SALES COACH

An Ounce of Prevention

Ask a client when they expect to hear back from you

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Q: *From a client's perspective, what are the expectations for response and follow-up? How quickly do they expect a return phone call or how often and how quickly do you follow up on a sales proposal?*

—Eric Schroeder, managing director, CrossFirst Bank

A: I can tell you're conscientious and truly want to be responsive to your prospects and clients. The following Sandler Rule is appropriate here: "You are but one event of hundreds in your client's daily life."

Unless they define the email or phone call as urgent, a good rule is to respond within 24 hours. Most emails and phone calls are not urgent, so responding right away can put pressure on the relationship in the future by setting the precedence of responding right away, all the time. The reality is, they are a busy executive who is probably in meetings throughout the day.

When possible, I like to ask, "When do you expect to hear back from me or need the information I am to provide you?" You'll be surprised by their answers when you ask this question.

As sales professionals, we often have a higher sense of urgency than they do. When we know this is the case up front, we can act accordingly. Their timing gives you a sense of how important what you are working on together is to them.

Lastly, when it comes to following up on a sales proposal, ideally they are making the decision at the presentation meeting, rather than following up later.

So before I give a proposal, I want to know what are their reasons for adding, deleting or changing their current product or service? What is their lost-opportunity cost if they do nothing? Is there a budget available, or where will the money come from? What happens if I meet the budget or am below the budget? Who gets to "pull the trigger" on this decision, and when do they see themselves doing this?

Handling the sales proposal this way is much like the old adage, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." The "pound of cure" being the chasing down of their decision after giving them the proposal.

Q: *Coach Dan, I have recently taken on a professional selling role in a new industry after more than 10 years in another industry. I'd like to let my network of family and friends know what I'm doing and how they can help, but I don't want them to think I am trying to sell them anything in the process. Any suggestions?*

—Duc Pham, LightEdge Solutions

A: I sense your dilemma, yet I get the feeling it has more to do with what you think, rather than what they think.

Be conscientious about updating your network on your new career. We all have that family member or friend who, every time we seem them, has a new sales role, and our life will never be the same if we don't buy their product or service. But, you being in your last role for more than 10 years, clearly are not that person.

This reminds me of the Sandler Rule, "If you think it, say it, but nurture, nurture, nurture." From a technique perspective, here is what I suggest: Call them individually (no blind-copy emails) to let them know you have changed careers and you would like to update them on what you are doing now. Be clear, this update is not to sell them your product or service but to describe how you help people and who would make a good referral. In essence, you are asking them to be an ambassador in the marketplace for you.

This can happen over coffee, and you should offer to be an ambassador for them in their business, too. In choosing people to have coffee with, I would choose those who know and like you, are influencers in the community and are people who regularly get asked for their advice and counsel.

These ambassadors become your arms and legs in the community and will shorten the ramp-up time in your new role significantly. The reality is: You can only be at one place at one time each day. Your ambassadors will allow you to do otherwise. Additionally, don't be surprised if some ambassadors also become clients, even though that was not the initial goal. **KCB**

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