

5 **The**
Fatal
Phone
Mistakes

Preventing
You From
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Business

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The Five Fatal Phone Mistakes Preventing You From Getting New Business

By Art Sobczak

Using the phone to prospect is the fastest, simplest, and least expensive way to get in sales conversations with people—whom don't know you and did not contact you first-- who can and will buy from you.

But many people cry, "Cold calling is dead!"

They are partly right. The cold is dead.

But most definitely not the calling.

Sales pros prove that every day.

I know. I have hundreds of thousands of my clients and followers doing it.

However, many others are trying to do it, and failing miserably.

That's because they are making one or more fatal mistakes that kill their calls—and morale—before they even have a chance.

It doesn't need to be that way.

Based on observing, listening to, receiving, and placing tens of thousands of prospecting and sales calls, I've put together my list of the **Five Fatal Phone Mistakes Preventing You From Getting New Business**.

These are the most heinous, avoidable errors sales reps commit every day...miscues that sabotage their sales efforts.

Read through the errors and then pay particular attention to Action Steps. This is what you can do to avoid the errors. Follow the advice, and I know you'll be more effective and get more of that new business that will put more money in your account.

Here are the mistakes, in no particular order of importance, since any one (or combination) can be detrimental to an individual's success.

MISTAKE 1: Viewing Call Results as "Rejection," and Letting that Cause Call Avoidance.

What is rejection anyway?

Is it a 'no' you hear at the beginning of a call?

Is it losing out on a competitive proposal.

Is it being hung up on?

If you think it is, it is.

Now, I'm not going to get all out-there-philosophical on you, but let's keep this simple:

Stuff happening **TO you** in sales (getting no's) is inevitable, if you are placing calls.

But, what HAPPENS to you is not rejection.

Rejection is the definition that someone attaches to what happens to them.

No one person or situation can cause you to feel rejected unless you allow it/them to.

Action Steps

Change your definition of rejection so that it does not include getting a no on a call.

After no's, ask yourself the two questions:

"What can I learn from this?"

"What good can I make from this?"

Further, you can ensure you get a win on every call by accomplishing something, or even attempting something, regardless of how minor. This is what I call your Secondary Objective.

More than almost any other profession, how you feel when you are performing your job affects your outcome.

Coupled with the fact that all day long we proactively put ourselves in situations where the outcome may not be the one we desire, there's little wonder most people would never consider sales as a career, and many have left because they couldn't handle what they defined as "rejection."

Now, you never need to feel "rejected" on a call again, or fear it.

MISTAKE 2: Poor Prospecting Preparation

Consider if an airline pilot got on the intercom just after takeoff and said, "Ladies and gentlemen thank you for flying with us today. We're going to fly somewhere, I'm just not sure exactly where, but I hope it's the right place."

Absurd, right? Sure.

Now consider another scenario. A sales rep plops down in the chair, flips on the computer or pulls out prospect names, while at the same time dials the first number. If you'd ask him/her what's to be accomplished on the call, you'd hear a vague response about a sale, appointment, lead, and so on. But that caller wouldn't be able to tell you any more about how he/she planned on getting there than the hypothetical pilot could about reaching his destination.

Poor preparation ensures a sloppy, rambling call that's like a kite without a tail, whipping in the wind, wildly changing directions.

On the other hand, you can and should choreograph your call before you place it.

Just like one of the greatest ski racers ever, Jean Claude-Killy said,

"The outcome is determined by the time the racer is in the gate."

The result of your prospecting call is also determined before you pick up the phone.

Action Step:

The most important step in a successful prospecting call is the first one:

Setting your Primary Objective.

I define this as looking at where you are, and determining where you want to be at the end of the call.

More specifically, ask yourself what you want to do at the end of the call, and what should they do at the end of the call. The objective must involve ACTION. If nobody's doing anything, you're no better off after the call than you were before.

And after you've set your objective according to this definition you simply fill in the blanks with what needs to happen for you to travel from point A to point B.

You'll realize what information you'll need, and the information you'll want to present based on those needs.

MISTAKE 3: Treating Assistants and Others as "Screeners"

I've heard sales reps refer to assistants as the bulldog, the rejectionist, and other equally negative names, including "gatekeeper" and "screener."

No wonder these callers have difficulty getting to buyers. They experience exactly what they expect: resistance, frustrating penetrating questions, and downright humiliation. That's because the callers feel like they need to go through, around, above, or under this person.

Basic psychology tells you that the more someone is pushed, the harder they resist.

Action Steps

To get to your buyers, all you need to do is help assistants do their job, which is protect the buyer's time so that only callers with something of value are allowed to spend time with the boss.

Therefore, you need to be sure you have a Justification Statement prepared in response to "What's this in reference to?"

It's here that you "sell" the assistant on putting you through.

And you thought you were calling to qualify them?

The assistant is qualifying YOU!

And based on your Justification Statement, they decide whether or not you deserve time with the buyer.

Ok, so what should you do?

Be ready to explain results and benefits that you bring to the table. Do NOT say,

"We sell _____, and I want to talk to him/her about it."

That normally gets a response like, "We're happy with who we're buying from"

Instead, say something like,

"I have some ideas that have helped other retailers in your industry cut down on their advertising expenses while generating more store traffic. I'd like to ask Mr./Ms. Bigg a few questions to see if this would make sense for him/her to take a look at."

Get Information From the Assistant

Also, whenever you're prospecting, you should ask questions before you get to the decision maker so you're better-prepared when you do ultimately reach him or her.

Every piece of qualifying information you need on calls could potentially be gathered from others in your prospect's organization. Reception people, assistants, and others in the decision maker's department, people who actually USE what you sell . . . all can provide valuable insight-information that gains instant respect, and creates interest in the mind of the buyer.

You could say,

"You probably work closely with Ms. Bigg, is that right?"

Then begin your questioning:

"So I'm better prepared when I speak with her, there's some information you could help me with first . . ."

MISTAKE 4: Not Having a Customized, Tailored, "Possible Value Message"

Many unsuccessful prospectors complain, "No one returns my calls or responds to my emails," and, "Prospects shut me down right away."

Well, of course.

With the sheer amount of marketing and sales noise that we all are bombarded with daily, everyone automatically tunes out almost all messages.

Almost all.

So which ones do prospects listen to?

The ones that are about them. What is going on in their world. Something that is relevant to what they want, or want to avoid.

And that pretty much never includes a pitch for your product or service. And most certainly it can't be generic, or give an indication that you know nothing about them.

Action Step

The foundation for my Smart Calling™ prospecting process is first gathering intelligence about your prospect and customer, using online and offline sources, and Social Engineering. And I'll cut right to the chase and give you the formula for using that info to create interest in your opening and voice mail.

Let's assume you have now done all of this information-gathering, you know something relevant about your prospecting, and now it is time to craft an opening that will grab attention. By the way, this also serves as a voice mail message, with just a bit of tweaking at the end. (And you can essentially use the same thing in an email.)

The Smart Call™ Interest-Creating Opening Statement Process

1. Introduce Yourself and Organization

"Hi _____, I'm ___ with _____."

Easy so far.

2. Use Your Smart Call™ Intelligence

Here, you employ something you know that implies you are not the typical cold caller; the more tailored and on-target, the better.

"I was speaking with_____ and she mentioned that you are now in the process of_____."

"Congratulations on the _____ I had read about in_____."

"I see that your firm is now going to_____."

"I understand that one of your major initiatives for the year is _____."

"At your website I had seen_____."

3. Hint at Your Possible Value Proposition

You want to tailor your PVP to their world, further tying everything together everything else we've covered,

"We specialize in working with _____, in helping them to deal with the issue of_____."

"In working with other _____, we have been able to help them_____."

"With other _____ in the same situation, we have been able to _____."

4. Suggest More Possible Value, Contingent on Moving to Questioning

This is the step where you build upon your PVP and begin to ask questions specifically tailored to their responses/situations/questions of you.

"I've got a few ideas that might be of some value to you regarding_____, and I'd like to ask a few questions...."

"We might have a few options that could possibly be a fit for you as well. If I've reached you at a good time, I'd like to ask a few questions to see if I could provide you with some information..."

"We've been able to repeat these results with over 220 companies, and with a few questions we could determine if it would be worth it for you to take a look at some information..."

"Depending on where you are in your selection process, we might have some options worth taking a look at."

Examples

Let's look at some full examples.

"Hi Dr. Moeller, I'm Stephen Drury with Smile Marketing. I noticed the coupons you are running in the school paper, and spoke with your office manager about some of the marketing you are doing to build your practice. We have helped other pediatric dentists cut their cost of new patient acquisition by 50% on average, while increasing their number of new patients by 25% within six months. Depending on what your goals are, we might have a few options worth taking a look at."

"Dan, I'm Karen Browning with Integrated Software. I was at your website and downloaded your report from the new book on managed healthcare. In speaking with Kelly, your marketing assistant, I understand that you're exploring options to streamline the steps it takes to do your online follow-up with those types of leads. We've had a few other publishing clients who were using five to ten different programs to manage the various aspects of their online marketing and sales. We've managed to replace all of these programs with just one, cutting their software costs, saving hours of time, and in some cases, doubling their online book sales. I'd like to ask a few questions to see if this might be something worth taking a look at."

"Heather, I'm Kyle Johnston with Personnel Solutions. I saw your Twitter posting mentioning how many unqualified applications you had to go through the other day. We specialize in reaching high-level managers in your industry who otherwise might not be looking for positions. Recruiters who use our career postings tell us that the candidates they attract are better-qualified — which saves them hours per week by not having to deal with applicants who would never be considered."

MISTAKE 5: "Closing" too Soon, or Not Earning the Right To, or, Not Doing it At All

This mistake actually is a combination of several. They each kill opportunities at different places in the prospecting process.

Closing Too Early- This is a mistake that so many prospectors make. It's asking for a decision right away in a call opening, voice mail, or email. As in,

"Hi Mr. Prospect. Joe Smith here with Allied Industrial . We help manufacturers cut down on downtime. I'd like to get on your calendar for 15 minutes and show you what we do."

You might as well say, "Hi. Can you give me \$100?"

You can't ask someone to marry you within seconds of meeting them.

Well, you can, and salespeople do, with similar results.

You do not want to ask for a decision of any type in your opening, other than requesting that you can continue speaking with them.

Not Earning the Right to Close- If a doctor writes a prescription without proper diagnosis, it could be grounds for malpractice if the recommendation is faulty. When salespeople suggest treatment without diagnosis (which happens all the time) there's not the legal mechanism in place for malpractice (al-though it might not be a bad idea).

What does happen, though, is usually disastrous for the caller: He loses credibility in the listener's mind, since the caller foolishly rambles on about what he/she wants to sell, not what the listener might be interested in buying. Therefore the prospect/customer channels energy into thinking of reasons why he should get the caller off the phone, instead of participating in a meaningful conversation.

Map out your questioning strategy before your call. Instead of having a list of features and benefits you're intent on presenting, take all of your benefits and write them, one beneath another, down the left-hand side of a piece of paper. Then draw two columns down the page to the right of the words. Label the first column "Needs Filled/Problems Solved." Then for each benefit write out what need or problem the corresponding benefit satisfies.

Label the right-hand column "Questions to Ask." For each need or problem write a question that would determine whether that situation existed. Use these questions during your call.

For example, let's say a business offered overnight delivery on orders received by 5:00 P.M., while all the other competitors cut off their ordering time at 12:00 noon for next day delivery.

The "Needs Filled/Problems Solved" would be the prospect often has last minute orders they require the next day, and their existing vendor isn't able to meet those requests, therefore it causes inconveniences, and maybe even lost business.

Only in these situations would the overnight delivery be a main buying motivator. Otherwise it might be a "nice to know" feature that the prospect might be able to take advantage of

in the future if he needed it, or worse, the prospect might think, "I never get in a situation where I need something that quickly. I don't care about that feature at all. Maybe that's why their price is higher." (See how presenting what you think is a benefit could actually create an objection?)

Make sure you don't present what you "think" is a benefit until you've confirmed it by asking the corresponding questions. Here are some examples:

"How quickly do you normally need delivery?"

"Do you ever need next-day delivery on orders you realize you need to place later in the day?"

"What do you do in situations like that?"

"What happens when you need it the next day, but have to wait for two days?"

"What kind of inconvenience does that cause?"

You can see in this situation, if the questions uncovered the need/problem, the "benefit" would then truly be of value.

Not Closing at All- For purposes of discussion, we'll refer to the "close" as commitment of any type, since for many—or most people—the goal of a prospecting call is not to close a sale, but to move to the next step... a meeting, a demo, another call.

This is the activity that takes the least amount of skill to execute, but yet is the hardest for many people to actually perform: Asking for the sale or asking for commitment to take action.

Even if prospects are leaning in your favor, they might not volunteer the action you want unless you make it easy by inviting them to do business with you. I've seen a lot of money left on the table, and hours wasted on unproductive follow-up calls, both a result of not asking for the business, or at least asking for some commitment from the prospect.

Action Step

Build the asking habit. There's no secret or magic here. No hocus-pocus phrase that guarantees they'll say "yes" to your offer. No offensive closing technique with a crazy name.

Very simply, if you want to get different results, you have to change your routine. If you're not asking for commitment or for the sale as often as you should, you need to analyze why, and then make the change. (See Mistake 1)

Now you have the Five Fatal Phone Mistakes, and you likely know which one(s) is preventing you from getting more new business.

Follow these Action Steps, and you will find yourself getting more "yes" answers and fewer no's.

Also, be sure you are getting our other resources to regularly keep your prospecting game sharp, and yourself motivated.

[The Smart Calling Blog](#)

Podcast: [The Art of Sales](#)