimately we don't reach our true potential as sales professionals.

Acknowledge the Fear

Getting past the fear of "no" isn't easy. The first step is to at least acknowledge that your fear is real. I've been selling my entire life and have been incredibly successful at it, yet today I still have to remind myself that "no" won't kill me.

Once you admit that you fear "no" you can then begin to pay attention to your behavior in front of prospects. Start by learning to anticipate the anxiety that comes right before asking for the deal. Then practice overcoming your fear by asking for what you want.

When you fail to ask, and you will fail, don't put your head in the sand a pretend it didn't happen. Instead, acknowledge your failure, get back up, and on the very next call ask for the business.

(Jeb Blount advises many of the world's leading organizations and their executives on the impact of emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills on customer experience, strategic account management, sales, and developing high performing sales teams. He speaks to and delivers training to high-performing sales teams across the globe. SalesGravy.com)

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Know When to Let Go

Are you a persistent sales rep, or just plain annoying? The line between persistence and annoyance can be thin. I recall a scenario when I handled some advertising for a major corporation I worked for several years ago. An advertising inside sales rep did a great sales job on me initially, but then pursued me until she became a complete and utter pain in the . . .

Jennifer had initially sold me on the benefits of advertising in her company's weekly magazine. She presented a host of impressive studies claiming to have a well-balanced audience for my product. She handled my objections well and closed the sale.

I got exactly four responses to the ad. Not good. Not necessarily her fault, but I was burned nonetheless.

The Calls Continued

Jennifer continued to call wanting more advertisements, and her efforts included a rather thorough "independent survey" which probed the readers.

"It's your target, Jim," she said. *"Shall I book you for a full page ad this time?"*

"No," I replied emphatically, "You may not. The draw from my last ad to that well-targeted market only drew four responses. I doubt the survey and I plan to run another ad with XXX publication."

"Oh, they don't have the same readers as we do. Our survey shows it. It's not what you want."

"Then how come I pulled over a hundred orders with a single run?"

"Well, it's not who you should be targeting. The survey shows that our publication is read more by your potential customers."

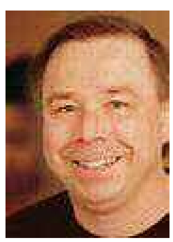
"Jennifer, you are not listening. I got four orders from your publication and over a hundred from XXX. Maybe your magazine isn't being read. Maybe your survey is not so accurate."

"Ah, but it's not 'our' survey. It was an independent survey. Take a look and see. It is our readers that should be buying your product."

Need I go on? Jennifer was armed with a survey. It was both her shield and sword. She was so blinded by the "results" that her listening was obviously impaired. She bugged me with her innuendoes. For example, when she said, "It's not who you should be targeting," she was really saying, "Jimbo, you're wrong." That's a no-no.

Even so, I could forgive her momentary blindness. But she continued to call. Two more times and the conversation virtually repeated itself. What a pain. But to make matters worse, she managed to get through to my boss, and *his* boss, who in turn came running to me, survey in hand, saying we should run an ad. Hey! Guess who got to break the news about the four lousy orders. I didn't look too good that day. (It was something I was trying to keep quiet.)

Lesson: Listen. Learn. Recognize a legitimate "no" and let sleeping dogs lie. Don't ruin a long run relationship for a short term kill.



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Sometimes What You Do Not Say is More Persuasive

Think back to the last time someone said this to you:

"I've got something I'd like to go over with you . . . nah, forget it. It's not that important."

What was your feeling? Curiosity, right?

Sometimes what you don't say can stimulate interest. The information you withhold can get your prospects and customers drawn into the conversation, interested in hearing what you might have for them.

Therefore, instead of telling someone what you think you can do for them, tease them first. For example,

"There are a few ways we might be able to help you increase the response to your ads. These are methods that have helped other people. Let's talk about your situation first to see if they would even be worth discussing."

Now, do you think that person would be likely to answer the questions?

Certainly!

Here's the formula:

1. Pique their curiosity with a potential benefit. Make hearing it contingent on them answering questions.

2. Ask the questions.

3. Present the benefits alluded to earlier with the assurance they're listening to what you have to say.

Be Like a Waiter and Ask for the Order

Ever notice how busy waiters manage their customers? They always ask for the order! **"What would you like?" "What can I get you?" "What do you prefer today?"** In contrast, think about the results if they were wishy-washy, explaining every menu item in detail, but never asking for action. It would unnecessarily lengthen the experience for everyone involved. Just like a sales call.

Ask yourself, "Do I just *finish* my presentations, or do I ask for and invite action at the end?"

Sadly, many sales reps invest plenty of time working up to the action phase of the call, then stop short of asking for commitment. They volley control back to the prospect/customer, when, in fact, like a restaurant customer, your prospects want to be led with requests and suggestions.

When it comes time, close. Ask. Get commitment. Without movement, nothing happens.

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setting an appointment on a first call with no discussion is like starting on offense at your own one-yard line. A lot of ground yet to cover, and the odds are not in your favor.

By taking the first call further, you have moved the ball downfield, closer to the endzone. Maybe almost all the way where scoring is just a formality.

I do it all the time.

Similar to the previous point, you can also help ensure a better next meeting.

You can ask them to get other stakeholders involved. Even do some preselling for you.

When you take the first call further, you satisfy the buyer's curiosity and need now. If I am talking to a sales rep about something I'm interested in, I don't want to get all worked up only for the rep to say, "Uh uh, not so fast. We can't go further now. You have to wait."

Forcing someone who is interested now to wait is like watching a burning match go out.

We live in an instant gratification society. Seize the opportunity when it is right in front of you, right now.

What to Do

OK, success with this relies on having the strategy, desire, and preparedness with your words to take the initial call as far as you can.

Sell yourself on the fact that you want to maximize how the advancement of every contact.

Don't get uptight when the conversation is going smoothly. (It's amazing to me how many reps panic and jump off the train when it's moving.)

When you do reach that moment when it is appropriate to set the next action, ensure you follow some proven steps

Setting Up, and Executing an Effective Follow Up Call

As I've regularly written and taught, the success of your follow-up is in relation to the success of your previous contact.

This includes

- having a substantive reason for the follow up,
- getting a commitment they are doing something between then and the next contact,
- asking them to get others involved (if they are essential for the final decision), and,
- getting agreement for when that will take place.

That sets up and actually writes the opening for the follow-up call:

"Hi Pat, it's Dale with ABC Systems calling to continue our conversation from last week, where you had interest in cutting down your time-to-market on new releases, and wanted to review the demo video explaining how we do it. I'd like to discuss your observations, and I have some additional case study results I think you'll find interesting."

Notice that example also brings something new to the table.

Here is an additional idea for the follow-up:

Ask if anything has changed since the previous contact.

For example,

"Since we spoke two weeks ago, has anything changed in your world regarding this issue?"

So, the mantra of *"Set the appointment quickly on the first call and get off"* is bad advice for most salespeople.

If my sugggestion resonates with you, adopt it and I'm confident you will see your call efficiency and effectiveness—and sales—improve. ☎

How to Build Instant Credibility

It's not enough to have a good offer for your prospects. You must be perceived as credible so that it's believable.

According to Dr. Robert Cialdini, author of "Influence," there's a way you can quickly build credibility in the prospect's mind.

What you should do early in your conversations is mention a flaw or drawback to your offer, or tell them what wouldn't work in their situation.

For example, Cialdini relates the story of a suit salesperson who literally tore a suit out of a man's hands and refused to sell it to him because the fit wasn't right, and couldn't be corrected by tailoring. The prospect was so impressed, he bought $4000 worth of clothing!

Here are some examples:

"Jan, I'm not sure our highest-priced model is necessary for what you want to do. Let me recommend one that is priced lower …"

"That item is going to take quite a bit longer to get in stock. You might not want to wait that long. I do have some alternatives for you…"

By telling someone what doesn't fit, the impact is much greater when you tell them what does fit. ☎

The Stalker Approach is No Way To Get an Appointment

By Kendra Lee

Not long ago, I had a back-and-forth discussion with a sales rep who just simply wasn't taking the correct route in regards to following up with a prospect.

This undoubtedly happens all the time, but this particular instance perked my ears up a bit.

The rep engaged in pursuing a prospect with nothing but good intentions, yet ended up coming off as a stalker as a result of her approach.

Worst of all is the fact that she *didn't realize* what it was that she was doing wrong, only that it wasn't working.

To put things simply, the rep in question was devoting her time and energy to all the wrong aspects of prospecting.

Instead of waiting to follow up with a prospect at the five- six-month mark (as he had specifically outlined), she made an attempt to connect after only one month--three months in a row!

Hounding a prospect is an easy mistake to make when the right amount of care isn't put into the prospecting process.

Tips for Non-Stalkerish Follow-Ups

Consider these three tips for following up with your prospects in a respectful, productive manner until they're ready to work with you.

1. Don't Ignore the Prospect's Time-Frame Suggestions

Here's a scenario to consider - you contact a prospect and they explain that now is simply just not the time to begin working together and to get back to them in 6 months.

This is extremely common in prospecting.

It can be very tempting to contact the prospect ahead of time because you know something might have changed, but you must use extreme caution in doing so. While contacting them at perhaps the 5-month mark might be acceptable, getting in touch within a month's time is practically stalking. Avoid the temptation. Give prospects the room they need in order to feel as if you've listened and respected their request.

2. Utilize the Proper Methods for Staying in Touch

While you should always respect your prospects' wishes for when they would prefer to be contacted, there's nothing wrong with staying in touch so they don't forget about your interest in meeting with them.

More often than not, however, sales reps take a route that doesn't help them in the end, calling too frequently to try to set the appointment sooner than the prospect is ready.

You can get a lot of mileage out of sending a short, handwritten note, responding to their Linkedin comments, or emailing a relevant informational article every five or six weeks or so.

These prospecting strategies will help to show your interest, gradually build a relationship, yet not make it seem as if you want something from prospects right now. You're just staying in touch.

Anything more and you're pushing your boundaries.

3. Be Aggressive When the Time is Right

If you take a full-force approach to follow up with the prospect prior to when they're ready, your chances of alienating them will be extremely high.

This being said, you can be aggressive with your prospecting strategy if you wait until the proper moment.

Use your prospecting follow-up strategy and don't worry about holding back. Combine calling, voicemail, emails, drop-in visits and social media to connect. So long as the prospect expects you to get in touch, you shouldn't feel as if you need to censor yourself.

Closing the first appointment is always a challenge, regardless of how long you spend crafting your value proposition.

However, if you're confident in your follow-up abilities and can keep the hounding temptation at bay, your chances of succeeding can sky-rocket.

(Kendra Lee is a Prospect Attraction Expert, president of KLA Group, and author of the award-winning books The Sales Magnet and Selling Against the Goal. KLA Group helps entrepreneurial and growing companies break through tough prospecting barriers to exceed revenue goals. She is a frequent speaker at national sales meetings and events. To find out more about the author and her "Get More Customers" strategies, visit www.klagroup.com)

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Findings From an Email Study

The sales engagement service, SalesLoft, deconstructed millions of emails to find out which best practices lead to higher reply rates. They studied subject lines, greetings, email bodies, and signatures.

They had some interesting findings.

As with any "study" or research, please consider that these are the result of their own study, which in the post I saw did not discuss what types of emails these results came from, what industry, product, sales process, etc. So, obviously you need to make your own judgment with the following.

1. Craft subject lines no longer than 5 words. Their research shows that subject lines with just one word outperform the average email by 87%. (Craft sales email subject lines with 1 to 4 words.)

2. Avoid numbers in subject lines. They say those showed a 32% drop in response rates.

3. If you are reaching out based on a referral, say so. Subject lines with the word "referred" had a whopping 536% higher reply rate compared to the average email.

3 Tips for Effective Greetings

1. Craft subject lines no longer than 5 words. Research shows that subject lines with just one word outperform the average email by 87%.

2. Two-word subject lines beat one-word subject lines. So, use "Hey Jane," rather than simply "Jane." (Better to start with "Hey Jane" than simply "Jane.")

3. Say "Hey." They found that is the best leading word in a subject line, commanding a 23% higher reply rate.

4. If you don't know the prospect's first name, don't overthink it. Just say "Hey there."

3 Tips for Improved Email Bodies

1. Personalize 20% of the content in the body of an email to enjoy a 2x higher reply rate. (Sales email probability of replies proportion of personalization.)

2. Be brief. Keep emails to no more than 50 words to boost reply rates by over 40%.

3. Avoid bullets. Emails with bullets suffer 37% lower reply rates.

3 Tips for Stronger Signatures

1. They say the best signoff is "Best." That's it.

2. Avoid the P.S. This one I do not agree with. They reason, "You would not use a P.S. with a colleague so don't use it with a prospect."

They don't say they split-tested this variable, but I'm going to go with personal experience, and what direct mail copywriters use. It's widely known that the MOST read part of a letter is the P.S. I'm assuming the same is true for email.

3. Avoid opt-out links. The post suggests that if legal (when you personalize emails, it often is), avoid opt-out links to gain a 38% boost in reply rates.

Now, with all of that said, please do not be that annoying salesperson who just mass-blasts emails all day asking for "15 minutes on your calendar."

Email can be a great tool, but similar to voice mail, it should simply create a question in the prospect's mind that they want the answer to.

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Ask the Assistant About The Decision Maker's Preferences

Tom Welsh suggests asking the assistant how the decision maker likes to be approached, and addressed. For example, some people enjoy a little small talk, while others prefer getting straight to the point. Some are offended when you use their first name too early in a relationship, others get uncomfortable when addressed as "Mr." or "Ms."

Getting into a conversation like this with an assistant serves two purposes: it obviously gives you good information you can use on the call, plus it implies that you truly care about the decision and are not just a self-interested salesperson who will waste time.

Put Them in the Picture

Here's the scenario: You have two stacks of photos dropped on your desk. One is a collection of pictures of a vendor's product, their building, and their employees. The other stack is comprised of photos that have YOU in each one. Which one do you likely have the most interest in? Of course, most humans are interested in anything that affects them personally. The point? When you call a prospect or customer, do you begin by talking about yourself and your company and what YOU want to do? Or do you describe an illustration, putting them in the picture? Remember, people don't care diddly about you and what you want—they want to know how what you have will affect them, their interests, their wants, their needs.

A Question for Assistants

Matt Hagenhoff says that when an assistant says, "He's not in right now," he replies with, **"Oh, is he on vacation?"**

Typically the assistant will then explain exactly where he is, and when he will return.

And if he is on vacation, he finds out the details and asks about it when he does reach the decision maker, building rapport in the process.

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Help Them Realize They Have Nothing to Fear

A common saying is that the word "fear" stands for "False Evidence Appearing Real." Fence sitters afraid to take the leap many times don't have a logical reason for their inactivity, yet they fear making a decision. And they probably can't explain why. So help them recognize their irrationality.

"What's the worst thing that could happen if you did this?"

"Let's look at the worst case scenario if you moved forward."

"Let's think in the future for a moment and assume that you did get this system. Can you think of any downside?"

"What if you just went ahead and did it? Is there any real disadvantage you can think of?"

"What would be the drawbacks if you purchased today?"

Or, try this one,

"Let's say you did nothing. Then where would you be?"

Don't Apologize

Don't apologize for taking someone's time at the beginning of a call. It diminishes your importance. For example, consider the caller who says, "I know you're busy, and I'm sorry for interrupting...I'll take just a few seconds, and here's why I'm calling."

Stop. Think about what you're really offering. You have something of value that will help make this person's life better. You need to present that feeling with conviction. If you're not sold on your importance, they certainly won't.

Don't Cave in To Get the Deal

Seems like the 80/20 rule applies to most everything. Including negotiating. Negotiation experts say that 80% of the concessions occur in the final 20% of discussions. What's important for us is that we don't appear too eager—or desperate—to get a sale, therefore caving in to concessions toward the end.

Question the Lower Competitive Price

When some reps hear a prospect or customer mention a lower competitive price, they tense up and believe they have to match it to get or retain the business. A smart approach is to remain calm and question the competitive offer in order to blow holes in it.

For example,

"Oh, that sounds like a really low price. What accessories do you receive with that? How long is the warranty?"

Especially question in the areas where you know you are strong and offer more.

Will You Help Me?

After leaving a voice mail, try then opting out to find the buyer's assistant. Then, simply ask him/her **"Will you have a chance to see Ms. Bigg when she comes back?"**

When they answer affirmatively, continue with, **"Great. When she picks up my message, would you please tell her personally that I really would like to speak with her today? I have an idea that she might want to know about."**

By treating the assistant ith respect, and understanding the power they wield, you should be able to get them to help you reach the decision maker.