



Developing People > Advancing Business



*Thoughts about selling from Alfred Tack, one
of the world's most successful salespeople.*

GETTING AN INTERVIEW

WHITE PAPER

Reprinted with Permission.

Revised by Janelle M. Barlow, Ph.D.

CEO, TACK-USA

2009

TACK-USA • 8270 West Charleston Boulevard • Las Vegas, NV 89117
www.tack-usa.com 702 939 1800

GETTING AN INTERVIEW

It is wise to be armed with every scrap of information that can help you to close an order. It is right to plan your sales offer. It is correct to check your sales information before a call. But these preparations are wasted if a prospective buyer won't see you. Interviews can be hard to get when a buyer is well guarded.

Managing directors, production and I.T. managers, project and advertising managers, purchasing personnel, store buyers, and buyers for retail chains, are usually in their offices or workshops, and between them and salespeople are assistants, secretaries, receptionists — all ready to bar the way.

Whether a salesperson is seen by a buyer largely depends on need for the product or service being offered. Salespeople selling repeat products, and to many retail outlets, have no problems getting interviews. But salespeople selling capital goods, services, or trying to open new accounts for component parts or any form of merchandise often waste valuable time getting to be seen, when they should be selling.

Appointments by Telephone

How can a salesperson get the maximum number of interviews? What alternatives are available? Salespeople can call cold or make an appointment by telephone.

Even if given a lead to follow up with someone, the salesperson will, more often than not, still have to telephone for an appointment. Cold calling or prospecting, as it is sometimes termed, will always have its place in selling, but it is usually a fill-in for most salespeople. Rather than waste time between appointments a salesperson will often physically call cold on any near-by prospects. But prospecting as a planned system of working can be very time-consuming. For example, there can be long waits in reception areas until the buyer is available. Also, a full day's work may result in only two good



interviews. But telephoning in advance may enable a salesperson to make four or five appointments a day.

Preparation

Unless the telephone call is made on a routine basis by a salesperson calling on customers every few weeks or months, customers like to set aside time to see the salesperson, the basis of all telephone selling — and making appointments by telephone is hard selling — must be good preparation. There are several rules to follow before making an appointment by telephone to prospective buyers, and one golden rule:

You must find out the prospect's name.

Knowing the prospect's name will help you to handle the telephone operator or whoever stands between you and the prospect, and by addressing the buyer by name you are able to bring immediate warmth to the relationship.

When you telephone either customers or prospects, remember:

1. You must have customer files or information cards available. This information allows you to anticipate a customer's or prospect's questions or objections to giving an interview. A customer may have had a delivery complaint. A prospect might not have purchased from you previously because your prices were considered to be too high. With this knowledge available you can forestall negatives before you ever get a chance to see the prospect.
2. Directories, brochures, and any other information that you may need should be at hand. The names and telephone numbers of calls you intend making should be listed in front of you, and of course pen and paper, or computer keyboard, available for making notes.
3. Your calendar is critical. Whenever possible you will suggest days and times for appointments to suit your convenience.
4. Your aim must be to fill the days ahead with appointments.
5. Make sure that you will not be disturbed while telephoning.

TACK-USA • 8270 West Charleston Boulevard • Las Vegas, NV 89117

www.tack-usa.com 702 939 1800

6. Do we need to say: never, never ask someone else to get the buyer on the line for you. Always dial direct yourself. But the other way happens all the time. Most customers will simply hang up when they're asked to wait for a salesperson.

Now, are you ready? Let's assume your name is Chris Manning, and that you are calling a production director, Mr. Tripp.

Although you want to speak to Mr. Tripp personally you must never make a misleading statement to obtain your objective.

Making the Call

Pick up the telephone, dial the number, and on being greeted by the telephone operator ask to speak to Mr Tripp.

One of three things can happen:

1. The operator will transfer you immediately to Mr. Tripp and all will be well.
2. The operator will ask you your business
3. The operator may put you through to Mr Tripp's assistant.

To avoid 2 and 3 you must have an authoritative approach: "Will you please tell Mr Tripp your production manager that Chris Manning is on the line for him. Thank you."

The use of "Chris" personalizes the approach. Never use the prefix Mr. alone. The *thank you* gives your statement a finality that does not invite any response.

Unless the telephone operator has special screening instructions regarding incoming calls, you will be put through to Mr. Tripp.

Now we come to 2. The operator asks you for further information. You answer quite simply:

"It's a business matter."

Don't add anything further. It's not a misleading statement because it is a business matter (not a personal call) that only you can discuss with Mr. Tripp, the production manager.

Alternatively it will show equal authority if you imply that you wish to discuss something of importance — for example:

"It's in connection with Mr. Tripp's new factory production plans — output — forecast...."

There is another excellent approach if a letter has been sent in advance to the buyer. Then you can say,

"It's in reference to the letter I wrote him . . ."

If the operator has been instructed to insist on obtaining information from every caller asking for Mr. Tripp you must say,

"I am sorry but it is a very involved matter. I think it might be best if you put me through to Mr Tripp's assistant."

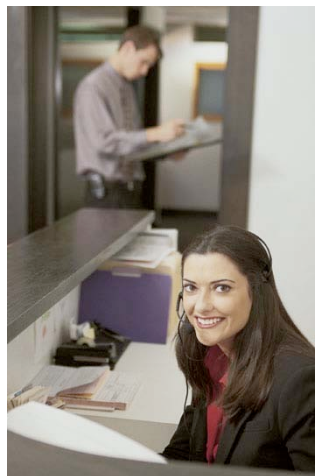
It is sometimes advisable when making appointments to ask for an assistant in the first place, but in the main it is better to ask for the executive concerned. The assistant may be away or out of the office, and in this event the operator may put you straight through to the man you want to contact.

If you do speak to the assistant, however, either by your own request or because the operator has instructions, you will then have the selling task of persuading this person to make an appointment for you to see Mr. Tripp. In this case, use the golden words:

"I'd like to ask your advice. I want to see Mr. Tripp because.. ."

You will not win every time, but you will win far more often than you will lose. In the majority of cases you will, therefore, be able to speak to Mr. Tripp.

What do you say to him?



The Hinge

There should, whenever possible, be a hinge on which to hang your approach. This can be a letter that you or your company has written, an advertisement, a new product — a special claim you can make for your product — or a reference from a friend or business associate.



Your approach could be :

“Mr. Tripp, this is Chris Manning of the Bridgewater Machine Tool Company. Have you a moment to speak on the telephone?”

This courteous request — “Have you a moment . . .” is not laid down as a fixed rule. It can, however, be very effective. It relaxes the prospect because you have only asked for a moment of time. Also it shows a courtesy that is lacking in so many telephone calls.

Whether you use this sentence or not, you must now repeat the prospect's name, after you have given the name of your company.

Letter Hinge

“Mr. Tripp, did you receive my letter?”

“No, what was it about?”

“Mr. Tripp it was about your...”

Reference Hinge

“Mr. Tripp, we haven't met, but John Williams asked me to contact you . . .”

You then have to sell Mr. Smith the idea that you are worth seeing.

Question Hinge

When you haven't a hinge of any kind, ask a question:

“Mr. Tripp this is Chris Manning of the Bessing Group. Have you heard of our organization?”

Whether you receive the reply Yes or No is immaterial, because it will take you smoothly into the main reason for your call.

The Quick Approach Close

In all forms of selling it is axiomatic that a salesperson should think of the close the minute the sale begins, but in telephone selling there is a difference. You can actually close at the approach.

The buyer might be influenced by the name of your company, or interested in the product or service you are selling or he likes the sound of your voice — you sound like someone he should listen too — or it may even be that he is very busy and tends to make quick decisions. Whatever the reason, this form of approach does get appointments. This is how to do it:

With conviction in your voice to create the impression that there cannot be a refusal you say, “Good morning Mr. Tripp, this is Chris Manning of Halliday Publications. I should like to take up just eight minutes of your time to tell you about our new journal for your industry and its wonderful advertising pull. I'm going to be in St. Paul on Wednesday. Would Wednesday morning or Wednesday afternoon be more convenient for me to call on you?”

This approach covers a lot of ground. It is brief; it asks for only a short interview; it states your business; it closes.

Be Special

A wonderful word to use in all approaches is *special*, or *specially*:

“Mr. Tripp, I am calling you *specially* to tell you about . . .”

“ Mr. Tripp, there is a *special* reason why I should like to see you . . .”

Keep to the Rules

Although the quick close will get you interviews, in many cases there will be a request for further information.

Here are some points to remember:

Time is not on your side, so keep the benefit short.

You must not become involved in a full sales offer.

Keep the objective in mind: *to obtain an interview.*

You must use short sentences.

You must use understandable words.

You must be authoritative, but never talk down to the buyer.

You must not try to be too clever. You have to persuade the prospect that you are a sincere person by the words you use, and by the tone of your voice.

You must have a reason for not giving full information over the telephone, e.g. samples to be shown, a model of a building to examine, figures to analyze, a drawing to discuss, or matters so personal that they should be discussed face to face.

The Main Benefit

You must stake your claim for an interview in a few compelling words :

“I’d like to show you some recent information on . . .”

“You will want to consider six ideas for cutting down overhead in your offices . . .”

“We have designed a very unusual saving plan that will be of great benefit to you . . .”

“The Mighty Midget office copier is no bigger than your desk pad. Knowing something of your company’s activities I’m sure once you see it you would find this of tremendous help for personal use . . .”

“You would want to handle the stitcher yourself, to see how well it works . . .”

Your aim is to intrigue prospects, to interest them so that they will want to hear more and will give you an interview.

The Objections

What could be objections to what you have said? The prospect can hardly object to your product or service, because you have only given the barest outline. The prospect could only object to you taking up time for an interview.

The potential customer could answer:

“I will see you” — and all will be well. You got your appointment.

“Send me the information.”

“Tell me now.”

“I’m too busy.”

There are several ways of tackling the request for further information.

“Ms. Taylor, you would want to have some one walk you through the proof of how a company has been able to increase overall production by up to 28 per cent.”

“What I want to talk to you about, Mr. Jones, is details of a new way in which you can protect your money and beat inflation. This requires applying our new concept to your numbers. Would next Tuesday morning . . .?”

“Ms. Travis, I know your business demands a very fast delivery service. We can provide that at low cost, and you will want to examine this claim. It is for this reason that I want the opportunity of meeting you so I can show you in person how our approach applied to your shipping needs can save you money. May I call . . .”



"I cannot advise you, Mr. Blackstone, until I know one or two things about your company . . ."

"You would need to look at our analysis forms, Mrs. Fitzpatrick, and I'll bring them with me. It will only take a few minutes. May I call on. . .?"

To the statement, "I am too busy", the salesperson has several answers, according to what is being sold.

"That is why I am telephoning you, Mr. Franklin, because I know you are so busy. I can help you in this direction by cutting down some of the demands on your time."

Ego building can also be a sound policy:

"Ms. Kellogg, I have found that it is the busy people like you who are most interested . . ."

Or assume that the prospect is only encountering a temporary rush of business:

"Of course, Mr. Howell, I know how busy you are. I was not thinking of disturbing you today or tomorrow. Will you be able to see me on Thursday or Friday of next week?"

If you reach a point where you feel you are antagonizing the prospect, then you must never shut the door to a future appointment.

"I'll call you again in two weeks time, Mrs. Allison."

If this does not work there is always one final request which you can make. It is rarely refused:

"Mr. Calhoun, there are some times of the day when you are not so busy as others — although I appreciate that you cannot specify exactly when that is.

I'll be in your area next Thursday. When I am near your offices, may I call on the off-chance of seeing you?"

The prospect will nearly always say Yes and this is noted in your cold-calling file.

Following the telephone call, after two or three visits at the most you will find that you will get to see Mr. Calhoun.

The Close
TACK-USA

Tying up an appointment is different from locking up an order, when you can use any of the standard closes set out in your sales presentation. This is not possible when selling the interview. Nearly always, you'll find yourself using the Alternative Close, based on an appointment time.

Most salespeople suggest a time for a meeting on the hour or the half-hour. You can be different. Put forward 9.10 a.m. or 3.50 p.m.

The very unexpected nature of this suggestion will often bring its own reward, but the main reason for using this technique is that many busy people make appointments on the hour or half-hour, some of which will last for the full period, while others will be cut short. The odd time, therefore, will often appeal to the prospect whose appointments on the hour may leave periods in between that are free.

Remember, you are only asking for a few minutes of time, knowing that if you interest the prospect he or she will ask you to stay. The close can, therefore, be :

"Will Wednesday or Thursday suit you best, Ms. O'Neill?"

"Er — Wednesday."

"Morning, or afternoon?"

"Afternoon is best for me."

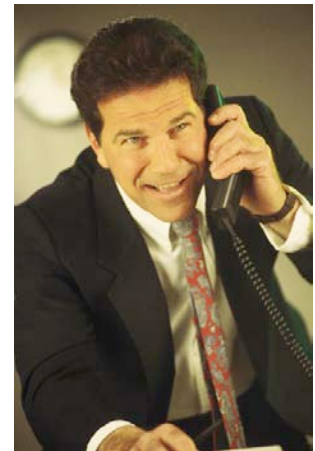
"That's fine, Ms. O'Neill, can you make it two-ten? Or would four-fifty be more convenient?"

"Ten past two would suit me."

"Thank you, Ms. O'Neill, I'll send you an e-mail to confirm our meeting. I look forward to being with you at ten past two on Wednesday."

Example:

(A sales representative, of Arrow Weighing Machine Company is telephoning a production director seeking an appointment.)



Getting the Interview

"Mr. Harvey? Good morning, this is Robin Resler of the Arrow Weighing Machine Company. We met some three years ago when the maintenance contract on your weighing equipment was arranged. Can you spare me a moment?"

"Yes."

"Mr. Harvey, your contract is due for renewal next month. No doubt you'll want to see the new proposal — may I call on Wednesday..?"

"There's no need for you to come here — you can mail the papers on to me, or send them by email."

"Thank you, Mr. Harvey. But reports from my engineers show that certain machines are being used either less or more than they were three years ago. You will agree that we should try to get the frequency of maintenance on each machine in relation to its use and importance. On Wednesday, I can explain . . ."

"You'd better talk to my chief engineer about this — he'll know what he wants and I will accept his recommendations, provided the charge for the contract isn't any higher than before. Costs seem to keep rising."

"They do indeed, Mr. Harvey, and you will understand that in providing a service a very high proportion of the premium is directly related to labor costs — and we both know how wages keep going up. In any event, you and I can work this out between us, and I'm sure you will agree that we should have a talk about it. Would Wednesday . . .?"

Particular Points

1. Reason for call made clear. Mr. Harvey might have agreed to see the salesperson without more discussion.
2. A valid, although secondary reason for wanting an appointment.
3. The primary reason comes out but is not dealt with, as Robin Resler does not want to become involved in a price discussion. The need for the meeting is brought to a "you and I" situation. Robin has raised the importance of the issue, and has built up Mr Harvey's ego.

Conclusion

To succeed in obtaining more appointments by telephone, you must:

know your prospects and their business

have a definite reason for asking for the interview

have a planned approach

have a main benefit to stress the need for the appointment

be prepared to listen, and don't pounce. (It might be that the prospect is about to give you an interview when you interrupt.)

smile when you talk on the telephone

talk a little slower than usual

if not making headway, ask questions

sound enthusiastic. Your enthusiasm will vibrate over the wires and will do more than anything else to get that appointment for you.

The obtaining of appointments is a challenge to all salespeople — a challenge that, if accepted, can lead to a far greater volume of business.

Prospecting

Business cards have their uses when calling on customers. A buyer who sees many salespeople cannot be expected to remember every name, but if the prospect has the visiting card, sent in by the receptionist or assistant, the buyer can refresh his or her mind by glancing at it. Sometimes a buyer asks for a card. Rather than apologize for not having one, always carry your business cards. If you have called on a buyer several times, each time



sending your business card in with a receptionist, and each time failing in your mission, you must work to a different plan.

The card might show the name of a company — Johnsons Tools, Inc., for example. A buyer glances at it, and being satisfied with present suppliers, returns it with the message: nothing today. But the salesperson representing Johnsons Tools, Inc. might have a special tool that would interest that particular buyer: this information cannot be learned from the card.

Thousands of salespeople make thousands of ineffective calls, because they persist in using cards for the wrong reasons. Here is a technique which usually brings about interviews.

If the prospect office is guarded by a receptionist, it is essential that you walk briskly up to the desk. If you have a hangdog look or appear ill-at-ease, you won't succeed even in the first part of your task, which is to convey a sense of the importance of your visit to the receptionist.

You smile and say, "Good morning, will you please tell Mr. Bhatt that Pat Robinson is here to see him." Spell your name "R-o-b-i-n-s-o-n" Then look away as if preoccupied with thoughts of great importance.

If you indicate that you expect to be questioned the receptionist will invariably, ask, "What is your business?" In most cases she will telephone Mr Brown and tell him that Pat Robinson is here to see him. Mr. Bhatt then has two choices: he can ask the receptionist "Will you please find out what Robinson wants," or he can say, "Tell Robinson to come up and see me."

If, however, in spite of your looking away, the receptionist asks for information, you must give it. If, when telephoning Mr. Bhatt, she says, "Mr. Bhatt has asked the reason for your visit," try to answer Mr. Bhatt's question yourself. You need only say, "May I just have a word with him?" Now it is up to you to convince Mr. Bhatt that he should see you.

This technique, therefore, gives an opportunity for an interview which is impossible when you just hand over a business card. You will find that it will lead to at least two interviews from every four calls.

Here are some simple rules to remember for obtaining more interviews:

1. Treat receptionists with respect. You're more likely to get their co-operation. It's amazing how many receptionists are treated poorly.
2. Don't wait about too long. Your time is valuable. If someone is going to keep you waiting thirty or forty minutes it may be better to make a call elsewhere.
3. If there is any reading matter relating to the firm's activities in the reception office, study it while you are waiting. You may be able to refer to it when you finally get in to see your appointment.
4. If you are kept waiting for some time, don't keep bothering the receptionist.
5. When the prospect or the prospect's assistant comes into the waiting room, don't forget to stand up. This person will appreciate words like, "I am so grateful for your help," or "I wonder if you can help me..." Most people like to help others.



* * * * *