

MAKING 'COLD CALLING' EASY (IER)

BUILDING POWERFUL SCRIPTS AND HANDLING THE FIVE CATEGORIES OF 'NO'

By Barry D. Caponi, Caponi Performance Group

If you're looking to increase your sales, there are two reasons to look at the appointment setting process. **First, there is no better way to proactively control your own destiny than to make more effective appointment making calls. There is a direct correlation between the number of dials made and the size of one's commission check.** Second, it is the one stage of the buying process that can act as a fulcrum and dramatically impact the final results of the process. In other words, an increase in the number of Initial Meetings provides a larger foundation for more sales, even if you are no more effective in the subsequent stages of the buying/selling process. Some of this advantage is pure math, but some also impact your business in subtle, yet substantial ways. For instance, how would your margins increase if you were in a stronger negotiating position because you had a full pipeline when trying to close deals? How would the atmosphere around your office improve if the discussions changed to those of how to better qualify the many more prospects you have, creating better proposals and closing deals instead of the negative vibes that accompany the 'we need more activity' and 'we can't afford to lose this deal' type discussions you're probably having now? And while I can't say this necessary task is painless, I believe this process makes it more effective, easier and less painful to perform.

This article examines how to effectively set appointments once you've got your suspect on the phone. There's a lot more to this process such as how to handle gatekeepers and how to use voicemail and email, but these are the basics of the actual call. If you'd like to read about the whole challenge of setting appointments, what are the alternatives, what kind of tools exists to make it easier, etc., There is a website (put link) or way to request a white paper that addresses those topics.

The Concepts behind Appointment Setting Calls

Before beginning any discussion of *how* to be more successful setting appointments, one must understand the ground rules by which the people you're calling play. It is important to understand these concepts because they are the underpinnings of how we approach the challenge of setting appointments.

When a suspect receives an appointment setting call, any of four operative laws can come into play:

1. The law of **'FEW Suspects in the Market'** – on average less than five percent of suspects in any given universe are currently in the market when you call;
2. The law of **'Get 'em off the phone at any cost'** - your suspect will do anything (including lie) to get you off the phone;

3. The law of **‘Workus Interruptus’** – no matter when you call, you are practicing interruptive marketing;
4. The law of the **‘Reciprocal Response’** is invoked – your suspect will generally respond in the same manner you approach them;

What a salesperson can do to increase the likelihood of keeping any of the laws from stopping the appointment call. It does make a difference what you say and how you say it - so:

1. You must be respectful of their time, so keep it short and to the point;
2. The purpose of an appointment making call should be to set an appointment and additionally build enough value to make them look forward to the Initial Meeting - **NOT TO SELL**;
3. Be professional, yet upbeat and enthusiastic (you do believe in what you’re selling, don’t you?);
4. You must offer something of value to them by offering to share some specific benefit oriented information about how you’ve helped others in their position (not, how you can help them – a subtle, but important difference). Offering to tell them about your new widgets does not cut it. The fact that your new widgets just increased their competitor’s market share by 10%...does;
5. Control the flow of the conversation by knowing what you’re going to say – but internalize your script to make it sound conversational and consistent so that;
 - a. You can predict the Conditioned Responses you’ll hear – they’ll be very consistent if you deliver the same message every time, and if you can predict those responses you can be prepared to counter them effectively and automatically;
 - b. **Believe** the first Conditioned Response is not true – and use the Counters and ‘Bridge’ questions to refocus the direction of the conversation so you can;
 - c. Ask for the appointment again without hesitation – leave dead air and they’ll throw up another flavor of Conditioned Response or question for you to handle.

The Process and Elements of an Appointment Setting Call

There are three stages of an appointment making call.

1. Approach
2. Suspect’s favorite Conditioned Response
3. Countering their Conditioned Response and asking for the Appointment again

The **Approach** contains the following three elements plus an optional fourth:

1. Greeting and Introduction
 - a. The Greeting is pretty simple. All you want to say is hello and state their name to make sure you’ve got their attention. An example would be, “Good morning, Bob” or “Good morning Mr. Abacrombie”.

- b. The Introduction is how you introduce yourself and what I like to call an eleven second commercial. Mine is, "My name is Barry Caponi and I'm the president of the Caponi Performance Group. We're a sales training firm based in Dallas."

I've told them my name, the company I represent, and what we do. As the meat of the call will come in the 'Purpose', that's all I need. However, if I want to add a little 'credibility' statement, I could add, "...and we're one of the leading experts in the country on the appointment setting step of the sales process." I have done it both ways and can measure no perceptible difference in effectiveness. I believe in keeping it short and the purpose for the call is much more important, so I generally leave it off.

2. Purpose for the call

Here is the meat of your call. Start with the transition statement, "The reason I'm specifically calling you today is..." Using this statement lets them know you're getting right to the point and may head off a dreaded Conditioned Response before you get a chance to tell them the reason you called!

The purpose for the call should include:

1. What you've done for others (not what you can do for them);
2. A request for a face-to-face meeting (or WebEx, or phone appointment)
3. An offer to share how you've done that for others (success story)
4. Optionally, an offer to share how others in their position feel about the value it brought to their organization (testimonial)

Mine is, "The reason I'm specifically calling you today is that we've had outstanding results from a new program enabling our client's sales teams to double or better the number of first appointments they were setting. I'd like to stop by your office and share with you how we were able to do that and what our client's are telling us about the increase in sales that resulted."

3. The first request for the appointment

- a. Would you be available Tuesday afternoon at 2:00?" Remember, you're trying to keep it as short as possible, so ask for a specific day and time. Although I don't have a major problem with, "Is Tuesday or Thursday better for you?" you sound more professional and in control of your own calendar by asking for a specific time and day. You're also getting right to the point and they won't feel 'trapped'. If they say Tuesday at 2:00 won't work, trust me, you can work something else out.

4. Optional qualifying question if required

- a. If you must qualify, do so **after** you've gained the appointment. Here's an example of how to transition into the questions:
- b. "In order to help me be better prepared for our meeting, do you mind if I ask you a couple of questions?" (Keep it as short as you can.

Remember you told them the reason for the call was to set an appointment, not collect information.)

Suspect's favorite Conditioned Response

It is here that the suspect first gets to play. On the surface, it may seem like they don't play very fair. But in reality, they do. If you are delivering the same message each time, the responses will fall into predictable patterns. (It's one of the reasons why scripts are so useful.) Up to this point they are thinking of nothing but how to get you off the phone because they don't think they need what you're selling, so they will fall back on their favorite Conditioned Response designed to get rid of you. You must buy into the fact that this first one has very little to do with reality.

The good news is that the responses are very predictable and there are only five major categories of them to prepare to handle. They are:

1. They'll make a direct statement or ask you a question
2. Already have one - either they do it internally or they are happy with their current vendor
3. Don't need one – this one comes in the most flavors, no budget, don't use them, etc.
4. Can't talk right now - which can mean either right that minute or that they are busy for a period of time (tax accountant in the spring)
5. Send me information - "What's your website address?", is the new version of this

Countering Their Conditioned Responses

This is where you earn your money. The process so far has been leading up to this point where you ply your skills and 'Counter' their knee jerk Conditioned Response(s).

Let me make an important observation here before we begin. None of these techniques work all of the time. Once I get through to the person I want to talk with, I am only successful fifty percent of the time (and I am *very* good at this). But if a .300 hitter in baseball can make hundreds of thousands of dollars a year, why not you!

The key element of this approach is called 'Bridging'. How this concept is used is what differentiates it from any other appointment setting process I've seen. It is designed to do two things:

1. 'Bridge' you back into control of the conversation after the suspect asks you a question;
2. Provides you the ability to 'Bridge' from the suspects' knee jerk reaction into a short conversation providing you a platform to expand on your value proposition before you ask for the appointment again. It will reduce no shows and cancellations and is the most powerful piece of this process;

Rules for 'Bridge' questions – each question should:

- Get you an answer that helps qualify and gets you into a short conversation to build the value for the Initial Meeting;

- Call for a relatively short answer using an open ended question;
 - Return a predictable answer you can control with, "...that's exactly why we need to get together. How is Tuesday at 2:00?"
1. Countering the Direct Question or Statement
 - a. You must answer the question or statement before doing anything else or you will have no credibility;
 - b. You have also just lost control of the flow, so ask a 'Bridge' question to regain control immediately after answering their question;
 - c. After they answer yours, you must ask for the appointment again – no dead air.
 2. Countering "Already have one"
 - a. Don't fight it. Instead use the old 'Feel, felt, found' (indirect denial) approach using the approach of enhancing or leveraging what they've already done. For example, my answer to the existence of an internal training program is, "Some of my best clients told me exactly the same thing until they heard how we had helped others actually leverage the investment they had made in their internal training program."
 - b. Then I ask a 'Bridge' question such as, "I'm just curious, what kind of internal training are you currently doing?" After they answer, I'll say, "That's exactly why we need to get together, because...!" and ask for the appointment again.
 3. Countering "Don't need one"
 - a. Use the same transition to begin your response, but instead of leveraging you must have a benefit statement to use that applies to the flavor of the response. For instance, "Sales are down so we don't have any budget", can be answered with, "Some of my best clients...until they heard how we were not only able to remedy their revenue challenge, but also how flexible we were in arranging payment."
 - b. Then I ask a 'Bridge' question and ask for the appointment again.
 4. Countering "Can't talk right now"
 - a. Don't succumb to the temptation to ask when would be a good time to talk. Instead, try, "I totally understand. As a matter of fact, the only reason I called was to set an appointment. How is Tuesday at 2:00?"
 - b. There are some other variations on this one that are beyond the scope of this article.
 5. Countering "Send me some information"
 - a. Many sales reps think they've got a 'hot one' when this occurs. Don't fall into that trap – they have no intention of reading what you send;
 - b. Either – "I'd really rather just get together. How is Tuesday...", or;
 - c. "I'd love to, but to make sure I send you pertinent information, do you mind if I ask you a couple of questions?" (They can't really say no to this!) Ask a 'Bridge' question.

Summary and Next Steps

For those visual learners and as a summary of the above description, a diagram of the appointment making process is provided on page 40.

Companies that implement this methodology along with some automation (recommended) will generally see a doubling or better in appointments set. But the key to making this, or any other appointment making process work, is putting in the effort to do the upfront 'homework'. That includes a script that is compelling and gets predictable responses, preparing to Counter those Conditioned Responses you'll get, writing a couple of really good 'Bridge' questions and then practicing again and again until it is second nature!

There is an old adage that says if you don't act on an idea within forty-eight hours, you never will. So if you'd like some help increasing your commissions, give us a call or send us an email right now. We love helping people make money!

Barry Caponi is a graduate of Northern Illinois University, class of 1972. He is also the president of the Caponi Performance Group, a sales training and consulting company located in Dallas, Texas. Mr Caponi can be contacted via email at bca-poni@caaponipg.com. The Caponi Performance Group can be reached at (817) 224-9900, the website address is www.caponipg.com.

