

Warming Up to Cold Calls

Applying Toastmasters' Communication Skills
to Obtain Job Interviews, Client Appointments and more.

By Craig Harrison

Craig@ExpressionsOfExcellence.com

Cold calling isn't solely the domain of high pressure telesales professionals in boiler rooms such as seen in the movie Glengary Glen Ross. In point of fact, cold calling is an accepted and proven technique for prospecting and generating sales, interviews and new clients. I've even used cold calling to attract new members to my Toastmaster club, and to generate support to build new clubs. You can successfully cold call tastefully and judiciously on your way to success. Using skills learned through the Toastmasters program you take the chill out of cold calls.

Cold Calls Defined

Any time you call someone you don't know, it's considered a cold call. You are calling "cold" without any previous contact. They don't know you and you likely don't know, or know about them. (If instead you were referred to the person you're calling, or they already know of you in some form or fashion, that's considered a warm call.)

Dialing By Numbers

The reality of cold calls is that success is a numbers game. On average one must make many calls for each sale. The key is to keep making the calls and not take the rejection personally. In many cases, the person you call will eventually buy from you, though it may take a number of calls or contact over an extended period. This is common. Attitude, then, is one key to cold calling. By staying upbeat and consistently making your calls, you will make appointments, contacts and sales and get better at it over time as well. A 10% success rate in cold calling is considered excellent.

The Tools of the Trade

Successful cold callers create a cold caller's tool kit to support them. You can too! Create a clean work environment where you can have a note pad, crib sheets, calendar, a lead tracking system, reference materials and even a mirror nearby. The more organized you are the more confident you will feel and sound as you make your calls. You'll also be more efficient with the tools of your trade at your side. Oh yes, don't forget your telephone! I find a headset telephone to be most convenient as it leaves my hands free and my neck unencumbered.

The mirror serves a special function. It's there to remind you to smile as you call. Though they can't see you, listeners need to hear your warmth, confidence and relaxed nature. Periodically look into the mirror to confirm you are smiling as you speak. Smiling relieves tension in your jaw, face and neck, and by relaxing you it helps relax the party on the other end of the line.

Become A Script Writer

To be most effective, you should sketch out a script of what you intend to say, *prior* to making any calls. As skilled as you are in Table Topics, write a conversational script that introduces yourself and your company, products or services, and emphasizes the benefits these offer the prospect.

By rehearsing with your script prior to actually calling, you begin to become familiar with your end of the conversation. This helps in several ways. It frees you up to ad lib since you are now speaking from experience. It also removes the pressure of what to say next so you can instead concentrate on what is being said by the receiver in return.

Remember, we deliver the script conversationally. Practice by calling your voice mail and recording yourself. When you play it back analyze where you are confident and where you waiver. What words flow from your tongue? Where do the words stick in your throat? Tweak your script accordingly to smooth your pitch out.

Ask Questions

Cold calls are intended to gather information as much as impart it. By asking questions you can best learn how to serve the prospect's needs. What are their needs? What problems do they have? Where is the gap in their product line? What keeps them up at night? Such open-ended questions will garner valuable information to help you see how you can help them. By listening intently and taking notes a fuller picture of the sales scenario can be formed.

Speak the Language of Benefits

Let them know more than the features of the products or services you have to offer. Let them know the benefits they provide! What is the result of using your products? What result derives from the services you offer? Simply put, what's in it for them? Say so, in no uncertain terms.

When I call to explore building company clubs for local organizations I don't just stress the features of Toastmasters clubs, such as weekly meetings, a learning lab for speech making and the logistics of each meeting. I stress the benefits and end-results of the Toastmasters experience: we build confident communicators and leaders! That's the takeaway that people respond to!

Objections Are Your Friend

Objections are not to be feared, but valued. Objections a prospect may voice give valuable insight into their concerns, fears and how they think. Take note. Knowing their objections allows you to quell them, soothing them and clearing the way to the sale. Don't argue or dispute their assertions. Instead make sure you understand it, then work to address those concerns. Doing so can net you the sale and become the beginning of a new business relationship.

The Toastmaster's Edge

As a Toastmaster you are well equipped to cold call successfully. You already possess the ability to speak concisely from your felicity with Table Topics. You are able to infuse your words with vocal variety to convey confidence and authority. Often cold calls are a combination of Speaking to Inform and a Making It Persuasive. And you are a skilled listener from your many meetings where you were an audience member for others. Advantage Toastmaster!

It's Closing Time

Sales may come on the first call, the fourth or the fourteenth. Never assume it's not forthcoming, but don't apply pressure and rush your prospect. Build trust, rapport and a fuller understanding of their world and the sale will help make itself. Your biggest concern should be that you are addressing the decision maker. Assuming you are, remain upbeat, use a combination of logic and emotion and speak to the needs of the prospect and the sale will be yours. It's your call!

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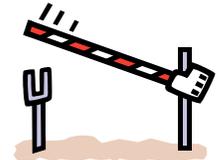
PROFESSIONAL SPEAKER **CRAIG HARRISON** DTM of Lakeview Toastmasters (2767-57) in Oakland, CA, has sold everything from jewelry to joke books to biscuits-in-a-basket using basic cold calling techniques. A speaker, trainer and sales consultant, Craig makes sales communication and customer service fun and easy for his clients. Contact him through his website www.ExpressionsOfExcellence.com or e-mail Craig@ExpressionsOfExcellence.com.



Getting Past Gatekeepers

Successful Strategies for Reaching Decision Makers

By Craig Harrison
www.ExpressionsOfExcellence.com



Does it sometime seem as though hiring managers are residing in a gated community? As a job seeker, you don't have to grope for the access code. Learn how to reach decision makers so you too can enter the gates of employment.

Let's face it, half the difficulty in getting a job is getting to the decision maker to make your case. Traditionally there was a secretary or administrative assistant to circumnavigate. Now there are electronic nemeses as well: challenges like voice mailboxes and blind e-mail addresses. The constant: it's still tough to get past the gatekeepers — those professionals who “guard” the decision makers and often run interference for them — to get in front of decision makers.

Gatekeepers (GKs), those entrusted with guarding the Decision Makers (DMs) you wish to reach, can be your adversaries or allies, depending on your approach. They serve as a filter or screen for their bosses. Your challenge: to be regarded as important enough to be allowed into their inner sanctum. Gatekeepers may be administrative assistants, secretaries, voice mail systems or main switchboard operators. They may also be temporary workers or human resource representatives.

Here are my rules of thumb for “Passing Gate” and receiving consideration by decision makers:

DO's

1. Turn Gatekeepers into allies: treat them with respect, humor and compassion. Their job can be tough too. They get it from both ends. Regard them as people with their own personality, not as faceless obstacles to be overcome at all costs.
2. Help decision makers look good in their boss's eyes. Can you solve his/her problem? Let the GK know and they will "carry your torch" for you. Let the GK present you as his/her solution to the DM's problem.
3. Recognize GKs as vital to your information gathering mission. Learn more about the DM, his/her department, recent trends, internal machinations within company, from the GK.
4. Call at different times if your initial attempts are rebuffed. Learn your DM's schedule & moods!
5. Calling before/after GK's shift will get you through directly. Many Decision Makers work long hours and feel less pressured before/after hours.
6. Use humor, creativity and topicality to distinguish yourself from others.
7. Take the time to establish rapport with *each* person you come in contact with. Whether or not they're the actual person you were wishing to speak to, they are actual people — deserving of your courtesy, respect and attention.
8. Gather information with every call you make, whether or not you accomplish your primary purpose in calling. Ask appropriate questions and gather pertinent information on the decision maker, his or her schedule, what else is happening in the department of company at the time you are calling. You're also interested in insights into the psychological make-up of the person you are calling. For instance, when is the best (and worst) time to call? How do you pronounce your decision maker's name? Does he or she prefer an informal name: "T" for Hortence or Condy for Condelezza.
9. Utilize multiple forms of communication to make contact. Calls alone may or may not result in success. Consider using calls, postcards, faxes and e-mails to make contact. Some candidates ask decision makers (and their gatekeepers) what the best way is to communicate. Some managers prefer e-mail, others formal letters or faxes. Once you know, play it their way.

Getting Past Gatekeepers *Con't*

10. The phrase “returning his/her call” upgrades your call’s importance in GK’s eyes. Use it to indicate past history.
11. When leaving repeated voice mail messages, list a different benefit you provide or skill you possess during each message, as a way to both qualify and distinguish yourself.
12. Don’t use up entire voice mail tape. Make your messages succinct: short and sweet.
13. Stay upbeat — even if it’s the 10th unreturned message you’re leaving.
14. Be creative/funny/distinguishable so as to get consideration. One job candidate could never get her calls taken when she left her full name. One time, when asked by the gatekeeper for her name, she used a literary name from the television series *I Claudius*. She replied "Clydemonestra." She nearly fainted when the gatekeeper then asked her to spell her name. The Decision Maker, intrigued, took her call and turned out to also be a fan of the same PBS series.
15. Humor works. Self-effacing humor and humor in solidarity with the gatekeeper help open doors.
16. When all else fails, have your Gatekeeper call theirs!

DON'Ts

1. Call and claim you're family, or claim to be calling from the police, IRS or FBI. One candidate though he'd get through to an HR rep who was from India. He told the receptionist he was a relative calling from India. The rep's father had been sick and she fearing the worst, dropped everything to take this call, in fear the news concerned her ailing father. Needless to say this candidate never worked for her company as a result of his misguided stunt.
2. Become surly, rude or sarcastic. It's a turn-off and suggests immaturity and a lack of flexibility.
3. Avoiding filling up your recipient's voice mailbox with long and detailed messages. Whether or not they are retrieved locally, it's inconsiderate and shows bad judgment on your part. Instead show off your communication skills with a short and pertinent "elevator" speech. If leaving multiple messages vary your message, listing a different qualification or benefit you provide each time you call.
4. Don't make the Decision Maker wrong for not being there to answer you in person, or for not having responded yet. To you it may seem like a simple thing to do (returning your call) yet consider the many priorities busy professionals already have on their to-do lists. Believe it or not, you're not the center of their universe!
5. Strive to make an impression. Using clichés and following scripts leaves you indistinguishable from the competition. Show some personality and spunk such that you'll stand apart from the crowd when you call and be memorable when they decide who to call back.

While cold calling can be a numbers game, the essence of calling is a people game: treat others like the valued individuals they are and remain confident you're someone whose call decision makers will be glad they took. The only Gates you may not master on your first call...Bill Gates.

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As a self-employed keynote speaker, corporate trainer and consultant on communication topics, Craig Harrison of Lakeview Toastmasters (2767-57) in Oakland, CA is simultaneously a decision maker, gatekeeper and caller on a daily basis. He is standing by to take your calls at (888) 450-0664 and respond to e-mails addressed to Craig@ExpressionsOfExcellence.com. Visit his website at www.ExpressionsOfExcellence.com.