

Don't Blow it When Your Prospect Answers the Phone

The use of voicemail has become so pervasive that sometimes you wonder if you'll ever talk to another person again.

Frustrating as it may be, over time you accept it as the new norm and in a perverse sort of way even relish it. You can check it off on your "to do" list, proving that you tried to get in but once again had no luck.

And admit it ... leaving a message is a whole lot easier than talking to a person who says they have no need, throws objections in your path or slams the phone down on you.

In fact, the prevalence of voicemail can lull you into a sense of complacency. So much so, that you're entirely unprepared for that rare moment in time when your prospect absent-mindedly picks up the phone.

Suddenly, instead of leaving your well-prepared message, you're on the spot to say something intelligent and compelling. If you're like most people, those words don't flow naturally from your mouth - especially when you're under pressure.

When I was writing *Selling to Big Companies*, one of my clients was actually working through it in real time, giving me immediate feedback on the strategies, processes and tips in it.

She had a great laugh at my expense when she read about my own major blooper when the vice president of sales actually answered the phone. I totally lost my cool.

My value proposition evaporated into thin air. I stumbled over my words, talked a mile a minute and blurted out this rambling spiel about what my company did. It was horrible - totally unbecoming of someone in my position. In fact, I was embarrassed to be me.

I got off the phone as soon as I could before I dug myself into an

even deeper hole. My only saving grace was that he probably wouldn't remember me.

Alyssa thought that was really funny, that is, until the day it happened to her. She'd prepared this great voicemail script for a prospect with whom she was trying to get an appointment.

She was all set to leave her message at the beep, but it never came. Instead, Mr. Big answered the phone. Immediately Alyssa felt a sinking feeling in the pit of her stomach. Her brain locked and she couldn't think of a thing to say.

On the other end of the line, Mr. Big was saying, "Hello, hello. Is somebody there?"

"Yes," she finally said. "This is Alyssa. I'm with Anonymous Software Firm."

"What do you want?" he said curtly.

"We specialize in (self-serving words to describe her offering). I'd like to talk with you about your sales automation system and how we can help you improve it."

He cut her short. "We already have that covered. I'm in the middle of a meeting and have to go."

End of call. He hung up.

So what do you say after your prospect says, "Hello?" Does it flow out of your mouth as easily as your voicemail? Or, are you getting ready to dig your own grave?

Here are several tips that will help you avoid sounding like a blooming idiot.

1. Keep it simple. After you say your name, make sure your next sentence is the same for both your voicemail and an actual conversation. That way your brain won't freeze.

2. Focus on business. Pros-

pects hate peppy, enthusiastic people who can't wait to share things about their product or service.

3. Develop a provocative question. You want to engage your prospect in conversation as quickly as you can.

4. Check to see if they're busy right then and there. If they're distracted, you're wasting your breath.

5. Don't focus on being nice. Instead, focus on being a business professional that has something valuable to say.

Most of all, plan ahead. This is the opportunity you've been waiting for. Make sure you put your best foot forward.

Jill Konrath, author of *Selling to Big Companies*, helps sellers crack into accounts, speed up their sales cycle and win more business. To get your free Sales Call Planning Guide, visit www.sellingtobigcompanies.com or send an email to jill@sellingtobigcompanies.com.



"It is our attitude at the beginning of a difficult task which, more than anything else, will affect its successful outcome."

William James

"I am still determined to be cheerful and happy, in whatever situation I may be; for I have also learned from experience that the greater part of our happiness or misery depends upon our dispositions, and not upon our circumstances."

Martha Washington