

SALES SKILLS CRITICAL TO INSIDE SALES TEAMS

BY BOB NADEAU

As more organizations grow their inside sales teams, the need to develop those particular sales skills is critical for success. Historically inside sales roles have suffered from high turn-over due to burnout, call rejection, and limited mobility. As the market for inside sales roles grows, there will be more prospecting phone work, more e-mail and less traditional in-person networking, for example, outside sales professionals who attend after-hour sessions, trade shows, or visit companies in person.



SUCCESSFUL ORGANIZATIONS NEED TO ARM THEIR TEAMS WITH SKILLS IN THESE 3 CRITICAL AREAS: LINKEDIN NETWORKING, VOICE MAIL AND COLD CALL STRATEGIES. DEVELOPING THESE SKILLS WILL LEAD TO INCREASED REVENUES FOR THE COMPANY WHILE PROVIDING REPS WITH HIGHER INCOMES, IMPROVED PRODUCTIVITY, AND LOWER TURNOVER.

PART 01 USING LINKEDIN

TO HELP TAKE THE "COLD" OUT OF CALLING. AN INSIDE SALES REP CAN DO THEIR HOMEWORK ON A PROSPECT, AND INFLUENCE CONNECTIONS THEY CAN POTENTIALLY LEVERAGE FOR A WARM INTRODUCTION—THAT IS WORKING SMARTER. BUT LINKEDIN CAN BE MUCH MORE THAN JUST GAINING INTRODUCTIONS. FOR EXAMPLE:

- One of the biggest obstacles a rep faces when trying to make a sale is overcoming their prospects "status-quo", the prospects current vendor. One of the best times to approach a prospect is when they are fairly new to their position. These prospects aren't "married" to the current vendor and have a greater propensity to take your call, and make a change. You can "save searches" on LinkedIn for specific job titles and get notified when someone changes jobs.
- Develop your 4 to 5 most common buyer personas. What are their job titles? For example, a "saved search" on Director of IT might be beneficial to a rep in high tech sales. The titles VP of Sales, or Director of Sales might be the decision makers for a rep selling Sales Training services, or a CRM, etc.
- Every change in a position creates 2 additional prospects. One is the person your 1st connection replaced, and the other is the person who replaced your 1st connection. As you congratulate your 1st connection, you should ask them who took their prior position, and also where did their predecessor go.

PART 02 VOICE MAIL

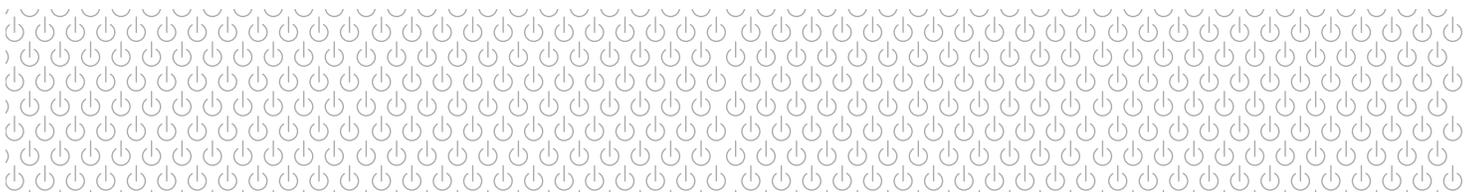
STOP AND CONSIDER THAT SOME 90% OF CALLS GO INTO VOICE-MAIL. MOST ORGANIZATIONS DON'T HAVE ESTABLISHED BUSINESS PROCESSES FOR LEAVING VOICEMAILS. BASED ON RESEARCH OF 600,000 VOICE MAILS, THE BIGGEST LIFT IS ON THE 4TH VOICE-MAIL SPACED OUT EVERY 3 TO 4 DAYS, ANY CLOSER AND YOU WOULD APPEAR DESPERATE.

REMEMBER: Sales is a game of inches. If you developed a voice mail process for 10 better voice mail messages per day, and got one callback, then over 250 working days – it would make a big difference in your results. Depending on the type of business, and your close ratio, this alone could generate another 10 to 20 sales a year.

When it comes to frequency of attempts to make a sale, there are many studies out there. While the numbers are all over the place, directionally they indicate more quality attempts generate more results. I've seen numbers that state 80% of sales are made after the 5th attempt, yet 90% of reps never get that far.



AS THE MARKET FOR INSIDE SALES GROWS THERE WILL BE MORE PROSPECTING VIA PHONE AND LESS TRADITIONAL IN-PERSON NETWORKING.



PART 03 **COLD CALLING STRATEGIES**
 YOU NEED TO NAIL THE FIRST 20 SECONDS OF A COLD CALL.
 PROSPECTS DON'T CARE ABOUT YOU OR YOUR COMPANY AT THIS POINT.

THERE ARE 3 KEY ELEMENTS TO A SCRIPT:

1. Who are you? Introduce yourself and your company.
2. Why are you calling? Do not present a product or features, this will trigger your prospects flight response, and they will shut down. Prospects don't want to be sold. Example: We've helped (companies like yours-or-name a couple of companies like theirs) decrease their energy costs by 12%.
3. What's in it for them? Focus your call on how you can help them achieve critical business goals. Example: I know there's pressure on lowering expenses in your industry. I'd like to ask you a few questions to see if we can help you. (it's disarming and won't trigger the prospects flight response)

Even when you get a "no" you should try and overcome it—at least once. Why not, you've already done a fair amount of work to get to that "no." The prospects guard is up, so try to empathize, this will give you an opportunity to reconnect. You could say, "I can understand your hesitation, you don't know anything about me or my company and you can't see why this (call or meeting) could be worth your time."

Then ask an unexpected question. Inexperienced sales people typically want to ask "Why not listen to my offer?" But that causes the prospect to dig in on their position—not to continue with you. This moves the call down the wrong path. On the other hand, an unexpected question surprises the buyer and shows them you understand their business or industry. So you must have a set of unexpected questions prepared BEFORE your calls, and use the right question.

YOUR UNEXPECTED QUESTION MIGHT REFER TO:

INDUSTRY TREND OR NEWS

Example—if you were selling insurance:

"I understand recent legislation in regards to affordability and accessibility has the attention of legislators...if these bills pass, how prepared are you to deal with that?"

NEWS ABOUT THEIR COMPANY

Example—if you were selling technology:

"I read a recent press release announcing the upcoming acquisition of XYZ...so how concerned are you about integrating their data with your ERP system?"

Do you need a script? Yes, and absolutely yes. Most reps don't like them. The problem is, they sound like a script. Why? Because we tend to write in 20 or so word sentences...but we don't speak that way. Does an actor like Tom Hanks sound like he's reading a script in a movie? Of course not, he's a professional who sounds natural because he practices. So scripts take time to develop and practice to yield desired results.

IN THE END, it pays to revisit the fundamentals of solid and proven sales skills. Earlier this spring our favorite baseball teams were in "Spring Training" in sunny Florida. They too are professionals whose careers are measured by wins and losses, like ours in sales. Why do professional baseball players, even those destined to eventually be in the hall fame have to practice the fundamentals? Because it's what professionals do. ▲



PROFESSOR BOB NADEAU

Professor Nadeau is the Director of the Professional Sales Program at Plymouth State University teaching marketing, sales, and sales management. His career as a Senior Manager for a Fortune 100 company earned him multiple awards, keynote speaking engagements, and a reputation as a results-driven consultant. Nadeau is in the top 1% most viewed in the world on LinkedIn. He has facilitated training workshops with clients like Comcast, DHL, Gartner, Ricoh and Staples as well as regional companies, and universities. In his spare time, Professor Nadeau teaches motorcycle courses for Harley-Davidson. For more information, you can reach him at 603-854-0886. ▲

A 3-PART STRATEGY TO EFFECTIVE VOICE-MAIL

1. SELL THE NEXT CALL.

This isn't the right time to focus on your features and benefits. You're not selling your product yet...you're selling your prospect on taking your next call.



2. LEAVE SOME THINGS OUT.

Too much information equals no reason to return your call. A little mystery is good. Use talking points like:

- I have a question about...
- I have an idea I'd like to share...



3. MAKE IT ABOUT THE BUYER.

Your prospect is interested in themselves right now... not what you're selling. Show them you understand their priorities, find something unique about them. LinkedIn will help you with this.

For example:

"I noticed you implemented a new ERP system at your prior company...will you be considering that at ABC?"

