

FEATURE

Getting Comfortable: How To Overcome Your Call Reluctance

By Bill Gager

Would you rather walk through a raging fire than make a cold call? As a salesperson or manager, if you even hesitated with your response to that question, then you may be suffering from call reluctance. That's okay—you're not alone. In fact, nearly 90 percent of salespeople experience some level of call reluctance.

The number one reason people fail at the sales profession is that—due to call reluctance—they don't initiate enough sales to be successful. Most salespeople prefer to wait until the customer initiates a sales discussion, rather than bring the topic up on their own. This challenge exists in all fields including the printing and graphic arts industry, where even the most experienced sales professionals are relied upon to expand existing customer relationships.

A huge number of causes for call reluctance exist, but the main reason is simply discomfort. Either you feel uncomfortable with the possibility of rejection, or you don't know what to say or do to initiate the sales conversation. Regardless of the root, you can overcome your call reluctance and feel more comfortable approaching customers and prospects when you use the following six steps:

Confront Your Feelings

Recognize, acknowledge, and express your negative feelings. Many salespeople don't like making new business approaches to customers and prospects. These feelings are natural, but they don't have to hinder your success. In fact, research has shown that a salesperson's attitude toward cold calling has little effect on their prospecting effectiveness, as long as they don't let these negative feelings stop them.

Recognizing your negative feelings and expressing how you feel about making sales approaches to a friend or colleague can actually help overcome call reluctance. Simply through expressing how you feel, you can release the paralyzing energy of your negative feelings and be more comfortable initiating sales situations. So talk about your call reluctance with someone you trust, release all your negative feelings, and you'll find that this alone will make you perform much better.

How Much is Enough?

Determine the necessary levels of contact. The next step in overcoming call reluctance requires you to look at how your discomfort affects your success. To meet the goals that you set for yourself, and the goals your company places on you in terms of new accounts and growth of existing accounts, you must figure out how many new sales you need to get. For example, to meet your goals, you may need to make 10 sales per week. Next, subtract the number of new sales that will come to you either through advertising, referrals, or existing accounts. Maybe five new sales seek you out, without any effort on your part. So 10 minus five means

you need to initiate five new sales per week to be successful.

Behave Yourself

Set goals. Now that you know how many sales you must initiate, you must set behavioral goals for yourself by looking at what you're currently doing. Do you need to initiate five sales per week to meet your goals, but currently aren't initiating any? If you decide you're going to stretch yourself for five calls in the first week, you're setting yourself up for failure, because the behavior change is too drastic. Instead, set a reasonable stretch goal. If you're initiating zero new sales now, anything greater than zero is reasonable.

Suppose you set your goal for this week at one new sales call. After you reach that goal, you can set it one higher at two. The key is to set goals you know you can make, and build your confidence until you become more comfortable.

Also, your goal must be behavior based, rather than time based. If you say you'll spend two hours prospecting this week, then you'll never do it. Human beings are extremely talented at putting off the things they don't want to do. No matter how disciplined you are, you'll never find the time for the things that you don't enjoy.

Ready, Aim, Fire

Pick targets. Once you have set your goal for contacts, you must determine who you want to target. When you're just starting to overcome your call reluctance, you must pick the low-hanging fruit—typically your current customers. With these people, you've already accomplished the hardest part of the sales process, which is to get people to buy from you the first time. Don't start looking for new customers until you've completely exhausted the new

business opportunities with the ones you already have. Plus, at this stage in overcoming call reluctance, you want to recondition yourself and build your confidence through small successes.

Blueprint for Success

Devise a plan. Part of the reason salespeople feel uncomfortable with initiating new business is that they don't know what to say or what to do to win people over. After targeting specific prospects for your sales efforts, you must plan how to approach them.

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Your plan must be very specific in what you will say and what you will do to win their business, and then you must practice it until it feels natural.

Your approach plan should also be easy to memorize and duplicate, so you can use it over and over again and make it your own. The more detailed

you are in your plan and the more you practice your approach, the more conversational it will be and the more comfortable you will feel delivering it.

Grab the Bull by the Horns

Overcoming your call reluctance will not be easy; it takes work and commitment to make behavioral changes. One of the greatest ways to make something you find uncomfortable feel more comfortable is to get out and do it. If you don't start making calls and initiating sales discussions, you'll never overcome your fear. You must hold yourself accountable for the goals you set.

By communicating your goals to a colleague, you can ensure greater follow-through. Make yourself accountable for results by telling someone about the behavioral goal you've set for yourself, and then plan for follow-up discussions to make sure you stay on track. Plus, by sharing your goals with someone, you take the goals out of your head and make them real.

Call reluctance is a common problem, but with commitment and practice anyone can overcome it. By recognizing your discomfort and expressing your negative thoughts, you can release your paralyzing feelings and focus on the process of improving yourself and your sales. By setting attainable goals according to the necessary level of contacts you must make to be successful, you can develop an action plan that yields positive results. By choosing easy targets at first, then planning your approach, you'll feel more comfortable with initiating sales discussions. Through implementation and practice, you'll overcome your call reluctance one successful sale at a time. **PN**

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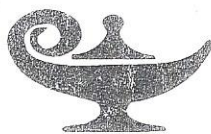
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