



SAMPLE CHAPTER

Step 6: MAKING YOUR FIRST PHONE CONTACT WITH THE PROSPECT

Seconds count once you get past the Screen and have the Prospect on the line. In most cases, the first 30 seconds on the line make or break the call. This is not the time to be fumbling for words, or wasting that precious time on “ice-breakers”.

Think of this initial call for an appointment as the “Call-up, fix-up, hang-up.” That is, *Get* the person on the phone, get to the point, then *get* off the phone.

The Prospects you phone during the business day are going to be involved in other work as you call, and usually will not have the desire or the time to get tied up in an extended phone conversation.

Besides, every minute that you're on the line raises the odds of another interruption coming in, so get to the point and complete your objective before you're bumped.

- 1. This first phone contact is *not* the place to try to make your case. You can only *lose* the sale, but *not make it*, over the phone.**

Notice that this “Call-up, fix-up, hang-up” phase of the selling cycle does not include “Sign-up,” because, no matter how much you say, or how great the discounts you offer, you cannot make the sale over the phone.

But—a big but—you can talk yourself out of the chance of meeting face-to face, and hence out of making the sale altogether. When it comes to the telephone, the less said the better.

This caution against making the case over the phone does not apply if your full selling cycle occurs over the phone. Telephone marketing (or “telemarketing”) is useful with certain products (usually relatively low-cost items that don't require face-to-face contact. Telemarketing is not a subject we address in this book.

2. Once you have the Prospect on the phone, aim to accomplish three key tasks within the first 30 seconds.

This is a business call, not a social call, so in most cases it's best to get right to business. You are most likely to have the Prospect's full attention during the first half-minute of the call, so use those 30 seconds productively by getting on with these three essential tasks:

- Introduce yourself and your company.
- Excite the Prospect's interest in meeting with you to find out more.
- Ask the Prospect to meet at a specific time.

“Excite” and “interest” are both key words. In your short phone statement, focus on what you can do for the Prospect, not the details of what your product or service is.

The object at this point is to whet the Prospect's interest, not to satisfy it. After all, if you satisfy the Prospect's interest over the phone, then there is no need for her to meet face-to-face.

Accomplishing these three tasks of introducing yourself, exciting interest, and asking for a meeting may seem like a lot to accomplish in 30 seconds, but it can be done, as in this example:

“Mr. Whidby, this is Tina Rowland, of the Rowland Consulting Group. I'm calling because I'd like the opportunity to show you how we have boosted the profitability of firms like yours by as much as ten percent over a six-month period. The meeting would take about 20 minutes. I'm going to be in Hopkinsville next week on Tuesday morning and Friday afternoon. Which would be better for you?”

3. Make it clear at the start of the call if you are following up at the request of this Prospect, or if you are acquainted from another context.

Example:

“You may recall that we met last month at the GTS Trade Show, where we discussed the effect of _____. I've given some thought to what we discussed then, and I have some ideas that might be of help to you. I could stop by to share these ideas with you sometime—perhaps on Monday afternoon? Or would later in the week be better for you?”

4. One of the best tools for exciting the Prospect's interest in meeting with you is a referral from someone they know and respect, or who has similar job responsibilities in another firm).

Earlier, we addressed the benefits of using referrals as a way of breaking through the screen. Referrals are equally useful when speaking to the Prospect herself:

“As I mentioned to your secretary, I'm calling at the suggestion of Robert Clarkson at GNI Software.”

Another example, this time tying the request to meet into the initial statement:

“I'm calling at the suggestion of Doreen Masters, who I believe you know through the local Step of the Computer Design Professionals' Association. She knows of my work, and thought it would be of particular interest to you.”

You may need to pause a moment for the name to register, then go on to say,

“I'm going to be in Hopkinsville next week on Tuesday morning and again on Friday afternoon, and am free to meet either time. Which would be better for you?”

It's even better if the person who referred you is already a customer:

“I'm calling at the suggestion of Robert Clarkson at GNI Software, who's been a client of ours for about a year now. Perhaps he has mentioned our work to you?”

If your referral has called ahead to introduce you, so much the better. If not, move on to the core of your message:

“As we've been able to help GNI, I believe we may also be able to help you, and I think it would be beneficial for us to meet to explore your situation. Would you be free, say, tomorrow afternoon, or would Friday morning be better for you?”

Unless you're certain that the present Prospect and your referral face exactly the same need, it's best to leave open just how you can help. If you get drawn into the details of what you did for this other client, there's a risk that your new Prospect may respond with words to the effect, “Well, that sounds nice, but we don't need anything like that.”

The point of the reference is to establish your credibility, not to suggest that the other project would be an exact template for this situation.

Summary: Your first phone contact with the Prospect

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2. his first phone contact is not the place to try to make your case. You can only lose the sale, but not make it, over the phone.
3. Once you have the Prospect on the phone, aim to accomplish three key tasks within the first 30 seconds.
4. Make it clear at the start of the call if you are following up at the request of this Prospect, or if you are acquainted from another context.
5. One of the best tools for exciting the Prospect's interest in meeting with you is a referral from someone they know and respect (or who has similar job responsibilities in another firm).