

Are you excited by the prospect of speaking to potential customers on the telephone? You should be. Not only may they be your next holiday in the Caribbean, Lexus or school fees but they will provide you with the most accurate feedback about your industry, company, products and/or services.

Simon Bell is passionate about using the telephone in business and entertains business audiences large and small with the complexities, joys and hilarious pitfalls each call can present.



His training company, DSA (Direct Sales Accreditation) has patented the formula for “Rapport in 60 Seconds” which is considered to be the Holy Grail of enjoyable, manageable and sustainable telephone sales at all levels, whether it be a secretary arranging an appointment, administration staff managing the complexities of a customer's case or a fee earner making an outbound cold call.

PERSONAL PSYCHOLOGY

The number of scenarios presented by a conversation with a potential customer is frightening. Will your potential customer be short on time, be in need of cash flow and poorly read on the subject or a different combination of these and many more criteria? The point is that fear of the unknown is normal, it's natural, even useful, embrace it.

Ask yourself if you are making/taking the call because it's your job to do so or perhaps it's part of your career plan. Either answer is not acceptable. If you want to be successful on the telephone you need to be really willing to connect with the person on the other end of the line. Results will follow on from your sincere motivation to help them.

The trouble is, it's so easy to think we know it all, after all, you don't know what you don't know. We call this unconscious incompetence. If someone points this out to you, you will enter a new state of conscious incompetence. With a good trainer, you would improve and become consciously competent and with a lot of practice, you would become unconsciously competent. You will recognise this state in people who are “naturally good” at things.

Does a bad call de-motivate you and can you be spurred on by a good call? Take a look at the triangular diagram. We call this the power pyramid and consider this to represent the strict hierarchy of an organisation like the army with the Commanding Officer, represented by the red cross, all powerful at the top and the privates, represented by black crosses, powerless along the bottom. Now ask yourself, where you would put your power cross on the diagram after a good hour, day or week of calling. Then, ask yourself, where you would put your power cross on the diagram after a bad hour, day or week of calling. I am hoping that your crosses are fairly far apart because the best position is for them to be far enough away to permit a circular flow of emotion. A good call earns you money and a bad call teaches you to do it better. There is no such thing as failure, only feedback.



Are you an “others” person or a “self” person? How about “internal” or “external”, the latter needing other people to confirm when you have done well? “Towards” or “away from”? “Options” or “procedures”? I expect your colleagues' answers will provide a number of different combinations but your potential customers will be most likely in a self/internal/away from/procedures state of mind when you initially speak to them. It is your job to convert them to an others/external/towards/options state of mind if we want a chance of getting them to consider our proposal.

This may involve a good deal of mental agility, not accepting “not interested” without investigating thoroughly what that really means. To do this, we need to learn to describe what our speciality really means to our potential customers without using jargon or even known facts.

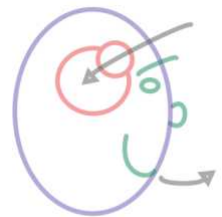
If you were presented with a family in rags, sitting in a circle in the dust to your left and a business person in well cut suit, holding a mobile phone and café latte on your right, who would you join if you had to? The right answer is the most risky one. We need to be brave on the telephone and we need to end each call with a percentage valuation of that opportunity for the future.

CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT

If I asked you to imagine someone competent, respected, good looking and emotional, do you think the person you choose will be the same as mine, your colleague or your partner? It is really important to note that when a potential customer states a fact, there may be several versions of that fact.

Now, if you consider recent conversations with several other people, some will have been light hearted and some more serious. If I suggested that the way they spoke to you had an effect on your perception of the meaning of what they were saying, you might be ready to accept that the simple richness of the English language can have a remarkable effect on your potential customer's propensity to agree with you.

You see, we can say things without saying anything really. DSA has developed a language called Audience Specific Language which sets the theme for a conversation with a potential customer but necessitates them accessing their subconscious mind to make sense of what we are saying. What comes out of their mouth next is their map of the world or "buying signals". It is important to note that by using this technique, we are completely avoiding the need to handle objections.



There are 8 essential rules for using Audience Specific Language and adherence to them will instantly let you relax and start to enjoy selling on the telephone and face to face.

There is however, one over riding Golden Rule and that is "Always be Asking". I know this may seem obvious and you have probably tried asking a lot of questions only to be asked to "get to the point" or told to "get on with it". The thing is, if you have used your Audience Specific Language properly you will have earned permission to ask the relevant questions.

Questions are absolutely essential because your boss, partner or manager does not know what your potential customers want and you cannot know what they want. Only the potential customers know what they want. So, start by asking some obvious questions, try a few risky questions, learn where your boundaries are and then take ownership of your relationship with your new friends. It's just like growing up.

It is useful to note how our personal motivation is similar to that of our employers and potential customers. You will start anything wanting some, you will next want more of it then you will want to be better at it and finally, you will probably be willing to share it. Your employer needs customers, more customers, improved profitability and finally customer loyalty. In a similar way, our potential customers will want something, get excited about it, accept it as necessary then finally start to look at alternatives. The similarity of these attitudes is important to note because it demonstrates that we are all simply human beings. You are only talking to human beings when selling on the telephone. It is easy to forget that.

It is also too easy to accept yourself at face value. Are you defined by the car you drive, the contents of your wallet or the house where you live? Is this all you can expect of yourself? Or is there more to come? Success is personal growth and every call can improve your understanding of who you are. After all, it was Socrates who said something like "know thyself" in 470 BC.

BUSINESS RAPPORT

The use of jargon during a conversation with a potential customer is not acceptable. In fact, you have to be careful using any given definitions. Is there a device on your desk you can use to make a telephone call? Do you call it a telephone? Could the device be used to earn money, start a new relationship or save a life? What would you call it in those three different circumstances? By using given definitions we are excluding many potential meanings and these meanings amount to our potential customers' requirements.

Your worst experiences buying anything will have been when the sales person tells you all about the product and/or service with no relevance to you. Your best experience will have been when the sales person talks about the product and/or service from your point of view.

In business, we are not interested in where our customers' children go to school or when the potential customer last saw his parents. This information amounts to "true rapport". What we need to do is build "business rapport" using questions based on the past, present and future.

When these past, present and future questions are used in conjunction with our Audience Specific Language, we will soon be able to talk about our products and/or services from the potential customers' point of view. That allows the potential customer to feel in control of the conversation and enjoy their buying experience.

Once we get a feel for our target market, we can really work on our features and benefits. Your brown glove will amount to a warm hand but may mean a new girlfriend to one potential customer or an excellent business deal to another.

To expand your features to real benefits, keep asking yourself "which means what?"



Your most enjoyable selling experience will be the one where you start with no preconceptions, no fixed outcome and no point to prove and your worst will be when you try to bully the potential customer into doing, thinking, wanting what you want.

Make the call interesting for the potential customer by altering your pace, tone and timing during the conversation. Recognise that the potential customer will be most comfortable when you mirror their style. Do not mimic it but if the potential customer talks fast, so should you. If the potential customer sounds bullish, so should you and if the potential customer uses a lot of details so you can too, in these circumstances. Be prepared to act out many characters on the telephone in accordance with what your potential customer feels most comfortable.

Remember that our potential customers probably work for someone else, have their eye on a bigger house and dream about a better and faster car. When they are speaking to us we can actually give them what they want because our society is lucky enough to have the resources to want the finer things in life. We are safe, warm and well fed most of the time. Our only enemy is stress and stress is derived from emotional needs not being met. By recognising the ten key emotional drivers we can refine our Audience Specific Language and business rapport questions.

PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

Each potential customer can be valued loosely by amount of spend, speed of commitment, range of alternative products and number of suppliers considered. These criteria are important to note because we can regulate the energy we use at any stage of the interaction. I always recommend that at the start of any new outbound cold calling campaign, a telephone agent should keep their energy output low to dormant until they first engage with a potential customer. After that, it's a matter of valuation and constant re-evaluation.

The pattern of buyer behaviour is known as the five stages of buying and it is important to recognise that few customers will say yes immediately. They need to recognise their need, research suppliers and evaluate alternative products before they buy and it is our privilege to help them do that. Once they are our customer we must recognise that they will be making a post purchase evaluation and it is only after that fifth stage that we can start thinking about up-selling and cross selling.

We need to act as hunter and farmer all rolled into one person. On the rare occasion that a potential customer is ready to buy immediately, get out your spear and bag your prey but in most circumstances you need to act as a farmer, preparing the land, sowing seeds and gently nurturing your crop. It is while nurturing these potential customers that you will be receiving feedback about your industry, company, products and/or services. This will allow you to change the way your company is presented (branding) and your products and/or services (marketing) but mainly the way you present your products and/or services by improving your Audience Specific Language and business rapport building questions. It's just like convincing your parents to buy you that bike or doll you wanted when you were little.



It is simply a matter of finding the most acceptable way of presenting your case but our formula for "Rapport in 60 Seconds" lets you test the market without upsetting anyone and without damaging yourself. In fact, what you will be doing is making friends with your potential customers then working out how you can do business together. The short term consequences of adopting this attitude are that you will only hear two answers from potential customers from now on. "Yes now" and "yes later". The long term consequences are that you will be accepted as a trusted and preferred supplier for the future.

MUTUAL AGREEMENT

We must move away from simply taking orders and selling has a bad reputation these days, so a lot of us are selling in a consultative way. What we are aiming for is collaborative selling where we metaphorically hold our potential customer by the hand and go out shopping together. Knowing what your friend likes so well allows you to recommend the best solution which naturally, you will be part of. There are five guidelines to persuading your potential customer to choose you in preference to your competitors but this article is not a training manual so I will just raise this one question for you to think about. If one boy runs into the garden full of birds with a big net, will he catch more or less birds than the other boy who walks into the same garden with a handful of birdseed and the same net?

I know you don't like having to choose, it is stressful after all, but can you recall when you finally decided which car or dress to buy or which mortgage package to choose? Great relief I imagine, maybe even euphoria. We can deliver this same emotion when speaking to our potential customers on the telephone.



Now, I am often asked what the fundamental tool is for successful telephone sales and the answer is very clearly "transactional analysis". This is a highly complex subject best described by this example. If you went to a party where there was a huddle of girls complaining about their boyfriends, a group of boys laughing about football and a mixed group discussing politics, could you fit in with each group using the same approach? Exactly.

Before I leave you to it, I am going to tell you a story. There was a rumour going around the forest that the bears had a hit list so the Stag decided to go and find out if it was true. He walked to the bear's lair and asked. "Is it true that you have a hit list?" The chief bear replied "yeah". "Am I on it?" asked the stag. "Yeah" said the bear. Well, the stag turned and ran as fast as he could. Two days later he was found dead in the forest. The warthog didn't like the sound of this so he went to see the bears and asked "am I on the hit list?" "Yeah" said the chief bear. The warthog turned and ran as fast as he could. Two days later he was found dead in the forest. The fox heard of this and thought that he had better see what all the fuss was about. "Am I on the hit list?" asked the fox. "Yeah" said the chief bear. "Would you take me off it?" asked the fox. "Yeah okay" said the bear.

The moral of this story is to always be asking and that as you now know is the golden rule of telephone sales. Stories are a very powerful sales tool but they are only a small part of a complex equation bundled into the limited timeframe of a telephone call.

Our training programmes change behaviour over time. If you need any help with your telephone sales in the meantime, please do contact DSA on 0845 423 0423 or visit www.directsalesaccreditation.com.