



10 Steps Towards Conducting A Successful Sales Call

By Catherine Jewell

You didn't study architecture or engineering or any other profession so that you could become a salesperson. But, growing in your career means moving into sales. The higher you go in an organization, the more important selling becomes. Here are some tips for rookies who never believed they would have to sell.

1. **Do Your Homework.**

Never make a sales call or pick up the phone without doing a little research. At the least, check the prospect's website and create two or three questions you can ask about the business. This replaces the old question: "If you could change one thing about your business, what would it be?" While this question is headed in the right direction, it proves you don't know a thing.

A better question makes a statement, followed by a question asking what or how: "With the new bond issue passing, what are your priority projects in the next 12 months?" or "How is your company responding to the new regulations?"

2. **Find The Economic Buyer.**

This is the person who holds the keys to the vault. Too often, we are afraid to approach the real decision maker. And sales rookies waste time with administrative personnel and other minor decision makers. A good question to ask is: "Who, besides yourself, will have input into this decision?" Then ask to set up a time to meet with your contact AND the economic buyer.

3. **Prepare To Present, Then Don't.**

You should be able to talk about the firm's capabilities – those services you oversee, plus the ones you don't. Learn the company success stories and practice telling them. Prepare as if you were going to give a presentation, then don't. Sales rookies oversell by talking about everything instead of listening for the need. This often has the effect of confusing or turning off the prospect.

4. **Write Three Killer Questions.**

Arm yourself with three great questions about your prospect's business and the project you may know about. Write these in a notebook and be prepared to take notes. Prospects are human; they LOVE to talk about themselves, their challenges and their vision. Your questions should ask "how" in order to get the prospect talking. Example: "How do you plan to respond to the new environmental guidelines?"

5. **Set Your Intention.**

Before you meet with a prospect, know what you want to accomplish. While this is important for any meeting, it is critical for sales. A reasonable intention for a first meeting might be: agreeing to meet

again with more details, the client sending an RFP, your firm inviting the prospect to a capabilities meeting, etc. Whatever your plan, decide in advance and SEE that good result coming true.

6. **Listen, Listen, Listen.**

You should talk about one-third of the time. If the client starts the meeting by saying 'Show us what you can do,' you can respond with this: "Before we talk about our capabilities, we'd like to learn a little more about your needs so that we can see if there is a fit." Ask one of your killer questions and listen intently. Take notes and ask follow-up questions.

7. **Sell Only What The Client Needs.**

It's tempting to tell all about your wonderful firm. Hold back. The prospect is only interested in his challenges, his project, and his needs. After listening to his needs, respond with some information that indicates the strengths your firm has in this area. It is very classy (and smart) not to push too hard at this point: "I think we may have some experience that relates directly to the project you've described." This is NOT the time to say you can solve all his problems. Being too eager at this stage makes you look desperate.

8. **Offer To Do Something.**

Nothing happens in a personal relationship until an offer is made: "Would you like to go to a movie sometime?" To further the selling process, offer to DO something. Offer to provide information, to develop some ideas, to show how a completed project was done, to make a connection. Design your offer so that another contact is necessary.

9. **Leave Before You Wear Out Your Welcome.**

Performers know you want to leave the audience "wanting more." So do good service professionals when they are selling. Set a specific time limit for the first sales call and stick to it. Typically, 75 minutes feels too long, 45 minutes is a little short. Plan for 45 and leave at 60 minutes.

10. **Summarize And Reconnect.**

At the end of the meeting, summarize your understanding of the prospect's needs. Most people will be stunned that you know them so well. Then, state when and how you plan to contact them again. Then do it, on schedule. You have a start of a relationship!

Catherine Jewell works with AEC firms to upgrade their business presentation and selling skills. The services of her company include sales workshops, marketing retreats and coaching for sales teams. She is the author of "STAR Performance." To learn more, visit www.CatherineJewell.com or e-mail her at cj@CatherineJewell.com

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