

MASTERING THE



COLD CALL

Eddy Mindlin
Sales Coach

Mastering The Cold Call

Without a doubt the single question I hear most frequently from live audiences and coaching clients has to do with cold calling. While there is universal agreement that cold prospecting is a necessary part of building a customer base, it is the rare sales professional who actually enjoys the process.

If you are one of those who dreads cold calling, whether in person or on the telephone, I have good news...this can become one of the more enjoyable aspects of your job, and when these basic strategies are mastered, you will see your income dramatically increase!

How can this be??? I believe the reason most salespeople are afraid of the prospect of cold calling is because they don't feel confident in knowing what to do on a cold call.

The first thing to remember is that this is not a sales call. Your goal is not to present your product or service, it is just to gather some basic information and begin a relationship. Just identifying the right person to follow up with makes a successful cold call.

The Cold Call

Here are the only things you'll want to do on a cold call. If you follow these steps you will enjoy success. Let's begin with the "in person" cold call. You walk into a place of business with a notepad and your business card. The first person you'll interact with is the receptionist. Here are the steps:

1. Introduce yourself to the receptionist. State your name and what company you are, along with his/her contact information, and write these down.

Tell the receptionist what you sell, and ask who at the company you should contact regarding your product or service. Ask the receptionist for this person's contact information and write that down. Give the receptionist two of your business cards. Ask him/her to please give one card to the person you should meet, and to keep the other card for his/her records. You want the receptionist to remember you.

Thank the receptionist, again using his/her name (this is important) for helping you. Let the receptionist know that you will be following up with the person he/she suggested .

Leave!! The cold call should only take 2-3 minutes. You want to accomplish the things above and be on your way. Get to the point and get the information you need. Do not linger!

That's it! That is all you need to do on a cold call. Pretty easy, right?!

For telephone cold calling it is almost exactly the same process. The only difference is that you won't leave business cards with the receptionist. Instead, ask the receptionist to please pass on your name to the correct person and to let that person know you will be calling him/her in a few days. Also ask the receptionist to keep your name and number.

The Follow Up

Now with this information, you should do the following follow-up:

1. Within 24 hours, email the receptionist and share that you enjoyed meeting him/her, and that you will soon be following up with the person he/she suggested. Thank the receptionist for passing along your card to this person. By thanking the receptionist, this usually insures your business card will be given to the correct person. Tell the receptionist that you look forward to seeing him/her on your next visit.

Why is this important? Who takes the time or interest to send an email to the receptionist? Hopefully you do because the receptionist (gate keeper) is the most important person for you to know at this company! You will get a lot of great information, over time, from this person.

If you doubt the truth of this statement, let me share a personal experience with you. I stayed in touch with the receptionist at an architectural firm over a period of many years, as I recall, at least ten years.

I worked very hard to have a friendly business relationship with her. We became friends and she would always meet with me even if the architects were too busy to see me. Because I was always pleasant and professional with her, she would talk with me and then pass along the new product information to the architects.

Sometimes I would see an architect, but most of the time I met only with the receptionist. I always kept these meetings brief as I knew she was busy. I was able to work on several small projects with this firm during the first several years of calling on them.

Then one afternoon the owner of the architectural firm called and told me he had a very important client that needed to have his entire building re-carpeted. He said he was calling me because he knew I had stayed in touch with his firm for many years. I met with the architect and his client, after doing a ton of work to prepare for the meeting. I sold the carpet for this entire building and I made a very substantial commission. This would not have been possible without those years of cultivating a relationship with the receptionist.

2. A couple days after your first visit (you want to wait a few days so the receptionist has time to give your card to the correct person), email or call the person the receptionist suggested you contact. If you call, you may talk to the receptionist first. If so, be sure to say hi and use his/her name! Ask to speak with with the person you are calling for, stating the name of the person the receptionist mentioned.

If you email or call directly to the person that makes the decisions, state who you are and what company you are with and then say: "the receptionist (use his/her name rather than using the word "receptionist") suggested I contact you about (state the product/service) you sell. When you state the receptionist's name, this really helps because the person you are talking to realizes you know the receptionist (good job!!) and will want to give you the benefit of the doubt, and meet with you so as not to upset the receptionist.

This may sound strange but it works! It is fine to tell this person that you were recently in their office and you had a nice visit with the receptionist (state his/her name). Then tell this person that you would appreciate “only 5 minutes of your time” so you can briefly introduce yourself and briefly let them know what you offer. By stating “just 5 minutes”, this makes the person much more likely to schedule a meeting with you because most salespeople waste the client's time.

Of course, frequently it is difficult to get in and see the decision maker. In cases like that your best friend in the organization can be the receptionist. I sold flooring to an entire nursing home due to staying in touch, over a long period of time, with the receptionist. The project manager was very difficult to meet with and did not like to see salespeople. I met with the receptionist many times and she was always interested in the flooring products I was showing her, and knew I would do a great job if her boss would allow me to meet with him. The receptionist “went to bat” for me and after several tries was successful in helping me get an appointment with her boss. I had a great meeting with the boss and he ended up hiring me to do the flooring in the entire building.

3. When you meet with the decision maker for the first time (say hi to the receptionist by name as you walk in!), only stay 5 minutes. At this meeting your goal is to shake hands, and in one minute tell the person what you sell. Be very direct. Then ask the client how he/she has bought this type of product/service in the past. Take notes on what is said! Taking notes shows you are listening and helps you remember details for future meetings. Then very quickly show the person one brochure. Ask when would be a good time for you to follow up with another meeting, to give this person more information about what you do. Then thank this person for his/her time, you look forward to your next meeting, and leave!

4. If you were allowed to set up the next meeting while you were at the first meeting, that is fine. If not, then within 24 hours, email this person, thanking him/her for their time, adding that you will email again during the time period he/she suggested to set up another meeting.

I became an Eagle Scout when I was young, and to this day remember and honor the scout motto, "Be Prepared." I mention this to introduce the idea that as a sales professional you always need to be ready to engage with a prospect. A good example of that happened to me several years ago when I was out to dinner with my wife. Across the dining room I recognized an architect that I had not seen in several years. I stopped by his table to say hello and he began sharing information about a large project he was designing. I offered to stop by his office the following week, and he agreed. The project was in an early stage, so required many follow up visits and numerous samples and spec sheets. Ultimately I won that bid and was able to sell a lot of my product, all because I was prepared and then followed up consistently over time.

5. Your goal is to SEE this person 5 times over a period of time. You want to show the person more things about what you sell each time you see him/her. You also want to LISTEN and take notes each time you meet or talk so you can learn more about this person, about previous purchase decisions, and likes and dislikes about products/ services that are similar to what you sell. Clients need to see a salesperson, on average, 5 times before they will even begin to trust the salesperson!

Finding the right time to follow up is sometimes difficult. I have lost a few jobs because I did not follow up at the right time. This is not fun, but I have learned from my mistakes and now I always ask my clients: "Please tell me when you would like me to follow up with you." Then I do exactly what they suggest and I follow up at the time they told me to. One time I lost an order because I waited too long for my next follow up. When I called my customer he said they had made a purchase the previous month.

That's it. You are now developing a relationship with the correct decision maker, and with each conversation you will be sharing additional ways that you can provide value. You are also gathering beneficial information about this person's needs, how he/she makes decisions at their company, and learning the best ways to eventually offer a proposal.

Selling is a process. It begins with an initial contact, and most of the time this means a cold call. By following these steps you will quickly master cold calls and follow up, and even learn to enjoy these two critical steps to building a customer base.