

Opening Statement and Voicemail Makeovers and Case Studies

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**BusinessByPhone.com
SmartCalling.com**

Welcome!

Makeover shows are some of the most popular on TV. Whether they be run down homes, landscaping, or people, seeing a transformation is often amazing, and entertaining.

What I've put together for you adds to that list. It will also be profitable.

For attendees at my seminars and for buyers of certain products I often offer the service of reviewing their opening statements and voice mail messages. You will see some of those here. Also, I get a number of calls at my office. I pick some of those apart as well.

Read through these examples. Learn from the mistakes, model the afters, and profit from them!

A GPS Voicemail/Opening Statement Makeover

Here's one I received the other day from a rep calling on owners of fleets of vehicles, selling GPS tracking software. Warning: I am not going to be gentle here.

Here's the "before," which is a voice mail message on a prospecting call.

"Hello, this is ___ calling from ___, in regards to GPS tracking software for the vehicles and the info I sent you on it. I wanted to see if you had a few minutes to talk so I can learn more about your company, how the fleet operates each day, what your challenges are, and to see if it makes sense to set up a free demo of the product. I know we can help cut expenses and help the fleet be more efficient, but if you have no interest in learning about what I can do for you, I certainly don't want to waste your time. If you could please return my call, or at least reply to my email and let me know where you stand in regards to this, I would really appreciate that courtesy. I can be reached at _____...thanks and I hope to hear from you soon."

There are fatal flaws in just about every sentence. Let's pick it apart.

1. "Hello, this is ___ calling from _____, in regards to GPS tracking software for the vehicles and the info I sent you on it."

When you mention your product or service, they can resist that. People don't buy a product or service, they buy the result. This would make it easy to say, "I don't need GPS," or "I'm all set." Also, don't make the info you sent as the reason for the call. They probably did not read it if they did not request it. Sending it is OK, but if they read it, it's a bonus.

2. "I wanted to see if you had a few minutes to talk so I can learn more about your company, how the fleet operates each day, what your challenges are, and to see if it makes sense to set up a free demo of the product."

The caller is asking for something from the prospect--time--before he has given any reason at all for the prospect to even listen one moment longer. Then he says what he wants to do: learn about the company, etc. Again, with no reason why the prospect should do so. Then he adds, "to see if it makes sense to set up a free demo," which is again suggesting that the prospect take time to do something, without seeing any value. The prospect still has not heard one hint of any possible value he would receive.

3. "I know we can help cut expenses and help the fleet be more efficient..." Put yourself in the position of the listener. You have not yet heard anything to suggest that the caller has done any research, knows anything about you or your company, how the caller might have done this for anyone else similar, nor any other smidge of possible value for staying on the phone one second longer, but yet the caller KNOWS he can help cut expenses and help the fleet be more efficient. A logical reaction from the prospect would be, "You don't know a thing about me, nor have you established any credibility, yet you are confident in what you KNOW you could do. That is pretty much telling me I'm doing something wrong. That's an arrogant statement."

4. "...but if you have no interest in learning about what I can do for you, I certainly don't want to waste your time."

Too late. You've already done that.

5. "If you could please return my call, or at least reply to my email and let me know where you stand in regards to this, I would really appreciate that courtesy. I can be reached at _____...thanks and I hope to hear from you soon."

Just because the caller has this prospect on his list, leaving the same generic message that he undoubtedly has clogged the voicemailboxes of hundreds of others with, he feel he deserves the courtesy of a response? What? Let's turn it around: How about the providing the courtesy of knowing something about the person you are calling,

personalizing the message, and suggesting some possible value and reason why this person might have some interest.

OK, so what SHOULD our caller say? First, he should do some Smart Call research and Social Engineering to ask questions, to learn something about the company, the fleet, any challenges they might have, and something about the decision maker. Then he would use that information to tailor a Possible Value Statement to hint at what he might be able to do for the prospect, pique his curiosity and interest, with the only other goal of getting him talking, NOT asking for a demo.

Let's look at a possible version of this.

"Hi, this is ___ with ___. I understand from speaking with your dispatcher, Mike, that a concern you're having is with the efficiency of your fleet and fuel expenses. We have worked with over 40 other delivery services to cut down on fuel costs and increase their deliveries per hour. To see if it would be worth taking a look at some information I'd like to ask a few questions if you have a moment..."

An Opening Statement Makeover

Let me share one with you that a fellow sales pro submitted:

"Hi ___, this is ___ with _____. The reason for my call today is we are a franchised stocking distributor of electronic components and we specialize in helping buyers such as yourself lessen the amount of time you spend procuring your electronic requirements."

My first reaction was that it wasn't bad overall, but it could be improved and have some "Smart Call" technology applied.

First, a small point, but at the beginning I prefer saying "I'm" to "this is." It's half as many words, and less formal. I know I'm doing micro-surgery here, but every word counts. Just sayin.

After the introduction, in the Smart Calling process I like to see a connection, where we plug in some of the intelligence we have gathered. In this case, he could do some Social Engineering and ask questions of someone else in the buyers department (Yes, this works. It worked for me as recently as, oh, yesterday.) He could find out what they buy, from whom, and very importantly, if there are any problems or pains in the purchasing process that would ensure that saving time in the procurement process would indeed be a benefit.

Next, even though there are instances where I have recommended saying "The reason for my call today...", we can eliminate that and go right into the value statement. More on that in a sec.

I'm OK with saying they are a franchised stocking distributor--which does not mean they sell brand name socks... sorry, couldn't resist--since that is important to the types of buyers he speaks with.

I would take out "buyers such as yourself" since that is redundant.

Finally, we can simplify and make more conversational the "lessen the amount of time you spend procuring ..."

Also, it could be strengthened with another benefit.

Oh yeah, we need a transition to get to the questions.

Here is my suggested revision.

"Hi _____. I'm _____ with _____. I understand that you now spend quite a bit of time sourcing and buying your electronic components. We are a franchised stocking distributor and specialize in helping buyers find what they need quickly and usually ship them the same day. I'd like to ask few questions to see if I could provide you some information."

All we are trying to do is put them in a positive, receptive state of mind, and move them to the interactive, questioning part of the call. The reaction we are looking for with the opening is, "Sure, what do you want to know?"

After receiving the suggestion, the rep e-mailed back,

"Thank you for the advice you gave me about my opening statement. I am working so I can recite it so it sounds smooth for me. I've already had success!"

Now, a recurring problem I've been facing is that once I quote the parts, the buyer says he will call me back and then doesn't follow through. Then I end up calling and getting the runaround. The problem is I don't know when to time my calls to know if I'm calling too much and I end up letting the buyer off the hook for another day. Can you give me any advice?"

Well, getting a runaround is a **symptom** of a problem.

Without hearing the context of the call (which I offer as a major part of my individual coaching), I will need to address it generally. Usually it's that there wasn't sufficient commitment on the part of the prospect/customer to do something as a result of the previous call. Any time you plan on calling back, especially if you have given them

something like a price quote, or sending literature or a proposal, find out what's going to happen next.

Ask questions like,

"What will happen next?"

"Where do you stand right now?"

"What needs to happen to move forward on this?"

"By when will I hear from you?"

Also, when you're in the business of giving quotes, be sure you aren't being used. That means providing a quote so they can use it against another supplier to beat down their price. Ask questions like,

"What criteria will you be looking at when you make your decision?"

"Aside from price, what will you look at?"

"If we are the lowest price, you are saying you will go with us?"

Best yet, when you give a price quote by phone, ask for the order right there. They're going to buy from someone, right?

When you get specific, things happen. If you're vague, people will put you off forever.

Two Openers Reviewed

Elizabeth McCarthy is a one-person telesales service agency. She went out on her own and now does telesales for a few selected clients from the comfort of her home office. She attended a Telesales College, and afterward submitted several opening statements for review.

One of her clients is the local United Van Lines branch. With these calls, her goal is to prospect, qualify, and turn hot leads over to the outside salesforce. Here's one of her opening statements:

Opening 1

"Good morning Jack, I'm Elizabeth McCarthy with Hollander/United. Briefly, we're corporate moving and storage experts, and we've worked with such clients as McDonalds, Mitsubishi Electric, and Spiegels Headquarters, to name a few, in partnering with them to reduce their project spending while minimizing their down time and offering the strongest project management support capabilities in our industry. We won their business, hands down, because we've saved them time, money, and headaches. If I've caught you at a good time, I'd like to see if we might be able to do the same for you."

Overall, I felt this was a fine opening. It describes the company, provides strong benefit/result statements, and moves the listener to the questioning phase of the call.

When I review openings like this, the next goal is to fine tune them by applying these two rules: 1. Are there any unnecessary words we can purge, and, 2. Is there anything potentially objectionable we can delete?

Read through the opening again before continuing to compare your finding with mine.

"Good morning Jack, I'm Elizabeth McCarthy with Hollander/United. Briefly, we're corporate moving and storage experts, and we've worked with such clients as McDonalds, Mitsubishi Electric, and Spiegels Headquarters, to name a few, in partnering with (add *"helping"*) them to reduce their project spending while minimizing their down time and offering the strongest project management support capabilities in our industry. We won their business, hands down, because we've saved them time, money, and headaches. If I've caught you at a good time, I'd like to ask a few questions to see if I could provide you with some information.."

Something else that might be potentially objectionable is "offering the strongest project management support capabilities in our industry." Someone could say, or think, "*Oh yeah, according to whom, and what does that mean, anyway?*" Perhaps we could change that to, "**And our clients tell us...**" followed by what those capabilities are.

Opening 2

Elizabeth also has a client in the corporate furniture business for whom she also qualifies and generates leads. Here's the opening she submitted.

"Good morning Jack, I'm Elizabeth McCarthy with Desks Inc. I'm calling today in the hope of building a business relationship with you, and depending on what you're doing in the area of furniture procurement for your (move/expansion/renovation) there's a good chance we can reduce your furniture spending by up to 25% (pause) while at the same time offering the widest selection of the highest quality products in our industry. We position ourselves as partners to our clients by reducing headaches, eliminating hassles, and offering an inside line to the furniture industry. If I've caught you at a good time, I'd like to ask a few questions to learn how we might be of value to you."

Again, a very good opening. The primary suggestion I have here is in the first sentence after the introduction: "*I'm calling today in the hope of building a business relationship with you...*" We could leave this out and make the opening more effective. I say this because that line could put a listener on the defensive immediately. Think about who's hearing this: someone who doesn't know Elizabeth or the company, and the first thing he hears is that here's a salesperson who wants to build a relationship. A crude analogy would be a guy at a singles bar walking up to a woman and saying the same thing. Too much, too early, right?

Overall, nice job Elizabeth. We all can pick up a few pointers from these.

A Case Study of a Dumb Cold Call

Hard to believe a salesperson could make so many mistakes in a short period of time, using so few words.

But it happened. I'll explain in detail.

I overheard Steve, my marketing guy, who also answers the phone in my office, talking to the caller:

"Well, that would be Art. I'll transfer you."

He put the call on hold and said to me, "Some guy wants to talk to someone about Internet marketing. He's being pretty evasive though. Might want to turn your recorder on for this one."

Sounded like it might be good material for this newsletter.

"Hi, this is Art."

"Doug? Did you say Doug?"

What a great first impression this guy was making. (I almost laughed out loud, being reminded of the movie "Multiplicity," where Michael Keaton WAS Doug, but the mutant clone kept calling him "Steve.")

"No, this is Art."

"Oh, uh, yeah, hi Art. I'm _____ with (I didn't write down or remember the company name.) I just wanted to touch base to see how your Internet marketing was going."

"It is going just fantastic."

"Oh, good. Tell me what you're doing there."

"Look, I'm busy (isn't everyone?) and not interested."

End of call.

Wow. Let's examine how this guy never had a chance.

Mistake 1: Not Getting a Name

He didn't even get my name, therefore the comical "Doug" scenario, which blew him out of the water three seconds into the call.

He could have simply started out by initially identifying himself and his company to Steve, and then asking, "I hope you can help me... what is the name of the person there who is responsible for your Internet marketing."

Mistake 2: Being Evasive.

Do some salespeople not realize that the person who answers the phone for decision makers actually TALKS to the decision maker before transferring the call?

Based only on what Steve told me before I picked up the phone, I for the most part knew that this caller had zero chance of success--except for the basis for an article like this one.

Callers must be prepared to work with the personnel who are closest to our buyers, gain their trust, and discuss value where appropriate.

What do assistants, screeners, office managers and others say about you?

Mistake 3: Not Getting Smart Call Intelligence or Doing Homework

Again, because of Mistakes 2 and 3, he didn't ask any questions of Steve. Hmm, let's see, call me crazy, but it seems that if you're selling some type of Internet marketing, it would make sense that if you visited someone's website, and found out what type of Internet marketing they do now, then you would be much better prepared to put together a nice opening, and ask intelligent questions.

So, after asking for the decision maker's name, it's quite simple to say, "Great, so I can be sure that what I'm calling about has value for the boss, I'd like to ask a couple of questions. Please tell me ..."

Mistake 4: Horrible Opening Statement

To review,

"Oh, uh, yeah, hi Art. I'm _____ with _____.
I just wanted to touch base to see how your Internet marketing was going."

Come on now, read this again, and think about how absurd that question is. What in the world does he expect people to say?

"Oh, my Internet marketing isn't going well at all. I'm glad you called. I bet you can help me."

Right.

There are two purposes for the opening:

- put them in a positive, receptive, frame of mind, by mentioning an item of interest ... a possible result or benefit you might be able to deliver, and,

- move to the questioning phase of the call. BUT, the first objective must be established.

Mistake 5: Asking Questions When They Don't See A Reason to Answer

Again, as part of Mistake 4, if we don't put them in a positive frame of mind, but then jump into questions, they don't have a good reason to answer, therefore the call goes down in flames.

So short of a call, but yet so many opportunities to screw up. And this guy hit most of them. Sadly, I see this all of the time.

Worse, he probably believes that prospecting for him is "just a numbers game." Make so many calls, and you're that much closer to getting a yes. Actually, he's that much closer to getting another no, and he's getting really good at making bad calls.

If you place prospecting calls, analyze each of these mistakes to be sure they're not part of your calls, and practice the right methods, the Smart Calling way instead.

A Review of a Prospect Opening

Here is an opening that was submitted for review by one of our LinkedIn for Sales Success course owners. I've left out his name because of the sensitive nature of his business, which is mergers and acquisitions for small business owners.

Also, he said that most of the business owners he calls are not social media-savvy, and are on the higher end of the baby boomer age, therefore he didn't feel social media, including LinkedIn was that necessary for him.

Here are the components of the opening with my comments below each part.

"Hi/Hello, I'm _____, founder (or owner) of Business Strategies, Inc. a local boutique M&A firm located here in Overland Park, KS." (Note: FYI - this is where I live and work so that's why I say the area to let them know I'm local with local knowledge of the Greater Kansas City marketplace or the Midwest depending on whom I am calling and their business location. OR, if I am calling on leads provided by another national out of state firm that I represent then I do say I'm the local affiliate with ABC.)

Art's comment: That's fine as is. I like that you are making a local connection

Next, as I say in the Smart Calling part of the course, you should include some other connection, using your Smart Call intelligence or your social engineering (not social media... this is in the course too, it's another form of gathering intelligence).

For example, "**Congrats on the award you just won,**" or "**I see you just celebrated 30 years in business, great job...**" Again, we go into detail in the course

"I promise not to take up but a few minutes of your valuable time. I am doing some market research today or this week (I use 'in your local area or industry' depending on what SIC Codes I'm interested in trying to represent) and I wanted to inquire if you knew any business owners in your (I could use any one of these: local area, trade group, trade association or local Chamber Chapter) who have expressed an interest in developing their exit plan, maybe need some professional assistance with it, OR who simply stated they want to retire and sell their business, but don't know who to contact for help. Is there anyone you would recommend I call and see if I can be of help? NOTE: if they say yes and provide a business name I then ask May I tell them (him/her/ Mr. Mrs., etc.) I spoke with you and you thought I should call them?"

Art's comment: I'm not a fan of the "market research" approach. These are busy business owners. If the first thing they hear is market research, they could likely mentally and emotionally check out. There is no reason for them to stay on the phone. So let's give them one:

"Mike, I specialize in working with business owners who might—or might not—be in the early stages of exploring possible options to/for (fill in with a value point, ie. 'determining the worth of their business to possible buyers,' 'thinking about their exit strategy down the road so they can maximize their return...' and the reason for my call is to see if there's anyone in your network of business owners who might be in, or close to those situations, or perhaps even yourself..." (Notice the messaging here; this would actually include everyone!)

Then you can proceed with questions based on their response, or at least leave it on good terms and plant a seed, and get agreement to stay in touch for when they do reach that point, which everyone does, some sooner than others.

Also, if you do send something in advance, I'd suggest a simple handwritten note on your personalized stationery, with a live stamp, saying something like,

"Mike, (mention the connection) I got your name from _____. I work with business owners who ____ (could be similar messaging to the above) and I'll be calling this week to ask a couple of questions for some direction."

Bottom line, all you are trying to do is to simply get someone talking, from a positive, open frame of mind—not a resistant one—as I say in the course, which I still recommend you go through—the Smart Calling part at least... I still do believe you should be proficient at LinkedIn. Those business owners who are will expect it, and disqualify you if you aren't.

A Review of a Failed Prospecting Call

Many sales reps look at ads, direct mailing pieces, catalogs, the Internet, or anywhere there's advertising as sources of prospects.

This is wise. It's a component of Smart Calling. But I find so many reps just stop there. And as a result they are ill-prepared for what they inevitably hear on calls.

I was going through some recordings of calls I received from sales reps. Here's an example of what you do not want to do:

Caller: *"Hello, this is Bill Jones with Video Stars. I saw the promotion for your DVD training and we do DVD duplication."*

"Uh-huh."

He became flustered at this point, probably because I didn't say, "Oh, you do DVD duplication? Where should I send my master copy; you can do mine."

"Uh, I'd like to talk to you about doing yours."

"Look I'll save you some time. I selected my existing company after evaluating quite a few. They have a very good price, quality is fine, and service is great. I have no reason to even consider looking around."

"Oh, OK. Keep us in mind."

Yeah, sure.

Analysis and Recommendations

So you might be thinking that I gave this guy an iron-clad objection that was impenetrable. And you're right for the most part—when it comes to getting a sale on that call. However, he undoubtedly runs into that same objection quite a bit, so I'm surprised he hasn't learned to use something that won't totally slam the door so suddenly in his face. Here's what I would do in his situation:

Call Strategy and Preparation: If I were placing this call, my Primary Objective would be to get commitment that the prospect would use my service the next time they had a DVD project. Although that wouldn't be achieved on a majority of the calls, it's always best to aim high. After realizing on the call this wouldn't be reached, objectives in descending order would be: to get commitment that I could at least bid on their next job, and if that wasn't met, to get agreement that they would at least keep us on file as a back-up supplier in case their existing duplicator for some reason no longer met their needs, or if they had other future projects coming up.

Preliminary Information: He knew nothing about me when he called. He could have asked the person who answered the phone about who we now use, how many we typically order, what we pay, and any other qualifying information which would have better-equipped him for the call.

Opening Statement: He gave no reason for me to even listen. He may as well just said. "Well, I've finally called you, so I guess you can start using us now."

Simply dialing the phone does not give a person the right to take someone's time. Promising or hinting at some value they could get does.

I would have listened to this: "I'm Bill Jones with Video Stars. I understand that you're considering a promotion where you might be getting a large number of single DVD orders in a short time. We specialize in top quality DVD duplication, and automated shipping right from your shopping cart, and now work with quite a few internet marketers on that application. It might be worth it for you to take a look at a bid we could do for you. I'd like to ask a few questions to see if it would be worth your while to talk about it."

I would have been more likely to answer questions at this point. However, even if I did retort with the same objection mentioned earlier, he could have picked up on it and used it to ask more questions.

For example, "**I see. How quickly will they be able to turn around those orders for you?**"

If that resulted in a dead-end, a last resort question to at least try and accomplish the last chance objective would be, "What plans do you have in place for a back-up supplier, if for example, you needed a large quantity in a hurry and your supplier wasn't able to accommodate you for some reason?"

Determine if parts of your call process are similar to this one. Analyze every step of the process, determine your own strengths and enhance them, and shore up the weak areas.

What's Missing In This Call Opening?

Here's an opening statement suggestion I read in an online article. It's no wonder so many people get beat up on the phone when they try stuff like this that they think is from a supposed expert.

"Hello, this is Mark Peters with Reclamation Services. We specialize in commercial recycling services, and I'd like to ask you about your company's recycling policy. Do you have just a moment for a couple of quick questions?"

What critical component is missing?

You win the prize if you answered, **WHY** the person should take a moment to answer a couple of quick questions.

In my experience, the most common result of this type of opening is that most prospects, who of course are very busy people--AND who very well might be great prospects--see nothing of value in the call, perceive this as a salesperson wanting to pitch his service, and then quickly brush off the caller.

But what's interesting, and this continues to leave me scratching my scalp in amazement is that some people will actually answer the questions in response to an opener like this. But when they do, they still are likely are bracing themselves for the sales pitch.

Sure they are still on the phone, but they're tentative, skeptical and guarded as they curtly answer the questions. Like a hostile witness on the stand in a court trial. Which is not the desirable state of mind for people you'd like to persuade.

In my [training programs](#), I'm all about crafting just the right words to form the optimal message to accomplish your objective. We want to minimize our chance of resistance and maximize our chances for success. And as I've demonstrated so many times, one or two words can make the difference.

Your opening must create the thought in their mind that you *might* be able to do something for them. This sparks their curiosity and interest, and earns the right to take some of their time, and, puts them in a more favorable frame of mind to answer your questions, since you've already hinted at the payoff for them.

Using my Smart Calling methodology, this missing component can very easily be added, making the example much more effective:

"Hi, I'm Mark Peters with Reclamation Services. I understand that you have adopted a corporate-wide Green initiative and have been looking at some options. As a commercial recycling service, we specialize in helping metal service centers reduce their waste hauling expenses, get paid more for their scrap, and also help them save money on everyday paper goods. If I've reached you at a good time, I'd like to ask you about compliance guidelines you've been given to see if I could provide some information..."

A few points that went into the creation of this:

-the caller used sales intelligence, some found on the company's own site about going "green," and also by doing "Social Engineering," which is speaking to others in the prospect's company. Therefore, he was able to instantly relate to a trigger event relevant in the prospect's world and made it about the prospect.

-the caller hinted at three concrete benefits they have provided to similar metal service centers, which would give an economic benefit in addition to helping them comply with their internal green initiative.

-the caller smoothly transitions into the questions, making it easy for the prospect to participate from a positive, receptive state of mind, like a friendly witness on the stand.

So, what type of prospect would you rather be dealing with?

There's a lot of free sales information readily available online. Be wary of what you read out there. I don't claim to have all the answers, or any magic phrases, but at least I know what I suggest is going to help you more often than not.

(Note: Jim Domanski is a long-time columnist in my Smart Calling Report, and one of the best sales minds I know. Here is his analysis of his own failed call)

Jim Crashes and Burns On His Own Call, But Learns

By Jim Domanski

Here's an old Polish proverb taught to me by my grandfather: *"If you have to eat crow, it is best to eat it while it is young and tender. Crow does not get better with age."*

Translation: when you are wrong or when you make a mistake, it is best to acknowledge/admit it right up front. The real point is to deal with the issue as soon as possible. Avoiding it or delaying it only makes the matter worse.

What are you talking about, Jimbo? I am talking about my annual blunder: that time of year, when, despite years and years of training, knowledge, experience, and expertise, I blow a call. And I mean *really* blow it. It happened last week. Let me tell you about it and let's learn from the experience. (Actually, I need to purge myself and confess. The Jesuit priests in my youth obviously had an impact.)

The Hot Lead

I received a hot lead from a colleague. The client wanted training for a sales conference for their inside reps. I questioned intently. I listened. I learned of the needs and the depth and the breadth of those needs. They wanted a proposal. I delivered. Darn good pricing. Powerful copy. Enticing and exciting, if I do say so myself. I made the follow up call in the prescribed period of time. Got voice mail but I employed my famous (well, it's not famous yet but one day) "4/3 strategy" of follow up voice mails. I did all that I should and maybe even more. A sure thing. A cinch.

Or so I thought...

On the third follow up call I reached the prospect, established rapport and went for the close. Heck I followed the book from beginning to end. The prospect replied:

"Oh, well, we decided not to include that portion of the training."

Ever-savvy Jimbo replied,

"Oh, okay, well, thank you."

Jim Carey Screams

Did you ever see "Ace Ventura, Pet Detective," starring Jim Carey? He utters a word in the movie that has been screaming in my head ever since the moment. That word? Loser.

I am being somewhat dramatic and I really haven't beaten myself black and blue but it was a nice little wake up call.

Analysis

I did a lot of things right. I established rapport, I questioned, I presented a strong message selling message, I followed up and I closed. But there are two things I did not do; two things that most sales reps are guilty of at some point in time.

First, I did not bother to plan my call. I was so confident of getting the sale I did not take pen to paper and plan the call. I assumed the sale was a shoo-in. I got "cocky" or maybe a better way to put it was that I got lazy.

I wasn't prepared for the prospect's remarks. I was totally caught off guard. I did not have prepared a secondary objective nor did I even remotely think about an objection.

Handling Objections

Okay, so I did not prepare. That doesn't really excuse the second blunder. I did not bother to handle the objection. I accepted it at face value.

The question now is, why did they decide not to go with the training? Was it my price? Was it the training proposal? Was it me? Was there a competitor who hit the nail on the head? Did the budget run out? Heck, I don't know.

Two Questions

My father taught me a lesson once a long time ago when I screwed up on something. Dad said to ask myself a question:

"So what did you learn from all this?"

And that's my real point. I am not a "loser." I simply screwed up. I made a mistake. That happens. It will happen to you sooner or later. And that's okay. It is okay to blow calls and make mistakes.

But what is not okay is to ignore the lesson that can be learned from the mistake.

That cannot be forgiven. That really deserves the moniker "loser."

Every time you miss a sale, go back and review it closely and ask yourself "What can I learn from this?" Keep a notebook and call it "Lessons I have Taught Myself." Record your impression. Toss your hurt feelings aside and be absolutely honest with yourself and analyze the moment. Sometimes you **really** screw up. Learn from it. Don't beat yourself up because that's an utter waste of time. Try not to do it again. If you do, record it again. And again if necessary. Check your "Lessons" book from time to time and see if there's a pattern. Fix it. Sometimes you don't screw up. Write down what you learned from the moment anyway. Learn from it. Who knows maybe you can write your own book one day.

The next question my dad would ask is this;

"So, what are you going to do about it."

Dad was saying that it is fine to do an analysis. But that wasn't enough. The next step was to figure out what you should do next. Sometimes the next step is to do nothing. But more often than not, it means you have to do some uncomfortable things. Do them.

As for me, I plan to eat my crow next week. I will send the client this article with a note explaining what I have done. I will make the follow up call and learn from it.

Don't Ask This Question in the Opening

When I review opening statements for seminar attendees, clients at in-house training sessions, and attendees at the [Know More! Cold Calling Webinar](#), I see lots of openings that need assistance.

Even more so with the openings that I hear when sales reps call me to sell. Many of these openings are destined to create resistance, like the example I shared in my previous tip.

We have so little time to create interest. Yet, most openings flat out elicit resistance, or don't move towards interest fast enough, therefore giving the listener time to let the resistance build.

And the little things can do it. A couple of words here or there. Perhaps a question that doesn't belong...too many unnecessary words that ramble like a congressman on C-SPAN.

Sad part is, some of the things I hear are actually taught by sales "gurus" in seminars, books, webinars, e-books ...whatever. I have to wonder if some of these experts have ever actually been on the phone.

There are over 20 opening mistakes I share with my training participants. I'll talk about another today. It's when a rep finally gets a decision maker on the phone and then says,

"Hi, I'm Pat Seller with ABC Company. Are you the person there who would handle the decisions regarding your_____?"

I can hear the reactions now from some readers: "So what's wrong with that?"

Here's what's wrong: You might as well start off the call with,

"I'm selling something. Are you the person I should be selling it to?"

And again, I know that most of you see the problem with that, but yet someone might still be asking,

"OK, we ARE trying to sell something and we want to be sure that this is the person we should be talking to, right?"

Right. But that IS NOT the way to do it. Here's why:

- people would rather not talk to salespeople they don't know. It's natural, like the way we typically avoid the salespeople in retail stores who stalk after us and ask, "May I help you?" That triggers the defense shields.

- you have about seven seconds to move a person into a positive, receptive frame of mind on a prospecting call. If you're not doing that, they're creeping into a negative frame of mind, moving into a, "How do I get rid of this salesperson?" mode. Again the question about "Are you the person...?" solidifies that before you have even begun to create interest.

- you should already KNOW that they are the decision maker for what you sell, BEFORE you ever hear their voice. That comes with good preparation and asking questions of other people within the organization. Even if you don't know for sure, after delivering your opening--without this question-- if you're not in the right spot, they'll let you know. And if you are in the right place, you haven't jeopardized the success of what you want to accomplish: getting them into a positive frame of mind, and moving them to the questions.

OK, so what should you do? When the decision maker answers, go directly into your Smart Call opening: Here's a very generic template.

"Hi Pat, I'm _____ with _____. We work with _____, helping them _____. I understand that you're now in the process of _____, and there's a possibility we may have an option that could help you to _____. I'd like to ask a few questions to see if I could provide you some information."

That's very general, and I always suggest that you tailor and customize your opening with the Smart Call intelligence you collect before the call, and on the phone by speaking with others in their company so that you touch on results they would have interest in.

And you can see that after that opening example, if you indeed were not in the right spot, they'd let you know.

Plus, if you still want to ask, "Am I in the right spot for what I just explained?", you could do it after you've piqued their curiosity, since you've presented a possible benefit.

My Analysis of the Horrible Cold Call Voice Message

In my blog I shared a recording of a cold call voice mail message that I have received 10 times over the past several months.

Wait, check that, I received it again yesterday. No kidding. Same message.

If you didn't hear it yet, go listen at my [blog](http://smartcalling.com/what-do-you-think-of-this-cold-call-voice-mail/), <http://smartcalling.com/what-do-you-think-of-this-cold-call-voice-mail/> and see the background info I included. And check out the comments a few fellow readers left.

This week I'll give my analysis.

First, here is the text of the message:

"Hello. Good morning. My name is ___ calling with (a temporary staffing firm). I was calling to see if I could take a moment of your time in order to schedule a meeting for you to speak with our Vice President. Our telephone number is ____. I'll try contacting you again at a more convenient time. Thank you and have a wonderful afternoon."

Ok, where do I begin?

This call could be the poster child for many of the mistakes I suggest salespeople avoid on prospecting calls when I present my live [Smart Calling training programs](#).

First, big picture, this is a COLD call, which I define as calling someone you don't know and doesn't know you, giving a generic canned pitch, and not knowing, or using any intelligence about the prospect.

Those calls are dumb, and destined for failure, as this series of messages is with me.

He does not address me by name, even though on my voice mail greeting I identify myself.

He makes no reference to my company or anything going on in my world. It is a talking direct mail piece that is addressed to "Occupant."

No Value

One of the biggest errors he made, that many salespeople commit as well in their messages and openers is not having any possible value.

Where's the "What's in it for me?"

Worse, he says he wants to **take** something from me, anyone's most valuable asset, time.

Asking for a Decision

To compound the lack of value, he goes further and suggests he wants to arrange a meeting with me and his VP. You've got to be kidding me. There's not a reason to listen to the entire message, much less to call him back, and most certainly not to arrange a meeting for which I don't know the reason.

Asking for a decision of any type in a prospecting voice mail or opening statement-- other than to continue the call and exchange information-- is a reason for them to put up resistance.

And, by the way, I'm a President and CEO. He wants me to talk to a VP?

I'm not a fan at all of calls where the ivory-tower executive has an underling making his appointments for him. What, is he too important to call me personally?

Don't get me wrong, this is different than the very sound lead generation/development model where a prospector generates interest, qualifies, and then hands it off or sets an appointment for the inside or outside sales rep.

But those calls should still follow the Smart Calling process which I'll go through in a minute.

Were there ANY positives in this message?

Hmmm. It was short. Which proves you don't have to say a lot to screw up badly.

So, where could this caller improve?

First, it would need to start with management, perhaps the VP, who probably instituted this smile-and-dial, throw it up against the wall and see what sticks, make 1000 calls a day, numbers game, ridiculous approach.

With that said, here's what I would suggest.

Identify the Possible Value Propositions

This is so fundamental, but most salespeople are deficient at it. WHY might someone possibly be interested in speaking with you?

What possible result might be an outcome for staying on the phone, or returning a phone call?

This caller's company is in the temp business, which I am not an expert in, but I imagine that they,

-help companies handle seasonal work or short-term projects without having to hire full-time long-term employees.

-help companies avoid the time and expense of recruiting and interviewing candidates for positions without the risk of hiring someone full-time that might not work out,

-help companies avoid the taxes, paperwork, and payroll expenses of full-time employees

And, if they have been in business for any length of time, they likely have some metrics that they can attach to the results they have achieved for others.

We'll get back to using some of this in a minute.

Do Smart Calling Research

Possible value becomes more relevant when it is tailored to the prospect and his/her world.

We gather intelligence through a variety of online and offline sources... LinkedIn, Google, news, social media, other sources that identify trigger events, and more.

And the best, most timely source is doing Social Engineering, which is asking questions of others at the company.

Hypothetically, let's say he did the most basic research on me. I'm pretty easy to find online.

He'd know that I deliver sales training programs, and produce training resources for salespeople.

Let's say he did some Social Engineering and learned that we are going to soon launch a new LinkedIn training program for salespeople and will use a lot of virtual help. THAT could be the trigger event that could enhance his Possible Value Proposition.

Then it's a simple matter of plugging it into the Smart Call Opening/Voice Mail Process. A good message/opener would look like this:

"Hi Art, I'm ___ with _____. I understand that you are now gearing up for a major launch for your new LinkedIn for Sales Success training program—which I'm excited to hear about—and that you're going to be using lots of virtual staff to help. With other companies doing similar product launches we've been able to help them minimize the time and expense hassles of finding the right people for their projects so they can focus on generating revenue more quickly. I'd like to ask a few questions to see if I could provide some information for you."

To make this a voice mail message, I'd add at the end,

"I will call you again on (day). If you'd like to reach me before then, my number is _____"

A few points on this:

-It quickly establishes that the caller is not puking out the same canned presentation to everyone. Research has been done.

-Someone, somewhere reading this is saying, "That's too long."

No it isn't.

Too long isn't a function of number of words, it's a function of listener interest or lack thereof. (Feel free to Tweet that, with credit of course.)

I would listen to everything there *because it touched on what is going on in my world*, and addresses possible problems I'm thinking about.

As we already established with the actual voice mail, short messages can suck badly. With that said, you do want to say as much as you can, of value, with the fewest number of words to do so.

That's why preparing in advance, and editing is necessary.

-Notice it doesn't focus on hiring temporary help, it talks **results**: minimizing time and expense hassles and generating revenue more quickly.

- The only decision it asks for is a simple one: to answer a few questions. Even if his goal is to set up a meeting with his VP, I'd be more inclined to do so after answering a few well-planned questions designed to get me talking about anticipated pain and hassle of finding help.

I agree, partially, with the pundits who loudly scream, "Cold calling is dead." It's dumb. Just like this caller demonstrated.

Actually the **cold** part is dumb, but the **calling** part does still work.

SMART Call prospecting is very much alive, and is the fastest, cheapest way to enter into a sales conversation with someone you'd like to do business with, whom might not ever contact you first, or whom you are unable to be introduced to.

Successful salespeople prove that every day.

The high level executive of a company I could help greatly might not have ever heard of me, and I could grow old waiting for him to read something I've written. But, by Smart Calling I could be talking with him within minutes, and beginning a sales process.

Art's Review of an Opening Statement

After a training workshop for the sales pros at Ortho Technology, a dental supply company, one of the sales reps, Irene Pangborn, took me up on my offer to review their opening statements that they created using the material from the training.

Here was her note to me:

Art, Thank you again for all of the terrific information you shared this weekend; the workbook and notes are in front of me right now.

Your offer to review our opening statement is so generous.

This would be an opening statement I would use to approach a Doctor or practice that I have never done business with:

"Hello Dr. Sobczak, this is Irene your sales manager at Ortho Technology, how are you this morning? (Reply) I was on your website-- very interesting – and saw that you offer interceptive treatment. Many of those patients dread the bulky appliances and difficulty flossing and brushing – some even stop using them. We offer bondable devices that eliminate those issues- how do you think they would impact your work day?"

What do you think? Too many topics? Too lengthy? I wonder if the How are you ? is an opportunity for them to get negative- but I also feel it's only a proper greeting-; what do you think?

Art's Reply

Irene, thanks for the note. Great to have you in the program Saturday! I really enjoyed working with you all. You did a nice job of using the Smart Call process with your opening. Just a couple of comments.

I'm OK with the How Are You as long as it is sincere. An alternative is something like, **"Hope you're having a great day."**

I'd modify the rest slightly to

“Hello Dr. Sobczak, this is Irene your sales manager at Ortho Technology, how are you this morning? (Reply) I was on your website- very interesting – and saw that you offer interceptive treatment. Many other Doctors tell me that patients dread the bulky appliances and have difficulty flossing and brushing – some even stop using them. We've been able to provide an option that eliminates those issues, meaning (fill in with the result). I'd like to ask a couple of questions to see if I could provide you some information....”

The change I made puts your claim in the words of another doctor, instead of you saying it. This makes it more credible and less likely to be doubted.

A Review of a Prospecting Approach

The following was submitted to me for review by a sales pro who devoured my Smart Calling course and really applied it. He wanted my opinion of what he created.

A little background: Nathan Moondi is a military veteran working for an organization that develops wellness programs designed by veterans. Here is what he sent me.

Art,

For veteransforhealth.org, I target police departments with our weight loss program designed by veterans (later fire departments, cities, federal, etc. but police departments for now).

What I've come up with for an opening is:

Opener

"Hi, I'm Nathan, Afghan Vet and I'm with VeteransForHealth.org. We provide an online weight loss program designed by veterans.

We've helped many officers become fit and greatly improve their job performance and safety through our thorough yet understandable program. I'd like to ask you a few questions to determine the scope of your weight issues with your officers and see if we might be able to provide you some assistance."

Questions

Let me begin by asking, do you provide your officers a weight loss program and are you greatly satisfied with it?

Why do you feel you are not satisfied with it? Why doesn't it blow you away?

Does this program handle weight loss discipline and helping keep weight off?

If we were to offer you a simple and incredibly thorough program to help your officers get fit, do you feel you would be interested in learning more?

What specifically do you look for in a weight loss program for your officers? Your biggest criteria.

Do officers' weight issues pose a serious concern when chasing after suspects?

Do you feel having better fit officers keeps the public safer and improves public image?

Many of the police officers we've worked with have become fit very quickly and greatly improved their performance in their duties due to our program. We would like to help you as well. Would you be interested in scheduling an online demo walkthrough within the next few days?

Goal

- 1) Get them to schedule an online walkthrough of our program. Or
- 2) Get their email and send them a "Weight Loss Tips For Police" PDF. Depending on rejection, ask to check in with them later to see if things have changed or be able to email them new news about our company.

Art's Comments

Overall, this was a very solid job of creating an opening with value, and then questions designed to get prospects talking about their problem. My main suggestion is in the opening to use some Smart Call intelligence... anything you might learn about them that would personalize the message even more, such as "I understand that an initiative to get in better shape has been discussed for your department."

Examples of Dumb Prospecting

I really shouldn't be amazed, but I still am.

After over 34 years in business, just when I think I've seen just about every bad example of prospecting and sales there is—I'm proven wrong.

I have a couple of examples of dumb prospecting I personally received over the past two weeks.

The first one is from—are you sitting down?—a sales consulting firm.

They had sent me an email a few weeks ago, obviously not having done the tiniest bit of homework. Like perhaps going to my website or LinkedIn profile.

They offered to set up a time to discuss how they could help me get “outstanding sales results.” I don't make this stuff up.

I shared it with a few people and we had a good laugh. Then last week I got this email from the same guy, the president of the company.

The subject line simply read: *“Follow Up RE: (name of the firm).”*

Here is the body:

Hi Art,
I hope that you are doing well.

I am checking back with you regarding my previous messages. Are you interested in how (I'm withholding the name, although I should expose it) can help you establish a world-class sales leadership team and achieve outstanding sales results?

We offer a complimentary Sales Performance Diagnosis to help you identify opportunities for improvement and outstanding results. Email us, so we can set up a time and discuss the next step.

Best,
Xxx
President

Did I mention that this is a sales consulting firm?

Offering to help companies get “outstanding sales results.”

I wonder if they **teach** this unfocused, untargeted method of prospecting.

Because of the spam system I use, a live person had to physically go through a few steps to actually send this to me. But yet they weren't savvy enough to actually look at what I do.

That's just "outstanding." (Still shaking my head in disbelief as I write this.)

Using LinkedIn for Dumb Prospecting/Recruiting

I am annoyed how LinkedIn is being abused more frequently for spammy messages and dumb prospecting. (“Dumb” as in the opposite of “smart,” where someone has intelligence about their prospect, and uses that to craft a value message relevant to the prospect.)

By the way, if you'd like to see the LinkedIn mistakes to avoid, and what **to do and say** to use it the right way, attend one of our free webinars this week <http://LinkedInSales.Training>.

Here is an actual LinkedIn InMail message I received:

Hi Art,

My name is (name withheld here.). I am a Sales Director at (I won't give them the publicity).

I recently came across your resume on LinkedIn and after review I have determined your experience and skill lends itself to an Outside Sale position we have available in your area. I would like to extend a personal invitation to you to schedule 15 minute conversation with you to learn about your goals, what you are looking for in your ideal position and to quantify the value of a potential partnership with us.

To schedule the call simply reply to this emails with your availability or give me a call at 866-796-####.

Below is a brief overview of (company) and the benefits of the position we are looking to fill.

(Company) services the Small to Medium sized business sector to help them gain customer retention, increased sales and customer analytics through a digital loyalty and marketing program.

(Company) is growing and we are actively seeking Account Executives and future leaders to help us develop a strong presence in your market place. For a more in depth overview I would like you to visit our website at @@@@.

Really?

Where do I begin?

The sender is not a first or second degree connection of mine.

And, actually, things are going pretty well here, so I most definitely did not post a resume on LinkedIn. (Do you sense my sarcasm?)

So, not only are they blindly sending spam, they are lying about what they are doing.

I sent this message back:

You have got to be fricking kidding me.

I suggest you stop using LinkedIn for your spam messages.

Art

I received this reply:

Art,

I'm a bit confused on what you mean?

Un. Believe. Able. I didn't bother to reply again.

I know I'm preaching to the choir here for the most part.

I know that most everyone reading this can spot the horrendous mistakes in the approach and messaging used here.

And that hopefully most of you are using the principles of Smart Calling to get through to and sell to prospects and customers. If you're not, please do dive into my [blog](#), the free [back issues](#) of this weekly newsletter, and get [the book](#).

And again, if you haven't been through it yet, attend our [free training webinar](#) (we have three different dates and times this week).

We'd like to hear from you about your thoughts on these examples. And also please share how you make your calls Smart and relevant, and how you set yourself apart from salespeople using these "dumb" prospecting techniques.

A Reader's Opening Script

Art, We sell search engine optimization to real estate agents across the US. Here is a revised script I'd like input on.

"Hello ____ We help Realtors close more real estate by managing their online leads...and I was wondering if you would be OFFENDED, if we just asked you a few questions to see if we MIGHT be able to help you as well?"

NO I WOULDN'T BE OFFENDED.

"Great....First, Are you accepting new clients?"

YES

"OK and second....What are you finding is the best way to market right now?"

NEWSPAPER, REAL ESTATE MAGAZINES, OPEN HOUSES....

"Ok and third...What are your goals for 2015?"

CLOSE 10 MORE HOUSES, ETC

"You know John, based on what you've said here, I really think we can help you close more real estate. Did you have 15 or 20 minutes that I can show you how to fill your pipeline with great quality leads..Did you have some time tomorrow? Or is Wednesday better?"

Art's Review

Brad, thanks for your note, and patience.

I like your opening, and your questions... other than the "offended" part. My reaction if I received that would be it is a technique rather than natural conversation. With that said, the best thing to do is try it out.

Also, I would use some Smart Call intelligence at the beginning.

"Hi, John. This is Jennifer with SuperSEO... I see that you are specializing in the Homewood area of town and are doing quite a bit of marketing...."

Anything that can help make a connection and show you aren't the typical SEO service just smiling and dialing.

Also, as long as you have them on the phone I'd give them the option of doing the appointment now. If the music is still playing, stay on the dance floor.