



Practical Tips for Making Prospecting a "Win-Win" Proposition

Of all the competencies associated with superior sales skill, prospecting is the weakest link. Most salespeople despise prospecting. *"I'm too busy," "I don't have any prospects," "I've tried and that doesn't work"* are just a few of the excuses you hear or may have said yourself.

Yet effective prospecting is a vital part of successful campaigns to gain new business. Becoming a master prospector can spell the difference between being a merely competent salesperson and a stellar one. So what holds us back and how can we succeed more often?

The reality is most salespeople fear prospecting because they are set up for failure. If you consider a call that ends with "no" a losing call, you will inevitably lose far more often than you win. Instead, try to see prospecting as a systematic gathering of information in a "win-win" atmosphere.

The truth is that out of a thousand possible buyers, perhaps only a few hundred are willing to talk with you and able to buy. Prospecting is trying to find them without wasting today trying to sell the other eight hundred.

Think of it this way: Instead of trying to push your product or service, you are trying to uncover needs and problems that your product or service can help solve. This respectful approach is more likely to spark a prospect's interest. And it helps you. After all, if the prospect has no need for or interest in what you're selling, why waste your time with that person?

Here's how to open a conversation positively and determine if you have a qualified prospect. First, begin with a confidently stated and respectful opening statement. Good opening statements contain:

1. A confidently stated business reason for the call.
2. An invitation to talk about the prospect's business and an openness to improvement options.
3. An acknowledgment that the prospect is a decision-maker who is in control.

Following a well presented opening statement, prospects will open up. Once they are willing to talk, the mission then shifts to whether they're able to buy. To find out, sound business questions must be used to qualify:

1. The potential need, opportunity or problem your product or service can address.
2. The decision making process and who is involved.
3. Resources available including time, money, space, and technical expertise.

Ask these questions with respect and listen to the prospect's responses for both factual content and emotional attitude. This will help you read the prospect's responses accurately and determine if you have a qualified prospect.

Trying to talk unqualified prospects into becoming qualified is as futile and as frustrating as trying to talk rocks into becoming gold. Instead, spend your time searching for the "gold". If a prospect says no, consider that a win rather than a lose. Because the truth is-the faster you get someone to disqualify him or herself, the faster you can move on to someone else who is willing and able to buy.

The right attitude, strong opening statements, good qualifying questions and respecting your prospects' decisions, whether yes or no, will result in greater cooperation and more positive and successful prospecting.