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Use The 'Aha! Formula' To Close On Sales Calls

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In challenging economic times, how do you increase sales?

It's not enough to do marketing campaigns and hope that the phone will ring, or run ads and mailers, expecting that orders will come falling from the sky. No, in this economy, it's more important than ever to be proactive in your approach, to make outbound calls to find new business and close sales. Remember, every sale starts with an appointment.

Because sales is a numbers game, you can improve your success ratios by improving your prospecting skills. The most important technique to master when calling new prospects is to learn how to handle their objections. Overcoming common objections and asking for the appointment can sometimes be the only thing standing between you and more business. I have developed the Aha! formula©, which will help you anticipate the objection, handle the objection, and ask for the appointment ... Aha!

First, you need to learn to anticipate or expect that you'll get an objection when you request a sales appointment. After all, it can't be that easy, right? If you anticipate the objection you'll be ready and prepared to handle it. If you do not anticipate the objection, you'll be thrown by it, stumble, and probably say something like, "OK, thanks for your time," and then hang up the phone.

So, after you've asked for the appointment, get ready to hear "No" in some shape or form. Prepare in advance for the way you'll handle their objection. Here are some suggestions:

- Say, "You know, Mr. Prospect, that's exactly what ABC Company said until they became a client and ... (insert the results you created for ABC Company, i.e., another client.)"

- Or try, "That's exactly why we should meet in person, so I can learn more about your company to determine if there's an opportunity for us to work together."

- You can also go with, "My services will actually complement, (enhance, or strengthen) what you're already doing in this area."

Now that you've handled the objection, it's crucial to ask for the appointment. Immediately following your response to their objection, ask for the appointment by saying something like, "How does Thursday at 10:15 a.m. work for you?"

Be specific when you ask for the appointment rather than giving a choice, such as "How's Tuesday morning or Thursday afternoon?" I recommend this for a few reasons. First, you want to make it as easy as possible for your prospect to decide when he or she can meet with you. By offering several options, it complicates the process by requiring your prospect to look in several different spots on their calendar.

Second, asking for a specific date and time lets the prospect know you are busy too and that "Thursday at 10:15 a.m." works in your calendar. If the prospect says "No, that doesn't work for me," then the conversation becomes *when* you should meet, not *if* you should meet, which is a more desirable conversation to have.

Third, asking for an appointment at 10:15a.m., the "quarter-hour technique", rather than 10a.m., shows that you're busy. It will also get the prospects attention since it's likely no one else is asking them for a 10:15 a.m. appointment, and it conveys to the prospect that it will be a short meeting, likely ending at 10:30am, making it easier for them to meet the small commitment.

Now, let's put it all together. After you've asked for the appointment, your prospect says "no," you've handled the objection and asked for the appointment. Here are some additional tips:

- Don't overcome more than three objections per call. If the prospect gives you three objections, use the Aha! formula to overcome them all; however, after the fourth objection, thank them for their time and hang up. You don't want to argue with the prospect because, after all, sometimes the answer is just plain "no!"

- Should a prospect ask you to call back at another time, try this: "Let's tentatively put something on the calendar now, and I'll call back to confirm. How's Thursday at 10:15 a.m.?" The chances of calling back and getting that prospect on the phone again is slim to none and studies show that once an appointment is on the calendar, there is a 70 percent greater likelihood it will occur, even if it's "tentative." So, if you can get your prospect to put you on the calendar now, rather than call you back, there's a good chance the appointment will happen.

Try the Aha! formula the next time you're on the hunt for new business over the phone. You will not only increase your telephone skills and set more appointments, but will ultimately win more customers and close more sales. Now that's good for business!