



HOW NOT TO OPEN A SALES CALL

CAPTAIN OBVIOUS AND NEWSCASTERS DON'T MAKE THE SALE

“Your first impression of a thing sets up your subsequent beliefs. If the company looks inept to you, you may assume everything else they do is inept...It takes a lot of work to change our minds. We're strongly influenced by our first impressions.” —Daniel Kahneman

Daniel Kahneman is explaining why first impressions are important. Although his quote refers to the impression of a company, this bias also exists for individuals. If we make a bad first impression, then every interaction thereafter is influenced by the original bad impression. Consider the long-term impact of a bad first impression.

Although opening a sales call should be straightforward and simple, salespeople struggle to open the call properly. Many salespeople miss customer cues. Customers mention they are busy, on their way to a meeting, or they don't have time to meet. Salespeople who ignore these signals become an annoyance.

Some salespeople mistake themselves for newscasters. Newscaster salespeople comment on the weather, last night's ball game or politics. Rather than focusing on delivering insight or bringing value, these salespeople focus on delivering the news.

Other salespeople feebly attempt to build rapport through general observations. Captain-Obvious salespeople chat about the bass hanging on the wall or the putter in the corner. In either case, the salesperson doesn't state their purpose and they are considered a time waster.

In each scenario, the salesperson fails to open the call in a professional, impactful manner. Their attempt to make a good first impression has left the customer in a state of depression.

Daniel Goleman says people begin making a first impression within 1/20 of a second. Here are some suggestions to professionally open your sales call with impact.

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STATE YOUR ELEVATOR SPEECH

If this is the first time you meet a prospect, state your elevator speech. The elevator speech is simple and straightforward. In thirty seconds or less you should answer three questions:

Who you are? What you do? To whom you sell?

The purpose of the elevator speech is to give the prospect a little information to satisfy their curiosity.

POSITIVE OPENING

There are several ways to create a positive opening. Consider making a positive reference to the customer's business. Maybe they were recognized in the news, had a record first quarter, or made a recent acquisition. A positive customer reference creates a professional impression and shows that you researched their company.

Using a referral is another way to create a positive opening. The Journal of Marketing Research shows that one referral has the value of 12 cold calls. A referral shows instant credibility. A referral shows that someone places value on you, your solution and your company.



STATE YOUR CALL OBJECTIVES

Rather than discussing the weather, the ball game or the bass on the wall, tell the customer why you are there. Professional salespeople show up with a purpose. Share that purpose with the customer. Stating the purpose of your visit creates a professional impression.

GAIN PERMISSION TO PROCEED

Value-added salespeople proactively take control of the sales conversation and guide it down a path of value. Value-added salespeople spend more time understanding customer needs than any other part of the sales process. Before they begin this process, value-added salespeople ask the customer for permission to proceed.

Here is an example of opening the sales call professionally and with impact. It includes an elevator speech, positive opening, call objectives and gaining permission.

“Good morning, Jan. My name is Bill, with XYZ Corporation. XYZ is a leading distributor in the electrical industry. We supply electrical contractors and datacom contractors. We are the exclusive distributor for ABC Automation Products. I noticed on your website that you were awarded the new hospital project. Congratulations! One of your project managers, Steve, suggested that I reach out to you. The purpose of my visit is to learn more about your department and see if we can support you on these projects. Do you mind if I ask you a few questions?”

How you open the sales call is more important than how you close it. The customer's first impression is a lasting impression. To open the call professionally, include your elevator speech, a positive opening, state your call objectives, and gain permission to proceed. It's not complex; it's routine. **cs**

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