



Your **PEOPLE.**

Our **PROCESS.**

Stellar **PERFORMANCE.**

10 Tips for Improving Business-To-Business Telephone Sales Results

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Results happen every time we dial the telephone. They just aren't always the results we had hoped for. During the last 20+ years, I have made a lot of phone calls. I have monitored a lot of phone calls. I have written thousands of call plans, call guides, scripts, sales strategies, campaigns, and targeted initiatives. And, I can tell you from experience, that results will continue to happen. More often than not, the results will be lower than they can be unless certain planned and predictable outcomes are accounted for.

We know, for example, that when a decision-maker answers the telephone, chances are good s/he is not hoping to hear you on the line so that s/he can place an order or schedule an appointment. Although this happens a small percentage of the time, and that's why "make more calls" is important advice for every sales manager to share with a struggling or whining representative, if we're prepared only for this circumstance, results will be poor. The incidents of salespeople and telemarketers who are prepared only for this circumstance, is staggering.

But here's where our world of sales and sales prospecting gets really strange. For, as often as telecallers are expecting too much too soon on initial approaches, there are even more telecallers who expect too little. They say they are calling to "introduce their company" which rarely creates enough interest to sustain a 10-minute conversation. And, to make it worse, it is true. When asked the "objective" of their first call to a decision-maker many, many salespeople really believe it is to introduce their company. That used to be a waste of a dime. Now, it's a lot more serious.

When calling high in an organization to Chairpersons, Vice Presidents or Directors, it can take an hour of dialing before one of these people actually answers the phone. That means agents may only hear the voice of their desired contacts 8 or so times per day. These are very precious opportunities. If the salesperson's behavior makes the call seem frivolous, or the only outcome is agreement that your company will send a \$5 marketing piece, then you have your results. These results may even be permanent. It could take months to catch this decision-maker answering the telephone again and you still don't even know if they are a prospect. If you are looking for justification for training time or training budget, you need look no further. These real statistics will scare the heart out of most finance executives.

Whether your team is suffering from expecting too much or too little, the following 10 tips can help.

1. Understand that the telephone approach is a process, not an event.

The opening statement must not explain that you are calling to schedule an appointment or close a sale. Selling too soon, or outrunning the customer, is a major contributor to poor results. Human beings go through a natural process when deciding to take action. There's no point in trying to circumvent it.

Telecallers must be prepared to move the prospect step-by-step through the process of buying your offer or call objective. One way to look at a first contact is to say we are moving him/her from Stranger to Disarmed Listener to Conversant to Interested, Excited Conversant to Agreement to take Reasonable Action.

2. Pre-write all statements and questions so they are colorful and concise.

Nobody is so good that s/he can just "wing it." It takes years of practice before a great salesperson hones in on the perfect sentence to describe or explain something. The best salespeople eventually come up with statements that are very compelling. But you probably don't have years. Meanwhile, you've got salespeople at various levels of experience explaining your products, services, company, features, benefits and value with a wide range of competence and confidence. Some are very wordy and filled with "ums" and "ahs" and some are so generic the prospect can't tell you apart from the last company who called.

Make sure your salespeople understand the concrete ways that your company can save the prospect time or money. It is no longer good enough to promise you can do it. They must know and be able to explain when, how and where time now spent will be reduced, or money now spent will be retained.

Work with them to pre-write the colorful, detailed explanations and descriptions that will make your value easy to understand and exciting to buy.

3. Every call must have a goal.

We only hit what we aim at. For people who historically aim too low, this is a challenge. They are used to chasing prospects for months before they learn very much. It feels like they're busy because they have a lot of "call backs" but no one knows if their time is being spent with actual prospects. And, if its not, sales results will reflect that.

This means, if a prospect is tough to reach, then a lot must be accomplished on a 1st contact. So, who isn't tough to reach? I guess that means we had all better have a good, solid objective for the initial contact. If it's a 2nd or 3rd contact, the stakes are even higher.

To be sure salespeople can separate the "call objective" from the "process of the call" try explaining it this way:

< Objective >	< What you learn before offering the objective >
Appointment with top decision-maker	That they qualify based on your criteria
Presentation in front of search committee	That they qualify based on your criteria You qualify based on theirs
Order with a P.O. or credit card	Their admission to problems that you can solve Their excitement about your solution
Agreement to review a highly targeted proposal	Account profile Their admission to problems that you can solve Their desire to invest in your solutions

4. Focus on your contact in order to create interest.

If you can't create interest, you won't create action. So, every decision-maker must hear "the reason I'm calling" followed by something that is relevant to him/her.

Help your salespeople by:

- Targeting a group of calls by industry, or by contact title/job description. This will make it easier to pre-write a statement that will create interest. After all, Managing Partners at CPA Firms speak a similar language. IT Directors in manufacturing companies speak another.
- Giving them time, maybe in a sales meeting, to think about the targeted industry and the decision-maker's issues or concerns. Whatever your company can provide that addresses the issues that "keep the decision-maker up at night" will be a great way to create interest.

5. Make the telephone conversation interactive.

Good conversationalists know that they must do their share of both talking and listening. Its perfectly natural for neighbors to meet on the sidewalk and share a conversation where each feels welcomed and empowered. It might sounds like this:

- Neighbor 1: "Hello. I haven't seen you around lately. How've you been?"
- Neighbor 2: "Not bad. I've had the flu and haven't left the house in 2 weeks. Anyone in your family sick?"
- Neighbor 1: "Not at my house, thank goodness. I was wondering about you though. Is that why your lawn looks overgrown?"
- Neighbor 2: "My son's been in charge of mowing, but all he cares about is basketball. Did you see the Celtics last night?"

You'll notice that each of these conversationalists uses a technique we call "statement/question pairs". This is something that they were probably not taught; but instead, perform naturally in order to maintain their chat.

From this, we learn 2 important things that apply directly to the business telephone conversation:

- a) If you make a pleasant statement first, you can get away with asking almost any question.
- b) Whoever is asking the question is in control of the subject of the conversation.

Now, chances are good that your prospects will not keep up their end of the statement/question pair conversation. That's okay. As long as the salesperson uses this model every time s/he speaks, contacts will feel comfortable and empowered enough to tell everything you need to know to sell them.

6. If it sounds like something a telemarketer would say, don't say it.

The last 30 years have been tough on the image of telemarketing. Even though most companies are reputable, most callers are honest and most products and services offer good value, more often than not prospects have very bad things to say about being contacted by phone.

I think this is good news. For those of us willing to use fresh approaches, the road is very clear. It's pretty easy to set ourselves above "stereotypical telemarketers."

Review your scripts and sales tools and look for any statements that you remember from sales training or outbound scripts longer than 10 years ago. Also delete anything you heard the last 3000 times you answered your home telephone.

Here are just a few that are overused enough to seriously reduce results:

- “How are you today?” Unless you have a team of medical professionals, no one believes you care about their well-being. Stop wasting time and ask a question that will create curiosity instead.
- “Businesses like yours/people like yourself...” these statements have completely lost their meaning. Why not be concrete and identify the type of business or the situation of the “people”? It can only improve the connection with the prospect.
- “I’m going to be in your area...” is another tale that breeds mistrust. It can easily be changed to “I have a meeting in your area at (name of place or street or office park).”

7. Know your product/problem connection.

Don’t force your salespeople to rely on marketing materials to understand the sales points of their products or services. Brochures are designed to be read by people who know their own problems and can make the leap from feature and benefit to how the product or service will help them. Salespeople do not live with these problems but can be taught about them.

Try this:

- Break down the features of your products or services and discuss the problems each feature is designed to solve. Most products and services were developed because of problems in the marketplace that were identified and solved.
- Now, help salespeople create a list of questions to ask that will uncover these problems. Be sure to avoid handing over a series of close-ended questions that ask “Do you have this problem?” “Do you have that problem?”
- Remember tip #4 and pre-write statement/question pairs to be sure these important questions get answered.

8. Direct activity toward “completed conversations” rather than “contacts” or “dials”.

We know that sales results are activity driven. In an inside sales or prospecting initiative the focus is often on the number of dials, number of connects, number of proposals, etc. Although this strategy allows us to keep salespeople busy, it does not always put qualified prospects into the pipeline.

Genuine prospecting requires that salespeople do more than just talk to a decision-maker. They have to make some headway into the relationship. They need to do some telling and some listening. They need to advance the sales process or determine that no advancement is reasonable right now. In order to do this, they must have a highly interactive conversation that satisfies your need for information (do they qualify?) as well as the prospect’s (what’s in it for me?).

Your definition may include more details. But, simply, we have a completed conversation, when salespeople:

- Talk with the desired decision-maker, and
- Have enough of an interactive conversation to get most of the pre-planned questions answered, and
- Be able to explain the prospect’s situation, what the next steps will be (if any), and why

9. Perform “call practice” activities in order to “sound right” while you say the right things

It’s amazing that some salespeople seem to get away with asking the most private questions. Yet, other reps get a loud “None of your business!” and then a dial tone. This reality has led many managers to conclude that scripts do not work. They could not be more wrong. It’s rarely the “script” that is the problem. Usually, it’s the emotions expressed in the delivery that drive the failure or the success.

Just like in a movie, pre-written dialog must be delivered in a convincing way, or the listeners won't feel engaged. The proper emotions are the key. There are 3 emotions that are appropriate in a business conversation. If a caller is not projecting 1 of these 3 emotions at all times, then s/he is projecting the opposite emotion, which almost always results in failure.

Here are the 3 emotions and a way to practice them:

- **Enthusiasm** – Perfect when describing your company or its offers, as well as when reacting to an explanation of your prospect's company, its situation and goals. Enthusiastic delivery requires use of lots of highs and lows in the voice, variation of speed and the emphasis or "punch" of key words.
The opposite of enthusiasm is boredom. It is accomplished by keeping the voice monotone. Or, worse, the sing-songy delivery when someone is reading. There is no middle ground here. Boredom will shorten the call and reduce the results.
Learners can practice the two opposite emotions with this statement, "We offer 4 solutions that will address the system crash problem you just described. And, based on your workload, and your staffing challenges, I'd say any one of them would pay for itself in less than a year." You will see very quickly the impact that enthusiasm makes.
- **Curiosity** – Lets the salesperson sound "interested" instead of "intrusive". It uses the higher range of the voice, varied pitch and a lilt at the end to indicate the question mark.
The opposite of curiosity is doubt or disdain, which comes across as sarcastic or manipulative and is not an effective way to move a relationship to the next level.
Learners can practice the two opposite emotions with this question, "What process do you go through when evaluating this sort of investment?"
- **Encouragement** – When you need to gain more information or cooperation, you must be able to make the contact feel comfortable and safe enough to go deeper. We encourage people by "dragging out" our words and using the lower more soothing range of our voice.
The opposite of encouraging is, of course, discouraging.
Learners can practice the two opposite emotions with this statement, "I see."

10. Create a series of 5-7 pre-scripted voice mail messages and keep track of which one you left.

After trying to reach a contact 3 or 4 times, many salespeople want to leave some sort of recorded message in the contact's voice mail box. I use the term "recorded message" so that salespeople remember that everything they say, every word and sound they utter, will, in fact, be recorded and replayed. That means it is very important to pre-write and pre-practice the voice mail messages before it is captured and heard by the prospect.

If the goal is to make an appropriate impression and to incite a return call, where possible, follow these guidelines:

- Create a series of messages so that you are not leaving the same one over and over. It may take 1 message a week for 2 months before the contact calls you back so the messages must be highly professional yet somehow different from one another.
- Practice your delivery so the message sounds natural, but is clear and concise at the same time.
- Give your name at the beginning but not the phone number. At the end of your brief message, say "I'll give you my number." Then pause for a count of 2 to give the contact time to grab a pen. Be sure to state your number slowly, 1 digit at a time so there's no chance the prospect will have to replay the whole message a second time to decipher it.
- Be sure to sound enthusiastic and encouraging. Never let impatience show in your words or your tone, even if you have been trying to reach someone for a long time.

These 10 tips are just a few of many that we have taught to 1000s of successful salespeople during the last 12 years. We are happy to share them with you so that you can continue to improve your results and develop the skills of your staff. Please let us know if we can be of even greater service to you in the pursuit of success in 2002.