

How to Lose a Prospect's Attention in 5 Seconds or Less

When you make contact with a new prospect—either by telephone or in a face-to-face meeting—you have an extremely short window of time to connect with them. If you fail to achieve this they will quickly tune you out. Here are several things you can do to lose your prospect's attention in the first five seconds of the conversation:

1. Start a telephone conversation with, "Hi, how are you?"
2. Open your conversation by introducing yourself, your company and what you do.
3. Make small talk about "stuff" you see in their office (awards, plaques, photos, etc).
4. Give them an overview of your products and services.
5. Explain how your product or service will benefit them.
6. Tell them what other companies you have worked with.
7. Show them the awards and accolades your company product has received.
8. Give them a brochure that outlines your key products or services.

Unfortunately, most sales people fail to effectively open the sales conversation with a new prospect. Most of the sales calls and meetings I have been subjected to over the years have started with one or more of the above. However, the moment your prospect senses that you are trying to sell them something that they don't need or want they will tune you out and look for a way to disengage or disconnect from the call. They don't care about you. They don't want to know about your company. They don't want to listen to you talk about your products or service. They want a solution to a problem. They want to know how you can help them improve their business. Here is how you do that.

Focus your attention on the prospect!

It may sound simple but most sales people don't get it. They still believe that selling means talking at great length about their company, their product or their service. However, truly effective salesmanship is all about asking the prospect the right questions and demonstrating that you can help them solve a particular problem or issue. That means you need to direct ALL of your attention on their situation and resist the opportunity to talk about your company or your offering.

If you are making cold calls you can accomplish this by modifying your opening statement or voice mail message. State a specific problem they are likely facing (based on your experience or research). For example,

"Mr. Big, if you're like other companies in ABC industry, I suspect that you (fill in the blank with the problem). If this

is the case, call me at 800-555-1212 and I might be able to suggest a solution. By the way, it's Kelley calling and my number is 800-555-1212."

This also applies to face-to-face meetings as well. When you meet with a new prospect for the first time, the last thing you want to do is to start blathering away about your product or service. Instead, open the conversation by asking, *"Mrs. Prospect, many of our clients are currently experiencing (insert the problem here). How does that compare to your company's situation?"* This demonstrates that you are knowledgeable of their business and/or the industry and it gives your prospect the opportunity to tell you about their chief concerns.

Several years ago I worked with a company who regularly participated in industry trade shows. I observed them at one show and noticed that their sales reps simply talked about the products that people showed interest in. Not surprisingly, their closing ratio was low because in most cases they gave information that was not relevant to that prospect's situation and that they talked to people who had little or no motivation to buy. After some training, they began asking people a few high-quality questions to determine the people who had problems, challenges, and were seriously interested in their products. They were instructed to let "tire-kickers" look around and focus their time on people who had pressing concerns. At the end of the show their sales were slightly higher but they also had a list of highly-qualified people to follow up with and many of these individuals ended up buying from my client.

Here's the bottom line. The more time you spend talking about your product, the less inclined a prospect will want to continue that conversation. The more you focus your attention on their situation, their problems and demonstrating how you can help them improve their business, the more you differentiate yourself from the competition.

You only have few moments to connect with a prospect so keep it brief. Keep it focused. Keep it about them. And you will keep their attention.

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