Transcript of Sales Kickoff 20+20
Art Sobczak

(Note: this has been edited slightly from the original recording for readability. The content has not changed. With that said, there are instances where it reads more like a transcript than a finely-edited book.)

Hey everybody and welcome to sales kickoff 20 plus 20 I'm Art Sobczak and I want to congratulate you for investing in yourself and your future success and probably your best year ever in 2020. I'm congratulating you because you're here today and that tells me that you're the type of salesperson that is interested in always getting better and those are the ones that in my experience over the past 35 years are the ones who make the most money as well.

So today I have got more material than I promised and I'm going to overdeliver and I might run a little bit long. We were shooting for about 60 to 75 minutes, so I'm not even quite sure how long it's going to be. So if I go over, I'll beg for your forgiveness here. If you need to jump off, that's okay because you're going to have the recording.

I'm not going to spend five minutes talking about myself. That's a pet peeve of mine. Those of you that know me know that I'm going to jump right into the material here.

Just a little bit about what we're going to be covering today. I'm going to give you rapid fire, tons of techniques, tips, processes, methodologies, word for word scripts that you're going to be able to use right away. The, this is not an entire training program step by step, although I do have some method to my madness here. The tips are going to follow the logical progression of the professional sales and prospecting call, which means we're going to start out with free call planning and then go out through the rest of the call and at the very end we're going to be talking about what is really most important, and that is how you think and how you feel when you're doing all this.
Okay?

All right, so let's jump into it right away. Let's talk about a source of intelligence.

A Source of Smart Calling Intel

Here is some great sales intelligence for you. A Wall Street Journal article suggested that you pay attention to those automated "Out of Office" replies you get in response to emails.
In the responses the person often provides names of others you could contact in their absence. These names could be other decision makers.
If you're prospecting it could give you contacts who either could influence or make a decision.
The article cited another example where the out-of-office note said the human

resources manager at a hospital had left the company. The sales rep then contacted her successor, whose contact information was in the note.

Prospecting Fellow Alumni

How about prospecting of fellow alumni...I'm going to jump over to LinkedIn here in a second. So when you're looking for a commonality to make a connection with the prospect, how about starting with the commonality first and then the right prospect? So let me get over to linkedin. So most of us have a special bond with our school and this brother or sisterhood inherently gives us an advantage over a stranger off the street, right? So what's both interesting and odd about this at the same time is that there were likely thousands of other people at your school that you saw every day and never spoke with. But if you saw someone in an airport, in another city with a tee shirt from your school, you might be likely to say something to them, right?

All right, so how do we do this? Well, I've got my LinkedIn account here and very simply, we're just going to go up to the search box and then I'm going to go to People. Okay, click on People. And I just clicked on search and I went to people. Now it gives me this stuff here and I'm going to go to Filters. Okay, so I'm clicking on filters ,,, now with filters, I can pick out a lot of different criteria for finding a prospect. Now, some of you, for some of you, this might be something that you just do second nature, so being repetitive here for you. For some of you, this is brand new. You maybe never even log into LinkedIn. So I'm going to go down to schools and my school isn't listed there. So I am going to type in Creighton University.

Oops, I should probably spell it right. Four years of Jesuit education. You would think I would know how to spell it. There we go. So Creighton university 9who happened to beat Marquette in big East play last night.) And then I could also double up with some other criteria. If I wanted to do location, I could do it there. If I want to do industry, what I'm most interested in, because I sell to sales decision makers, is I'm going to put in VP of sales. All right. VP of sales who went to Creighton university. So now I'm going to do Apply and what comes up here? Well I've got 74 results of people who I would assume went to Creighton university and also are VPs of sales. And as I scroll through that I'm looking for anything that jumps out at me. So I see one here, I'm in the Scottsdale area and then this name also sounds familiar to me.

So I'm going to click on that. And I see Todd Wenberg, vice president of sales, Renewal of Anderson. We both studied at Creighton university in 1981 and 82. I graduated in 1982 ,we were there at the same time. We might've been in some classes together, might've been at some parties together. Who knows, going through his experience here. I see he's been with the same company, different locations, several years. And then, ah ha, this is how he looked interesting to me or familiar. He was also the head baseball coach at Creighton university in 1992 thru 94 which also happened to be the year after Creighton went to the college world series. So now, and I'm a huge baseball fan, so, he was the assistant baseball coach then. All right you never know what you're going to find when you go into LinkedIn.

It's pretty amazing if we just do couple clicks around here. Now how am I going to use this? Well, just because we went to the same school or anybody went to the same school does not diminish the need to have something of value. People are likely not going to buy from you just because you went to dear old hometown you together, right? So we still have to have some potential value here. So we still have to have some potential value. I still want to treat this like any other smart call, which means we want to do our research, we want to come up with our possible value for them. Like we would any other call and then I'd tack on the fellow alum connection at the beginning just to warm them up and make it easier to get engaged.

So for example, with with Todd here, I might say, “Hey Todd, Art Sobczak here with Business by Phone. I see we're both Creighton BlueJays. We were there at the same time. Might've even had some classes together. And also I thought your name looked familiar so I recognize you as the baseball coach in 92 and 93... well anyway, Hey, the reason for the call is that I know you're responsible for new business there and I specialize in working with...” and then I would go into my value statement, which we're going to get into here in a second.

All right, so again, relatively simple approach. If you're prospecting, take advantage of your alumni connections. I mean, here's the thing, you likely paid a lot of money or maybe your parents did for your college education. This is at least one way that we can get something from it, right? Even though if that Statistics 101 class didn't do you any good.

Sending Something Before a Prospecting Call; Compelling, or Clutter and Crap?

Here's a 1980’s version of a bad prospecting approach:

"Mr. Russell, I’m Rob Dunlap with Whatever Services. I sent you a letter and brochure last week, and was wondering if you read through that?"

Here's a 2019 “Sales 2.0.” “Social Selling,” “Content Marketing” version of a bad prospecting approach:

Voicemail:“Hi Bob, I’m Rob Dunlap with Whatever Services. I see we are both connected to Pat Ivory. I sent you an InMail with a link to our video on our IQC capabilities and would like to arrange an interactive web demo to go through our various options with you.”

Technology and innovation does not make a poor strategy (or no strategy) and messaging that lacks value any better.

I can shoot just as poorly with my new Callaway Epic as the clunky things I played with in college. (In fact, I have.)

The example above is about a salesperson sending something in advance of speaking with a targeted prospect. Used in those ways, it’s as bad of an idea now as it was then.

There are exceptions of course. When some best practices are followed.
Decide whether you're conducting a direct response lead gen campaign, or doing sales
Do you intend that your mail, InMail, email, white paper, video, etc., does the selling for you?
If so, it should be structured as a stand-alone direct response piece. And if that is your strategy, why, then, are you needed? Pay someone minimum-wage to call and say, "We sent you a video. Would you like to place an order?"
We live in an "Ignorance Environment."
Meaning that we all ignore most of the messages that come our way daily. We must. Unless there is something timely and compelling that interrupts our ADD mode. More on that in a sec.
If, however, you want to take the chill off of a prospecting approach, we need to first and foremost have some possible value for the prospect.
And grab attention through messaging that cuts through all of the other noise that screams "Salesperson!"
Here are some steps to take. If you are a practitioner of Smart Calling, this should not look new to you.

Do Your Research
Their interest level is in direct proportion to how targeted your message is to them.
Be a detective. Do your online searches. Being proficient at all aspects of LinkedIn is no longer an option. And actually not even enough. Check out these other lead and intel tools: SeamlessSmartCalling.com and SmartCallingIntel.com

Do Social Engineering.
This is calling and asking questions of assistants, screeners, others in the buyer's department, and users of your product or service. For example,
"I hope you can help me. I'm going to be speaking with your VP of HR and want to be sure that what I'd be discussing would be relevant. Please tell me …"
You'll use this information to customize and personalize your preapproach note, voice message, opening statement, and to ask targeted, intelligent questions.

Draft Your Pre-Approach Messaging
The more personalized, the better, using the information you gleaned from your sleuthing:
"Mr. Russell, I saw your post in the Facilities Management group on LinkedIn. I understand that you are now in the process of considering an addition to your manufacturing facility and are looking for the latest energy-efficiency options. We compiled a resource list of just that, that another company in your industry used to reduce utility expenses by 30%. Here's the link to it. If you have questions please let me know."
Discuss the potential results that can be gained by the prospect, not your products or services. Leave them curious.

Make your Call
Use an opening similar to the wording in the note. Just make these slight changes:

"Mr. Russell, Rob Dunlap with Whatever Services. I saw your post in the Facilities Management group on LinkedIn and I understand that you are now in the process of considering an addition to your manufacturing facility and are looking for the latest energy-efficiency options. As I mentioned in an InMail message to you, we recently helped another company in your industry reduce utility expenses by 30% If I've reached you at a good time, I'd like to ask a few questions about your plans to see if it would be of mutual benefit to discuss some of the various options for reducing energy expenses."
Prospects do not want or need, nor will they pay any attention to more irrelevant content, clutter and crapola.
We all, however, will pay attention to something that is compelling. Your job is to determine what that might be, then insert it into a Smart messaging approach.

Answering "What's this in reference to?"

I was doing some research for an online marketing campaign I'm doing, and as often happens, got sidetracked down a rabbit hole of other topics. I landed in a forum for website developers. It was mostly geeks talking geekspeak. But I found someone who had posed a question about actually selling their services and dealing with the "screener's" question, "What's this in reference to?"
I was surprised, because a forum member, another techy-type, responded that he has success with,
"Terry, typically we help chief executives who are frustrated that although they've spent money on a website, it doesn't generate any leads, it doesn't lead to any sales and they feel like they've been wasting money. I'm curious if Dale has ever mentioned that this is a problem?"
Wow, that was brilliant! Adapt that using your own problems and benefits.
You never know where you will find inspiration for great sales ideas!

An Alternative to "How are You?"

Alright, let's lighten it up and talk about something fluffy. Something that provokes a lot of conversation always is should you ask someone how they are at the beginning of a call.

I don't believe in absolutes, in that I wouldn't say never do it, or you should do it all of the time. It really depends on you.

Here is an alternative that one of my clients sent to me, he said it works great for him, and I've tried it to, with success. "How have you been?"

One of my followers, sales pro Edward Totland says, “Yes, I do a simple introduction, following the smart calling format then I'll interrupt myself from going any further, and say, "Did I get your name right? is it pronounced, Sub-Check?? Then regardless of what they say i'll say my name looks simple but people get it wrong all the time, Tot-land.!! then just get back on track with your normal introduction and opening statement. I think when you admit a tiny bit of stupidity in a certain area it brings you down to earth from any lofty sales pillar you may be standing on in their eyes.

What to Do When They Sound Rushed and Crazy-Busy

So here's a scenario. Your prospect or customer answers the phone when they greet you in this tone of voice and it's uh, speaking very rapidly, like, uh, they're trying to spit out all the words in one second. Okay. Now how do you react to that? Some reps just kind of tense up, but they crumble at this point. And if they weren't confident to begin the call in the first place, this kind of knocks their legs out from underneath them. So some people at this point, they just rush their introduction and they're stumbling over their words and, or other people apologize because they, they say, why, I know you're busy or I'm sorry for bothering you.

Whoa, stop for a minute. Now let's analyze the possibilities of why someone sounds like that when they answer the phone first. Maybe they naturally sound that way when they answer the phone with urgency.

Do you know, anybody like that, it's always quick to the point, right?

Or maybe they just like to give the impression that they're busy or maybe too busy to talk because it gets rid of salespeople, or at least it gets them to the point.

And I got to tell you, quite often I'll do this when I get calls from number unavailable or a number that looks like it's coming from a a scam operation, which I've got one this morning and I'm really tired of getting nos as well.

Or maybe you caught them in a moment when they're really busy and therefore that comes through in their voice.

Now, if you analyze those three situations, the only one that you really need to be concerned about is the third one. So what's the best course of action when you're greeted by this seemingly rushed individual? Right? Well, I suggest that you remain calm and then confidently begin your call just as you would with someone who sounds like they're a gracious host, welcoming you into their homes. Maybe could even visualize that image. Don't let a preconceived notion or perception about how busy someone is become your reality. Because if you fall into that, then I can almost guarantee that the call is not going to go as well as you would like it.

Your Opening and Voice Mail Fill-In-the-Blanks Template

Okay everyone. This next part is going to help you get responses to voicemails and emails. Get through, grab more attention of decision makers, get them interested in speaking with you. And all you need to do is fill in the blanks.

Well actually you're going to need to do the things necessary before filling in the blanks and then you're going to need to practice it. But what we're going to do right now is cover very briefly my fill in the blanks opening statement and voicemail template. Maybe some of you already have this. If you don't, this is absolutely critical that you have an interest creating opening statement that can also be used as a voicemail and you have it as a GoTo and then you have variations for the different types of people that you call. Now the, again, this is primarily a prospecting opening.

And I would say for the most part, based on my experience, most people on this call probably do some sort of prospecting even if it's to your own existing accounts. Now I'm going to give you the reader's digest version of this. We're gonna go through it pretty quickly. What I would suggest you do is that you can download this template at that link, smartcalling.training/kickoff. And then I also have about a 45 minute training video there that goes into more detail on all parts of that template. I'm just going to go through the template with you right now and I want, I want you to be thinking about how you would be filling in the blanks here. Okay. So this is the actual template. This is what it looks like. And again, we call this cold caller without the cold.

Actually it's the smart call. Now I am skipping through on fast forward and to all of the things we need to do before the call. Do our research, putting together our possible value proposition, getting our smart call intelligence, doing any social engineering. I'm just going to assume that we have all that done already. So here is the beginning.

Hello Pat. I'm Art Sobczak with Business By Phone and then we're going to have our connection here. Now, what is all this stuff? Our connection is we're going to use some intelligence that we had gathered again by doing our research, social engineering, doing some LinkedIn research, how we were referred or anything that is going to let them know that I know something about you. I did my research. This is not a robo call.

This is not one of those stupid calls where everybody's getting the same message. So I've got a number of different examples in the template there where you can customize your connection. This is certainly not all inclusive. So for me it might look something like this,

“Hey, Art Sobczak here, with business by phone. I saw your post on the LinkedIn inside sales group we both participate in about looking for a prospecting workshop for your 2020 meeting. Next part we're going to give our specialty and then I'm going to further describe a problem or desire that they likely have. So in my case, again, I'm going to say something to the effect of we specialize in working with VPs of sales, sales directors. So specialty, it could be their title, it could be the type of organization, and then we fill in with the problem or desire.

We're looking for more targeted web traffic who are experiencing this, who are considering this, who are expanding into a new territory. Okay. So what we're doing here is that this is helping them visualize themselves because now they're framing it where they're saying, okay, yeah, that's me and that's the problem or desire that is now going on in my world. So all of this is very tightly engineered for a reason to connect with them.

So again mine would look like this. We specialize in working with sales teams who have new business quotas and might not be as confident in their prospecting as management would like.

Now we're going to move into our possible value. And it could be pain avoidance or it could be, or it could be desire to gain or result. And this one gets into a little bit more detail on the template where I give you a lot of different examples.

Don't get overwhelmed by this because you don't have to do it exactly. Ultimately, still got to be conversational. Still has to fit your type of call. So I'll give you an example of this in my case. Uh, so again, we, we work with sales teams who have new business quotas who aren't as excited about prospecting and management would like them to be, are proficient at it. What we do is we help them to avoid their call reluctance and rejection and help them to increase their numbers of quality calls, appointments and sales using a proven conversational prospecting process. So again, I've used both of these here. Excuse me, you don't necessarily need to. The next step in the process, this results in or what this means is, so I'm really, I'm piling on the benefit here and then I'm discussing the end result discussing the outcome for our clients.

This has resulted in gains ranging from 10 to 50% and in my case, this results in reps being more confident in their calling and having a consistent predictable pipeline. So again, again, I went through that pretty quickly and when you get it, I would suspect you're probably not going to go through it that quickly, but it's really not that difficult. And again, all of this is predicated on doing the pre-work, having some intelligence, knowing what your possible value is. When I do this in workshops, I mean, this alone normally takes about an hour and a half and we work on these, we fine tune them. Uh, and the end of this is, or if you don't want to leave them hanging, what I'd like to do is, and notice we don't want to ask for 15 minutes of their time. We don't even want to ask for a decision. Okay.

The biggest decision we want them to make is that they're going to stay on the phone with us for another couple of minutes. So here's what this looks like. So what I'd like to do is ask a few questions, review what you're doing now to see if I could provide you some information to see if we might have a reason to speak further. Again, very conversational, very low key, very non-confrontational, looking for an easy decision for them to make. So in my case it's, I like to ask a few questions to see if it would make sense to have a conversation. So what does this all look like put together? This is everything that I just filled in the blank with. I specialize with working with sales teams. They might have new business quotas, they have new business clothes and might not be as confident in their prospecting is management of like help them avoid call reluctance and rejection and increase their numbers of quality calls, appointments and sales using a proven conversational prospecting process and this results in reps being more confident in their calling and having a consistent predictable pipeline. And I'd like to ask a few questions, see if it makes sense to have a conversation.

Now, I didn't deliver all that as conversationally as I normally would. That's where your practice really comes into play because it's got a sound like the first time you ever said it. Now when you do this, you also have a voicemail message. All you need to do at the end of that to change it to a voicemail message is after saying, Oh, I could ask a few questions. You've made sense to have a conversation. I will call you again on whatever day if you'd like to reach me before then here's my number. I'll also send you an email if you just please hit reply when it would be a good time for us to speak. So there you go, fill in the blanks opening statement template and you can get that at smart calling. Dot training and forward slash kickoff and this truly is a great tool and the people that are using this, and actually I just came out with a revised one a couple months ago and people that are using it, my clients are using it are just kicking butt. I had somebody at a workshop said they went out and placed a call right after they got out of the workshop. Just using pretty much the basic template word for word and got an appointment and I'm pretty confident you will too.

An Effective Listening Tip

While on a sales call with a training prospect he said, "There are four important things we teach our sales reps…" You can bet I wrote as quickly as I could to get those down. And then I repeated them to be sure I understood. It might seem obvious, but this made it easy for me to tell him exactly how I would help him. A couple of points here:
-Any time someone mentions numbers, such as, "There are three key areas we need work on…" you need to laser in with your listening.
-If they do not volunteer this info, ask for it: "What are the three areas you feel you need the most work on?

The Socratic Opening for Meetings

Today there is tremendous emphasis on “getting the meeting.”

Entirely new job positions have been created for it. Actually, they might have just been given new names, Sales Development Professional, Business Development Rep. Regardless, who does it, it involves calling to arrange a meeting, either in person, on the phone, or online, which adds the visual element without being there.

In my experience, I have seen far too many situations where the appointment and meeting was set, but then the caller—or a different sales rep blew it in the actual meeting.

Now, there are lots of things that could have contributed to the rep not being set up for success to begin with. Perhaps the prospector—who might have been them-- simply called and quickly asked for, and got a meeting without any conversation. I've never been a fan of that. These are the people who follow the "the first call is just to get the meeting" myth. That usually results in a disinterested, sometimes unqualified prospect.

And those are costly when you calculate the actual costs of a meeting.

Perhaps the caller didn't find out if it would be appropriate to get others in the meeting or on the next call.

OK, we won't focus on those for now. Let's talk about the rep who calls or shows up for the scheduled meeting. And then proceeds to go into his or her pitch.

You know where that ends up, right?

With a disinterested, unengaged prospect, looking at his or her watch—while the salesperson is droning on about his "thing," his product or service, and what he feels are the benefits.

Ask any decision maker, and we've been in more of these sales presentations than the good ones.

Sure, the rep might ask some basic questions, but the default most often reverts to "pitch mode" by the salesperson.

And even though most sales training teaches we should go deep with questions, the easy thing to do for salespeople is to shift into what they are comfortable with: dumping product knowledge.

But of course, that is exactly what we don't want to do. Because it is ineffective and creates objections.

So what is the effective, recommended strategy?

Get the prospect talking about what they want. Quickly.

This should not be a surprise for anyone who has followed me for any time at all. Pretty much every call opening I've ever suggested ends with letting the prospect know that in order to deliver on the possible value we hint at, we need to ask some questions.

And, the same format can and does work if your model is to follow my process for the initial call, and then to arrange a meeting or demo.

So for example, a good first call would reach the moment where you determine a meeting would be appropriate.

You've qualified them, and asked questions at the advanced level... not only to get information, but to intrigue them, getting them thinking about a problem, pain or desire, and interested in speaking more.

Of course I've always been partial to taking the first call as far as possible. If the music is still playing, stay on the dance floor. Why end the party prematurely if they are playing along

But OK, let's say for whatever reason, your model is another meeting. You suggest the best next step would be a web demo call, and that the other department heads should be involved.

Your prospect agrees. You confirm the date and time, and assign some homework. Which could be them collecting data, speaking with their front line team... whatever.

You want to be prepared to use the "Socratic Opener" to kick off your questioning.

This is something I pulled out of 23-year old book that was on my shelf, "Socratic Selling," by Kevin Daley and Emmett Wolfe.

I had forgotten about the book. But pulling out older classics is something I do regularly. Not everything has changed in sales, regardless of what you might read on the Internet.

In fact, most things regarding human behavior have not changed. And things you read in actual books, by successful people who authored them based on experience, are more valid than a social media post that an out-of-work "expert" or "influencer" just typed up.

Anyway, I am going to take the "Socratic Opening" and adapt and refine it a bit. (And I do still want to give credit to where I found it, although many people might just take idea and call it their own.)

I'll just lay it out for you, then I'll break it down, show why it is effective, and offer variations you can use.

Here it is:

The day and time arrives, the call begins, small talk and introductions exchanged, and you then say, "Mike, I'm prepared to talk about (the result/benefit they were interested in and what you had discussed on the first call). If you could give me your perspective on that, we can focus the meeting on what interests you most."

Boom. There it is. Sit back and watch the magic unfold.

The book analyzes each part of it. I'll take their analysis, adapt it, and add to it.

1. Saying You are Prepared.
   "I'm prepared to talk about (the result/benefit they were interested in and what you had discussed on the first call)."

By stating this at the beginning, you are implying that you have done your homework and could get into presenting what they might be thinking they are going to hear.

The authors say that that this lends credibility to you, and it puts the prospects at ease. They give other ways to word this:
"I'm ready to discuss..."
"I could start by explaining..."

I've come up with some of my own:
"Some people might start out by going in a presentation about (result/benefit) and I certainly could do that..."

"I'm prepared to talk about many of the reasons that others have taken advantage of (benefit/result)..."

I like mine, since we're actually doing a "pattern interrupt" on what they might be expecting a typical salesperson to do. You are contrasting yourself with them. And accomplishing the same thing the authors suggest of notifying the prospect you are prepared.

2. Invite the Prospect to Speak
   "...If you could give me your perspective on that..."

Notice the choice of the word, "perspective." The authors point out that this is "mind" word.
Everyone has thoughts, viewpoints, and ideas. The prospect doesn't have to work too hard to answer.

And they point out to avoid the use of words like, "problems," "concerns," and "needs."

What? Doesn't most training suggest that we get into those things? Yes, but not this early.

Depending on what has transpired up to this point in your discussion, they could justifiably be thinking—or say—"Wait, we didn't say we have a need."

Also, notice you are not asking them to just tell you about their business—which some training suggests. Instead, you focus them on the particular topic at hand: the result of your product or service.

3. Offer an Immediate Benefit

"...we can focus the meeting on what interests you most."

Although the book doesn't explain it in this way, I find this is brilliant in that we have already mentioned the possible benefit they will hear about and are expecting, but now we have disrupted that thought with something even better:

What interests **them** the most.

It appeals to the most basic emotion: what we as individuals want.

On the surface, this technique is relatively simple: letting the prospect know you want to find out what is important to them instead of pitching what you have.

And it is what I have been preaching for years.

But this framework is so well thought out and constructed that I suggest you give it a try.

The authors give numerous examples of its success in action.

In one case, once arriving at the meeting, the rushed prospect said that something urgent came up so he needed to make it a quick 15 minutes. The rep was tempted to just go into his presentation slides. Instead, he calmly executed the Socratic Opener. The 15-minute meeting ended up being an hour. With the prospect talking for 50 minutes of that. And the sales rep generating an opportunity far beyond what he was seeking.

One final suggestion on implementing this and having success with it. Just like with any process and technique, you can't wing it.

You must craft the words that are most comfortable, appropriate, and likely effective for you (subject to tweaking, of course).

And then practice. Out loud. With others. And record them. Rinse and repeat.

The authors say,

"It's one thing to think of what you'll say. It's quite another to train the mouth to say the words you choose. Rehearsal guarantees that your mouth will follow your mind's orders."

In conclusion, if you arrange meetings with prospects, the Socratic Opener will be effective for you. Go through each of these steps, create several variations, practice til they are natural, and then put it into practice.

Positioning Value When You are Not the Giant

Prior to my training session with the sales team I worked with a few months ago, I sat in on the "State of the Company" addresses from the top leaders in the company. One mentioned a brilliant phrase that you can implement as a strategy also, if you have a Goliath in your industry, and you are more like David.

This company provides awesome database software, services, and support. They are growing, but not massive. They do pride themselves on truly caring about what is best for the customer, and I can vouch for that.

What is the phrase?

A reason that companies should do business with them is,

“Because we are not Oracle.”

Of course Oracle is the behemoth in the industry. So this is taking what someone might consider being a negative (being smaller) and turning it into a positive.

I can think of many of you right now who can use this. Maybe you already are.

"Because we are NOT Amazon."

"Because we are NOT Costco."

"Because we are NOT (fill in with the "Goliath" of your industry)."

Of course this all needs to be in context, and has to be backed up with the reasons why.

Responding to “We Already Work with Someone”

The question on LinkedIn was, How do you overcome “I already work with someone?”
One popular response was,
“I am so happy to hear that! Does that person solve all of your business challenges? If not, I can share a quick story where I doubled a company’s revenue in under 2 years

and could do the same for you. Can I come by tomorrow to discuss?"
What?
Responders were gushing over that one with reactions like,
"Wow, that is great!"
"Amazing!"
The real problem with lots of these online discussions is you have people in many cases sharing suggestions they actually do not use in the real world, and others who probably would be afraid to use them, but are wowed by them, who believe that is a good thing to say.
I always analyze things both from a salesperson, and buyer perspective.
If I heard that response, I would think the person was a jerk. You can "do the same for me?" You don't know that, and we have not established that.
(However, a question at the beginning is good—although not that one—as I'll point out later

What I suggest is always under the umbrella of "What will minimize that chance for resistance for most people, and maximize the chance for success, based on basic human behavior principles?"
So, based on that, I've always taught that the best way to respond to this is to first understand why they might possibly say it.

Two Reasons
1. It's a Resistant Reflex Response, meaning there is no substance there and they are just trying to get you off the phone. Or,
2. They are working with someone (without whatever degree of happiness doesn't matter) and the easiest thing to say at that moment is they are happy, because even considering changing the status quo would involve more work than getting you off the phone.
Working within those parameters, the best first response is to get them talking. Only then do we have something we can work with.
Caution: There are TWO thngs you do NOT want to do at this point:
-We don't want to argue with them, or,
-pitch how good we are, or what we want to do.
Plus, if they are really satisfied with who they are with, the only way they will even enter a thought process to consider changing is if they begin to think there just might be greener grass on the other side of the fence.
For the first words out of your mouth I suggest a softening statement,
"Not a problem."
"I hear that a lot."
"That's OK."
"Almost everyone I talk to is already working with someone."
The softening is important because it is not what is expected, IF they think you are a typical salesperson.
It puts them at ease in a way.
Then comes the question. It can take different forms. A good one is to create questions based on problems they likely still have that competitors don't address as well as you.

For example,
“What do you do in situations where you need same-day delivery on an essential part that is holding up your line?”
“How are you dealing with the issue of_____?”

The “Backup Plan”
Then there is the “backup plan” question that I have used successfully:
“What is your Plan B in case of an emergency?”
“When stuff hits the fan, what is your contingency?”
These questions can cause someone to think and say, “What do you mean?”
Precisely. We want them thinking about something that they hadn’t before.

Ask What They Did Previously
Here’s another. This is based on the proven premise that it is easier for someone to tell you what they have done before, than what they want.
“What criteria did you use when you selected them?”
“How did they happen to become your main source?”
And here is another way to possibly plant some doubt:
“When do you do your annual review to be sure you are getting the best competitive market price?”
Finally, although this would not be your initial response, but as I have taught for years, at the very minimum you can ask to keep the door open for the future, after you have had a brief conversation, and it doesn’t appear you’ll be moving forward any time soon.
“Well, if anything ever happened with them, and you were in a bind, would you consider us as a backup if you needed one?”

Good Points from the Discussion
OK, back to the original LinkedIn discussion.
There were some good suggestions in the comments that I would approve, that go along with my principles, and would recommend:
“Hey, I totally get it … I got into this profession to challenge the status quo and help you improve your business. Are you confident enough in your current provider to get a competitive look at the solution?”
“If we were able to give you the same, great quality product/service, if not better, and at a lower price, would you be interested in speaking with us at a later date?” Note: the “later date” is the key here, since it does not ask for the commitment today. If they say yes, then it opens up the dialogue.
“Many of the strongest and longest client relationships I have started with that exact same sentence.”

How to Use a Micro-Commitment in the Objection-Handling Process

OK, we just covered how to deal with something that could be challenge or roadblock, or an attempt at a blowoff. Now I want to cover addressing real objections.

I've been teaching a process for years to address the real objections we hear. I've just added a powerful new component to it: the micro-commitment
You can see the process explained in an video by going to YouTube and searching on my name and "objections, " although I'll share a brief version now. Actually parts of it are similar to what we just covered.
First, a real objection happens later in a call after we've asked questions, made a recommendation, maybe even a proposal and we are well down the sales process. Then we hear something like, well, your prices are still out of range. Or, we believe your competitor has a better solution.

1. The Softening Statement
The first step after hearing an objection is using a Softening Statement.
You don't want to give the impression that you are going to argue with them. Therefore it's good to let them know that you are going to be conversational with them. You could say,
"I see."
"I understand."
"Not a problem."
"Let's talk about that."
"Let's discuss that . . ."
"That's an interesting point. Let me get a good understanding of it ..."
"Tell me more about that... "

2. Isolating the Main Reason
In most cases it's wise for you to narrow their reason for objecting to one issue. After the softening statements we just went through, you could use phrases and questions such as these:
"Let's take that out of the picture. Would we be the ones you'd choose?"
"Let's look at this a different way. Looking at us compared to the others, what would you say would be the more comprehensive choice for you?"
"If you didn't use that as one of your criteria, would we be the ones you'd choose?"
"If we completely took that out of the discussion, then where would we be?"

3. Doubt-Creation Questions
The next step is where you actually use the doubt-creating questions you will think about and prepare in advance.
So again you will ask your questions here, designed to get them thinking about, and doubting their reasons for objecting.
Ultimately you want them thinking, hmmm, well, maybe there is another way to look at it.
Let's look at a specific situation, a wholesale supplier trying to persuade a retailer to carry his product.
The retail customer says, "We don't need to stock any more lines." The wrong response would be a canned "objection rebuttal," coming back with market share facts and figures that would prove the retailer wrong—but not change his mind. A doubt-creating approach would use questions:

“How often in the past month have people called and asked for this type of product and you’re not able to provide it?”, or,
“What situations have you had where someone called and asked about a product like this, but they didn’t come in because they found out you didn’t have it?”
When you are prepping your questions you would also be anticipating their possible answers, your next questions, and so on.

4. The Micro Commitment
Next is the micro-commitment. We now have softened and broken down their resistance. We want to do one more thing before we go into you restating your case as to why they should move forward.
This is simply asking them,
“Are you open to an idea.”
Boom. This is almost hypnotic.
It’s an easy question for them to answer.
Notice the key words.
"Open." Again, given the context of where you are, most reasonable people would at least be open, right.
And then you are asking about an idea. Ideas are non-threatening. They don’t cost money.
And, once they say yes, they are now invested in listening to what you have.

5. Recommend Again
Now you make your sales recommendation again, and ask for commitment.
For example,
“So Mike, based on the math we just did here, it looks like your total cost of ownership would be less with our system, since you feel it will give you a greater return over the longer life of unit, and you won’t have the out of pocket maintenance expenses. Given all of that, let’s go ahead and move forward with it.”
Again, what’s important here is that if you just made that statement before going through the doubt-creation process, technically you could be totally right, factually, but they might not be there yet emotionally, therefore they likely wouldn’t buy into the argument. They’d still be in resistant mode.
And again, incorporating the micro-commitment makes it all stronger. Work it into your process.

A Trial Closing Question
When the call is running along smoothly and you detect they're leaning in your favor, take their temperature with, “What else will you need to make a decision to go with this program?” The answer will indicate how likely they are to make a positive decision, and what else you'll need to provide to help them do it. Or, it can help smoke out any problems, which also is a good outcome.

A Conversational Close
Try the “Sounds good?” technique as a trial close, or even as a final close. For example, “What I can do is have your account set up, and have that first shipment—at the 20% discount—sent out tomorrow. Sounds good?” This is similar to the “OK?” technique in that it is a natural tendency to reply positively to “Sounds good?”

An Assumptive Close
I had a contractor come out to do an estimate. The woman asked great questions, took notes, made some recommendations on things I had not thought about, wrote up the estimate on the spot, and just handed the clipboard to me with a pen and said,
"You want to go with this, right?"
It was that simple.
No hesitation in her voice.
An assumptive, but not pushy attitude and tone.
She knew I needed the work done, otherwise I would not have called and took the time to have an estimate done. The easy thing was to just go with the estimate.
It doesn't get much more fundamental than this, and it's something we all should follow.
When someone contacts you for a quote or for information, they have a reason for doing so.
I see too many organizations spend heavily on generating inquiries, and then sales reps don’t treat them with urgency, and like the precious gems they are.
Lots of studies show that they will ultimately do something with someone, it might as well be you.
Oh, here’s one more. This is one I’ve used hundreds of times, when you can tell someone is leaning toward you, but haven’t volunteered the sale yet.
“Sounds like you’ve made up your
mind to do this, right”

So, have a similar assumptive attitude, and be sure you ask--not wish--for the sale.

A Very Simple Resistance Response
While listening to recordings from client calls, I heard a prospect say,
"Well, it is not in our budget."
The sales rep responded,
"That’s OK,"
...then continued with his questioning, pretty much ignoring the statement.
And he got the sale!
Two important points here.
First, his reaction was like the Mexican beach vendors in Cabo walking up to everyone they see and asking for the sale:
"Sunglasses Senor?"
No.

"These would look good on you."
They act as if they didn't even hear the no, then they continue. You can do the same.
Next, regarding the budget issue. If you are looking for new business, in many cases what you are calling about will NOT be in their budget.
And it doesn’t matter.
If you are talking to the right person, and if they perceive your value as high enough, they find the money.

When They Ask for the Proposal Too Early

I was reviewing a few of the past The Art of Sales podcast episodes when doing some research for a client training workshop, and found myself listening to the entire show again where I had Dan Hoemke on as the guest, "CEO Guest: Dan Hoemke Shares How to Sell to the Top.
As a CEO of a major healthcare organization, and a couple others before this one, and someone who has, sold to the C-Suite, he had some tremendously valuable how-to's anyone can use to sell to decision makers--at any level.
One of the many tips that sent me scrambling for my pen was on our discussion of not being proposal printers... meaning that proposals should be the result of moving the sales process to the point where there is already a good probability of getting the deal.
In response to an early proposal request, Dan suggests saying,
"The last thing I would want to do is put a proposal in front of you that was not worthy of your consideration."
Powerful. That is a great way to further qualify someone as serious, and get them to continue with questioning.
(You can hear this episode, and all of them at TheArtOfSales.com)

Are you 100% satisfied with where you are right now?

If you are not 100% satisfied with where you are with your sales results, your skill level, and your career right now, it is precisely a result of you.

The choices you have made up to this point, the actions you've taken and did not take. The effort you have put in.

It's not "the leads."

It's not "no one answers the phone anymore."

It's not "my manager is a jerk."

It's you.

It always is us.

The great news is, where you want to be is not reliant on past choices.

Your GPS does not ask where you have been.

Only where you want to go.

But, achieving whatever you want is not a matter of one "script," response, or easy button.

It is a matter of BEing the person who does the things, consistently, to get the results you want.

A person who is in shape, fit, and whose blood chemistry and other vitals are in the above-average-of-healthy range IS a different person than someone who is 80 pounds overweight, can barely breathe going up a flight of stairs, is constantly sick, and whose heart is a ticking time bomb.

What are their behaviors and thoughts that are driven by the type of person they see themselves as?

Think of someone right now who has what you want.

Whether it be status (the top sales rep in the company), or material possessions (huge house, Lambo, flies First Class, etc.), or self esteem ("I am great at what I do and provide massive value.")

Now, think of WHO that person is every day, and what they are consistently DOING to get those results.

What changes to your identity would you need to make, to BE the person you need to be, to DO the things necessary to get the results you want?

The great news is, the past does not control the future, unless you allow it to.

It's pretty amazing what we can accomplish when we decide to BE the person who will commit to do the things necessary to get there.

Now that we've discussed changing your identity in order to do the things you need to, to get the results you want, let's look at those desired results.

How do you know what you can't do?

Unless your answer is a physical limitation (I could not hit .300 in the Major Leagues. I couldn't even hit that in high school) your answer is probably a self-imposed limitation. A story you tell yourself that you bought into.

I had dinner with a couple of guys in the tech space the other night. One was about my age and I asked about his background. Early in his career he had quickly risen to one of the top sales reps, among hundreds, at Wang Laboratories (look it up, kids).

I asked how he did that.

He said, "I didn't know what I didn't know." He didn't know that he couldn't go into big companies and school districts and actually displace IBM. So he did it. Repeatedly.

In Jim Fortin's podcast this week, he talked about there is actually no such thing as "mind boggling." That just means we have attached our limiting beliefs to things.

He shares a story where years ago he was working out with weights and his lifting partner told him to add another 20 pounds to his next bench press set.

He said he was maxed out and couldn't do that.

Then Jim went to the drinking fountain. He came back, knocked out the next set without a problem, and his partner told him to look at the weight.

He had snuck on another 20 pounds. Jim just didn't know he could do it, but he did anyway.

How about asking yourself better questions as you end the week, and plan for next week... and the end of the year:

-What do I really want that up to this point I thought I couldn't achieve?

"Is (whatever fear/habit/limiting belief keeping you from your top revenue-producing activity) really more important to me than (your vision/life mission/major goal)?"

For example, "Is my avoidance of placing dedicated prospecting calls EVERY day really more important to me than getting out of credit card debt and building up the kids' college fund."

-What do people do who have already achieved this?

-What is the first step I need to take on the way to achieving this?

-What are the next small steps I need to continue taking?

Alright, let me end with one more important point here…

I got into self-development early... in college is when I first read "How to Win Friends and Influence People."

Later, after I left my corporate jobs and early in my business over 30 years ago I bought lots of cassette tape learning programs.

I scrimped on other things to invest in these programs.

One that was particularly influential was "The Strangest Secret" by Earl Nightingale. (You can still get it in various forms.)

I was reminded of one of Earl's quotes from that program yesterday.

I was reading another misguided post on LinkedIn from someone who apparently was a Gary V. follower and putting out his 100 pieces of content for the day (don't even get me going on that)

The poster was whining how no one answered the phone today, so he didn't even try calling, and how CEO's and everyone on down should have their own "content strategy."

Uh huh. Wonder how that is working for him.

I could go off on that one, but my observation is that a lot of "content" out there is crap.

Anyway, here is what Earl said:

"Too many people today are like the man who stands in front of the stove and says, 'Give me heat and then I'll add the wood.' How many men and women do you know, or do you suppose there are today, who take the same attitude toward life? There are millions. We've got to put the fuel in before we can expect heat."

The fuel, Smart Callers, is putting in the QUALITY activity.

Doing the prep work efficiently, and then making the calls.

TALKING to humans.

Don't be a hobbyist as a salesperson, someone who just dabbles in calling people.

The top salespeople are calling professionals.

Who else is planning on making this an epic year?

I am.

Let's go add tons of fuel and kick some butt!

2020 WILL be your best year ever!