

Denver Business Journal - June 12, 2006

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DENVER BUSINESS JOURNAL

Friday, June 9, 2006

Walk a fine line between tenacity, being annoying

Denver Business Journal - by [Garry Duncan](#)

Tenacity in sales is essential.

Tenacious salespeople don't rely on luck for their success. Rather, they work toward a goal with determination, trying to make something happen. One of the biggest mistakes less successful business developers make is failure to follow up with potential customers and prospects.

The dilemma is identifying the fine line between being tenacious and being downright annoying. The answer isn't readily clear, because measuring annoyance is highly subjective. Most of us have experienced stimuli such as advertising jingles, commercials, poor telemarketing or retail techniques that are irritating and annoying.

Studies report 81 percent of all sales happen on or after the fifth contact. So how many follow-up calls are OK? If your answer is six or eight times, you have to wonder how to call someone that many times without being a pest.

Making repeated follow-up calls requires exceptional people skills. Interacting with you must be fun and enjoyable for your contacts. Since prospects come in different packages, it means being adaptable to fit the communication style of the receiver.

Make the most of each contact to develop the relationship. Be especially tuned in to your prospect's tonality when using the telephone. Tonality conveys 80 percent of a person's emotion and feelings on the telephone. By matching and mirroring the tonality of your prospect, you'll build rapport and comfort more quickly.

Focus on the prospect by learning as much about them as possible. Gather information about personal interests and hobbies. This demonstrates you're willing to put in the extra effort to gain their business. Dale Carnegie said, "You can make more friends in two months by becoming really interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you." Try to remember something special about each person you call.

Ask your prospect if they have preferences in how you contact them and the best times to call. Use language such as, "I don't want to be a pest, but I want to stay in touch with you." Asking, "What generally are the most convenient times that I may attempt to reach you?" sends a positive message about your intent and concern for their schedule. Other good questions are "What should I do if I don't hear back from you?" or "How will your assistant know to put me

through?" Their answers clarify the level of interest and their commitment to you.

If you don't get the responses or return calls you're seeking, perhaps you're missing something important. A direct approach is best. For example, "I seem to be missing something here. Either I am becoming a pest or I have misunderstood your needs. Can you help me?"

Remember that prospects love to buy and hate to be sold. Most prospects want to help you help them. They must feel comfortable to open up and share their feelings and concerns. Stop selling, listen carefully and be appreciative.

Always be respectful of their time and appreciative of their interaction with you. Ask them directly if they have a moment before starting a dialogue. Find out about regularly scheduled meetings so you can avoid calling at those times. E-mail may be more convenient, but a personal handwritten note or personal card is much more powerful because it will be remembered longer. Be brief, appreciative and clear with your "thank you."

Convey the value of what you have from the prospect's perspective. Your conviction is imperative. Too many salespeople approach prospects in a way that says more about their own interest in the sale than about what is in it for the customer. When others feel you have their best interest at heart, they are less likely to see you as an annoyance.

Humor is good, especially if you can use it naturally. Humor removes the edge and keeps everything light. Of course, what's funny to one person may not be to another, so be careful. You'll usually be safe with self-deprecating comments. "I am back on the streets but really harmless" or some other lighthearted statement can go a long way with the right person.

Finally, realize when it's time to move on to other prospects. Because it's so easy for us to be emotionally involved with a potential sale, consider re-qualifying your lead with an objective outsider or fellow employee. You must value your own resources and time.

Tenacity only works with real opportunities, so do your homework. Ask pertinent questions and listen to the responses. Keep the client's issues at the top of every discussion. Don't make frivolous calls without good questions or solutions, and be respectful of your client's time.

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