3

Prospecting

As we've discussed, time is money. It's also important to understand that customers are money too. If you're not making enough money, part of your problem is probably the you don't have enough customers! The solution to that, of course, is prospecting for some new ones, but before we get too far into that, let's add some terminology to our discussion.

There are four kinds of people on the buying side of your personal sales equation: *suspects, prospects, customers* and *maximized customers.* The way this progression works is that they're suspects when you *think* they might be prospects; they're only prospects when you *know* for sure that they are prospects; you only call them customers when they're actually *buying* from you; and they become maximized customers when you're getting a *maximum share* of their business. (And that, of course, is really the name of the game, to develop and grow customers to their maximum potential!)

Let's take a step backwards in this progression and consider why I think you should only use the word *customer* to describe someone who is actually buying from you. This goes to the issue of what buyers really think about in making a buying decision. I've done a lot of research on buyer behavior over the years, and the research indicates that the single most important factor in most people's buying decision is the matter of whether they trust the salesperson or not. (Note: I'm using the term *buyer* as a noun, not a title. There are "Buyers" in business, although these days, that title is more likely to be expressed as "Purchasing Agent." For our purposes, the *buyer* is whoever makes the buying decision, and we'll talk more about the titles that may involve a little further along.)

Here's a big chunk of core selling knowledge for you: The reason that most of your current customers are buying from you is simply that they trust you. The reason that most of your current prospects are not yet buying from you is simply that they don't yet trust you enough. Your challenge with these people is not to get them to *like* you more, it's to get them to *trust* you more. I think that's such an important understanding that you should never use the word *customer* unless you're talking about someone who has already demonstrated the necessary level of trust. That will — hopefully! — keep you focused on the challenge of *building* trust with everyone else.

Most salespeople make a fundamental mistake in this regard. Sure, developing a new customer is all about developing a relationship, but here's the mistake: the relationship has to be about *trust*, not just about *like*. Does *like* play a part in it? Sure, but I'll explain where *like* fits in a little further along. For now, I hope you'll accept the fact that it takes a leap of faith to place an order with you. Why? Because you're selling a custom-manufactured product! Even if all you're doing is adding an imprint to a pre-printed shell or a pen or a mug or a keychain, the final finished product doesn't exist until after the order is placed. They can't see it before they buy it like at K-Mart or Wal-Mart. They have to trust you to deliver on your promises.

Promises, Promises

That leads to another important point: The essence of your job is to make promises! Think about how many promises you make every day. *I promise that you'll be happy with the quality. I promise that you'll be happy with my personal service. I promise that we'll deliver on time. I promise that the finished product will look exactly like the proofs or the samples or the design renderings.*

Beyond those *overt* promises, think about some of the *implied* promises you make — things you may never actually say but your prospects and customers may nonetheless hear: *I promise that the people who will do the production work on your order are well trained and well managed and highly motivated. I promise that we do all of the preventative maintenance on our production equipment to minimize the chances that one of our machines will break down and cause your order to be late. I promise that we know what we're doing, all the way from the order through to the invoice.*

Here's the bottom line — if you can get them to believe your promises, they'll think seriously about maybe buying from you. If you cannot, they will not.

But My Situation Is Different!

Now, I can hear some of you thinking, "That may be true with some people, but the ones I'm talking to, the decision is more about price than anything else."

OK, here's another way to look at your pool of suspects, prospects, customers and maximized customers. It's been my experience that all printing/forms/signage/promotional products buyers fall into one of five categories, and I call them Solids, Liquids, Gases, Players and Price Monsters. *Solids* are completely happy with their current supplier, and they're not going to change. (We know that there are solids out there, right? Hopefully you know that because you have solids among your own current customers!) *Liquids* are generally happy with their current supplier, but they'll talk to you and give some thought to whether you're better than what they already have. *Gases* are dissatisfied with their current supplier, and many of these people are actively looking to make a change.

Players spread their business around, among a group of trusted suppliers. They're price sensitive to the degree that they'll usually give the order to the supplier in that group who offers the lowest price on any individual project, but they won't have the cheapest supplier in town in their group, because if they did, they'd be *Price Monsters*. That's my term for people who make all of their purchasing decisions based on price alone.

So yes, there are *Price Monsters* out there, but they are not the majority! My research indicates that nearly 75% of all printing/forms/signage/

promotional products buyers make their decisions based on *trust*, not just on price. So why is there so much talk about price from the buying side? We'll talk more about that when we get to the issue of handling price objections. For now, though, I'd just like you to consider that the *Price Monsters* are the ones who are most likely to talk to you early in the process, since the more salespeople they talk to, the more likely it is that they'll end up with the lowest possible price!

Let's say that you identify 100 suspects, 25 of whom are *Price Monsters*. Let's also say that you'll get to talk with 20 out of that group of 100 within a relatively short timeframe. The concept of even distribution says that you'll be talking to 15 trust-oriented buyers and 5 *Price Monsters*, but the concept of even distribution doesn't seem to apply here. It's far more likely that you'll find yourself talking to 17-18 *Price Monsters* and just a couple of trust-oriented buyers. Do you see how that warped distribution can affect your perception? Do you also accept that it's harder and takes longer to get on the radar of the people you really want as your next customers? It takes patience and a plan to accomplish that, and most salespeople never get beyond the initial obstacles.

Fully Qualified Prospects

I'm going to teach you how to do that, but first, let's go back to *suspects*, *prospects*, *customers* and *maximized customers*, and specifically to the difference between *suspects* and *prospects*. Remember, they are suspects when you *think* they might be prospects. You can only call them prospects when you *know* for sure that they qualify.

In the early stages of prospecting — which should probably be called suspecting! — all we really care about is whether someone *looks like* they might be a prospect. In order to be considered a fully-qualified prospect, though, whoever we're talking about has to pass three tests. First, they have to buy exactly what you're trying to sell. Second, they have to buy enough of it to make pursuing them worthwhile. Third — and this is ultimately the most important consideration — they have to show some interest in buying from you!

Before reading on, stop and think about the people you think of as prospects right now. Are they really? And for the moment, let's forget about the biggest issue, whether they have any real interest in buying from you. Do they even buy exactly what you're trying to sell?

Product Line & Strike Zone

I asked the attendees at a recent seminar to tell me exactly what they sell. "Anything that involves ink on paper," said a printing salesperson. "Anything that your logo can be applied to," said a promotional products salesperson. "Any kind of signage from really big to really small," said a sign salesperson. "Anything you might need to help you advertise or promote your business," said a salesperson who dabbles in all three product categories.

"Really bad answers," I said, and here's why. *Anything* answers are far too vague for the buying public, and beyond that, an *anything* attitude has a very high probability of getting you in trouble at the prospecting stage. Consider this: your "product line" is all about capability, and it's theoretically infinite, consisting of anything you can manufacture plus anything you can outsource. Your "strike zone", on the other hand, is all about being *competitive*, and it's an unavoidable fact that you can't be competitive all the way across an infinite product line.

Let's say that you sell for a printing company equipped only with a small format 2-color press. The "strike zone" for that press would certainly include 1000 2-color, 11" x 17" posters, but how about 50,000? Sure, you can run 50,000 sheets through that press, but there's a point at which a bigger press will gain a pricing advantage over your press. By the same token, a 40" 2-color press would have a pricing advantage on a 50,000 run, but it would suffer a significant pricing *disadvantage* on a quantity of 1000. In printing in particular, there's no single factor that has more to do with having a "competitive" price than having the right tool for the job.

OK, but you can certainly outsource something that doesn't fit your equipment, and there are brokers/distributors all across the graphic arts industry who outsource everything they sell. You may be one of them! So what makes outsourcing a better strategy for a broker/distributor than it is for a manufacturing company?

The simple answer is that a manufacturing company will be most *profitable* by selling a high percentage of its internal production capacity. There's a trade-off between the cost benefit of making it yourself and the burden of overhead, but as I just said, no single factor has more to do with having a "competitive" price than having the right tool for the job.

Can you compensate for that by outsourcing to a supplier who has the right tool for the job? To some degree, yes, but here's the complicating factor: *When a reseller competes with a direct seller, the reseller will almost always be at a cost disadvantage which will lead to a price disadvantage.*

Think about that. Let's say you're that printing salesperson, equipped with a small format press. You're invited to quote on 50,000 2-color, 11" x 17" posters, so you call a "trade supplier" who does, in fact, have the right tool for that job. The trade supplier quotes you a price of $5,000. (Don't read anything into that number. I'm not saying that $5,000 is the "right" price for 50,000 2-color, 11" x 17" posters, although it probably is somewhere in the ballpark. Beyond that, it's mostly a nice round number for use in explaining a concept.)

The trade supplier's price provides them with a satisfactory profit margin, right? In other words, they're happy to sell to you at that price. Would they also be happy to sell to your suspect/prospect/customer at that price? You bet they would! Now, a true trade supplier won't do that, because it violates the principles of selling through distributors, but that's not the point I'm trying to make. Here's the important question: What's the difference between a trade supplier and a direct selling competitor who also has the right tool for the job? In terms of cost, the only real difference is in the cost of whatever sales resources are involved, and that cost differential will probably be less than 10%.

Simple Arithmetic

Let's do the arithmetic! The trade supplier will sell it to you for $5000, and if you mark it up by 30% — which I would consider a *minimum* markup to cover your sales cost and support overall profitability — you'll be asking your suspect/prospect/customer to pay you $6500 for those posters. A direct-selling competitor might want 10% more than the trade supplier in order to cover their own sales cost, and that would result in a quote of $5500. Would you consider $6500 *competitive* with $5500? More importantly, would your suspects, prospects and customers?

I have an ironclad rule, that I will consider outsourcing just about anything for a customer — remember, that means someone who has already demonstrated that they trust you enough to buy from you, and probably someone who likes you at least a little bit too! — but I will not stray from the middle of my strike zone with a suspect or a prospect. If I were that small-press printing salesperson and I was asked to quote on a large-press job with a suspect or a prospect, I would say: “You know, that’s really not the sort of printing we specialize in. If it was a quantity of 1000, I’d have the right tool for the job, but for 50,000 you really need someone who has a larger press. We’re really good at what we do, and I’m never going to ask you to consider me for anything that lies outside of what we’re really good at. Now, what will you be working on next?”

Trust Builder

I hope you’ll see that this is an opportunity to look good in terms of trust, and to avoid looking bad in terms of a *competitive* price. Sadly, it’s not what usually happens, so let’s take a closer look at the more common scenario. The salesperson gets all excited about the chance to quote on a “big” job, gets a price from a trade supplier, marks it up and quotes that price to the suspect or prospect, and then wonders what the hell happened when the suspect or prospect stops returning phone calls.

Here’s what probably happened. The buyer looked at the price, in comparison to one or more competitors for whom that particular job was right down the middle of the strike zone, and said: “Wow, this company is really expensive. I guess I don’t want to waste my time on them anymore.” The real tragedy, of course, is that the salesperson never gets the chance to compete for orders that he/she would be very competitive on.

The baseball analogy is very apt. Sure, swinging at bad pitches delivers positive results every once in a while, but you’ll have a much higher batting average if you’re patient enough to wait for good pitches to swing at. That takes us back to the first test of a fully qualified prospect: *they buy exactly what you're trying to sell*. The complicating factor is that most suspects will also have needs that are outside of your strike zone.

If *all of* their needs are outside of your strike zone, they're simply not prospects. If *some of* their needs fit your strike zone — and that adds up to enough volume potential to pass the second test for a fully-qualified prospect; *they buy enough of exactly what you want to sell to make pursuing them worthwhile* — then they're two-thirds of the way to being fully qualified. I just hope you'll see that the most important consideration in the early stages of suspecting might be to avoid disqualifying yourself!

Pure Distributors?

Now, how does all of this apply to pure distributors? As part of the answer to that question, let's recognize that even those among you who sell for very well-equipped printing or sign companies probably outsource some of what you sell, and some of that may fit into the category of outsourcing just about anything for a *customer*. Another part, though, may represent a "level playing field" situation, where no direct seller has the right tool for the job, so everyone who competes for the order will be outsourcing it. That situation is pretty common for promotional products distributors, where there are relatively few direct-selling manufacturers.

But do you see the potential for problems when a promotional products distributor competes for a printing sale against a direct-selling printer, or for an imprinted t-shirt order against a direct-selling screen printer? If the playing field is *not* level, it might be a good idea to back off and wait for a better pitch to swing at!

Competitive Pricing

If you quote me a price on something, I tend to assign your quoted price to one of three categories — three *buckets* if you will. The first bucket is *too high*, meaning more than I think it should cost, or more than I want to pay. The second bucket is *too low*, meaning that your price is so low in comparison to others that it scares me.

> The third bucket is *competitive*, and that tends to be the biggest bucket of the three.
>
> Here's a key point: *Competitive* is *not* a *point*, it's a *range*. And the real artistry in selling is getting the order when your price is on the high end of that range, not at the low end. Just understand that if you're not in that competitive range — if I put your quote in the *too high* or the *too low* bucket — you're not even in the competition! And if I disqualify you from the first competition you enter, you may find yourself permanently on the outside looking in!

The Expanding Strike Zone

Here's an interesting and important phenomenon. Your *strike zone* expands as the relationship grows. In other words, the more they trust you and the more they like you, the less important price becomes as part of the buying decision. That makes perfect sense, right? And that's why my ironclad rule lets me consider outsourcing just about anything with a *customer*. Just remember that in the absence of a relationship, price is about the only factor you'll be judged on, so try not to swing at a pitch you have little chance of hitting — and lots of chance of looking bad trying!

Does that mean you'll lose out on those out-of-the-strike-zone opportunities forever? Absolutely not! Let's say that you handle the first opportunity to quote on one of those projects the way I suggested above, but you continue to work on the relationship, and before too long you get a chance to compete for an order that you are well equipped for. Let's say that you win that order, and you deliver on all of your promises and that leads to another order, and then another — all orders that are right down the middle of your strike zone. After 6 months of that, I can easily see you calling that *customer* and saying: "Do you remember that first project you invited me to quote on, and I told you that it wasn't really in our strike zone? Well, some things have changed since then. We've brought in new equipment, (or perhaps 'we've established a strategic relationship with a trade supplier') and I'd like to take a shot at that sort of project if it ever comes around again." You may still be at a pricing disadvantage, but as long as you're in the *competitive* range, you may very well have a shot at winning the order.

By the way, if I were in this situation, I would have been looking forward toward that conversation from the day I first declined to quote on the project. My ACT notes would have included the specs of the project, and I would have scheduled a call for 6-8 months out to remind myself that I'd want to have this conversation if I'd been successful at winning a few inside-the-strike-zone orders by that time. Do you see how this fits into our discussion of time management and organization? Remember, *you won't gain new customers from prospecting; you will gain new customers from follow-up*. Follow-up is also a big part of creating maximized customers.

> **Anything Answers**
>
> "Anything" answers are bad for you in two ways. First, because they'll get you into unfavorable pricing situations, and second, because they're far too vague for the buying public. Here's an example of what that second part means. Let's say that you're a printing salesperson. Are checks printing? How about posters and banners?
>
> OK, we know they are, but the question is, does the person you're talking to know they are? If not, you could lose opportunity because you made an assumption that didn't hold true. Don't ever forget that *they* are civilians — my term for anyone who doesn't work in *our* industry. They don't know all the things that you want them to know, so you have to tell them!

Identifying Suspects

OK, it's time to do some prospecting. Let me throw another definition at you, and then we'll talk about how to identify good suspects. Here's the definition: *Prospecting is an activity chain which begins with the identification of suspect companies, and ends with your first meeting with the buyer.* That "meeting" will hopefully be in person, although it might be accomplished over the telephone (more on the agenda and strategy for the first meeting will follow). The reason prospecting ends with the first meeting is that it turns into something else after the first meeting's goals and objectives are accomplished (again, more on that will follow).

So what makes a company a good-looking suspect? Remember, all you have to care about at this point is that they *look like* they might be a prospect. And we know what a prospect looks like: (1) they buy exactly what you're trying to sell, (2) they buy enough of it to make pursuing them worthwhile, and (3) they show some interest in buying from you. So the question really is, where do you look for companies which look like that?

I'd start by looking at my current customer list — both my personal list and my company's list — because this issue relates directly to another element of essential selling knowledge: *Your next good customer will probably look a lot like a current good customer.* Think about it: your current good customers buy exactly what you sell, and enough of it to get excited about. There's something about their businesses which creates a requirement for your products and services. Doesn't it make sense, then, to look for other companies with similar characteristics?

I've developed a tool you can use for this purpose. I call it the *Niche Markets Identification Form*. You'll find both the form and an instructions document in the online appendix: www.davefellman.com/onlineappendix.

Other Strategies

What other strategies are appropriate for identifying suspect companies? The two most likely possibilities are networking and canvassing. By networking, I mean simply asking the people you interact with if they know anyone else — or any other company or organization — that might have some need for your products and services. We'll cover networking and referral strategy in detail later on.

By canvassing, I mean simply walking into buildings and speaking to the first person you encounter. *Oh My God*, you may be thinking, *he's talking about cold calls!* I guess I am, but I want to make something clear. I am 100% opposed to cold calls — *on the actual buyer!* I am 100% in favor of *cold starts* for research purposes, because the fact of the matter is that you have to start somewhere. And while you can initiate a *prospecting start* in a number of ways, including buying a list and getting busy on the telephone, there's a lot to be said for simply getting out and prowling around in your marketplace. That may seem primitive, but here's a fact to consider. Not every good suspect is easily visible from *list distance*. There are plenty of what I like to call *hidden treasures* out there, and the only way you'll find them is by walking in their doors.

What you say when you walk in the door is important, though. Here's what you *do not* say: *"Hey, Toots, I want you to do me a favor and drop what you're doing and call the person who buys the printing/forms/ signage/promotional products here and ask them to drop what they're doing and spend some time talking to me."* Obviously, you would never put it so crassly, but that's pretty much the substance of millions of cold calls every day.

So here are two things to consider: (1) you're not likely to get in to see the buyer on a walk-in cold call, and (2) you don't want to see the buyer anyway! I can see you nodding your head at #1, but maybe shaking your head at #2. After all, didn't I just say something about prospecting being all about getting that first meeting with the buyer?

I did, and I meant it, but one of the issues here is that I don't want to have to start from scratch on that first meeting. So let's consider both challenges, and a strategy that will address both of them. What I say when I walk in the door is: *"Hello, my name is Dave Fellman, and I'm from Dave's Printing (or Dave's Signs or Dave's Promotional Products). I'd like to send some information about our company in the mail to your company, and I'm hoping you can tell me who to address it to. Who's the person who's most involved in ordering your printing (or signs or promotional products)?"*

Magic Words

It's been my experience that the magic words here are "in the mail." I have watched thousands of receptionists, secretaries and clerks — let's call them *gatekeepers* — as I've approached them, and I have seen their shields go up as I got in close. I remember one gatekeeper who told me that she could always tell when the person approaching her was a salesperson, and her thought process was: “OK, let’s see what sort of a *salesjerk* this one’s going to be!” I have seen the shields go down, though, as I spoke the words “in the mail” — which tells me that you’ll often get what you want when what you’re asking for is easy rather than hard. Giving you a name is fairly easy. Interrupting that person is hard. (Don’t forget, by the way, that most gatekeepers are lower on the food chain than the buyers behind the gate. Which would you rather do, please your superiors or be part of their noise and annoyance?)

Granted, there are gatekeepers who won’t cooperate. I once walked into a building in San Francisco with a young salesperson who approached a receptionist just as I’ve suggested, and this gatekeeper’s response was a very brusque: “We don’t give out that information.” I’ll continue that story in a moment, but first, let’s talk more about a positive response — for example: “You should address it to John Smith.” OK, you’ve got a name, now what else would you like know before following up with Mr. Smith?

Answering that question really raises two more: (1) “Is he really the right person?” and (2), “Do I really want to pursue this company?” Let’s start with the second one. You’re talking to this gatekeeper because you’ve indentified a suspect company, and all that means is that they look like they *might* be a prospect. In order to be considered a fully qualified prospect, they have to pass three tests. Remember? First, they have to buy exactly what you’re trying to sell. Second, they have to buy enough of it to make pursuing them worthwhile. Third, they have to show some interest in buying from you.

The third test is probably something you’ll have to have to take up with the buyer, but many gatekeepers can give you insight into the first two. The best strategy is a pretty simple question: “Can you tell me anything about how much and what kind of (printing/forms/signage/promotional products) a company like this uses?” My experience has been that the gatekeeper often knows, and his/her answer will often tell you whether it’s worth going to the next step. “Oh we use a lot” would certainly take you there. “We don’t use any” or “We get it all from our home office” might not. “I have no idea” would probably leave you somewhat up in the air. As a general rule, I’ll choose to err on the side of *inclusion* in situations like this. In other words, if I'm not sure, I'll probably go to the next step. If it's really obvious, though, I'll move on to the next suspect in search of more potential.

The Chamber List

Most Chamber of Commerce organizations publish a list of their members once each year. In addition, many Chambers and other organizations — including local/regional business publications — publish Top 10/Top 25/Top 50 lists broken down by various business categories. These lists have value, of course, but they also represent a trap for many salespeople who count on them as their sole source of prospecting information and sole trigger for prospecting activity. What does that mean? Let's look at it from the buyer's perspective. All of a sudden, it seems like you're getting calls from a million new salespeople. Why? Because the Chamber list just came out! Do you have time to deal with this onslaught of prospecting activity? In all probability, the answer is *no!*

Still, though, a Chamber or publication list is a legitimate source of suspects. So how do *you* best use it, without getting lost in that onslaught? How about starting at the end of the list, rather than the beginning! It turns out that very few salespeople will work their way through an entire list, for whatever the reason, so if you start with the smallest companies on a list sorted by sales volume, or start with the Z's rather than the A's on an alphabetical list, you stand to be among the smaller group of salespeople calling on those particular companies.

Now, I should probably mention that starting at the *other end* is a strategy that quite a few progressive salespeople have already latched on to. How can you stay one step ahead of them? Depending on the size of the list, you may find that the least trampled territory is not at the beginning or the end of the list, but in the middle!

The Right Person

Regardless of which strategy you choose for identifying *suspects* — canvassing or working from a list — it's still of the utmost importance to identify the decision-maker. That raises the question of whether the name you are given is really the right person. How do you make sure of that? Again, the best strategy is a pretty simple question: "What is his/her title?"

I promised you earlier that we'd get to the consideration of titles in prospecting, and the basic idea here is that if you know the titles of the people who are your current customers, that tells you what titles to be looking for in your prospecting efforts. If you don't know the exact titles of your current customers, you should start on gaining that information right now! (Remember that *title* is one of the 8 critical database fields we discussed in the previous chapter! Please also remember what I said about using *buyer* as a noun, not a title. John Smith is probably not a Printing Buyer by title. It's much more likely that he's a printing buyer in his role as the Marketing Manager, or Office Manager or Human Resources Manager or Purchasing Manager.)

Knowledge of your target titles can also be very important if the gatekeeper doesn't know whose name to give you. Gatekeepers usually do know, but not always. Sometimes they need help, or maybe just a little prompting. That may start with the last part of your initial question: "Who's the person most involved in ordering your printing (or signs or promotional products)?" If the gatekeeper doesn't seem to know, you could prompt him/her by continuing: "By that I mean letterhead, envelopes, business cards, business forms, brochures, manuals, posters, banners, architectural drawings, imprinted pens or mugs, screen printed t-shirts, etc" — an appropriate listing of some of your specific products.

Another way to prompt would be to say: "I usually find that it's a Marketing title" — or Operations or Human Resources or something as specific as Project or Property or Event Manager. Do you see how this works? I hope you also see how this is another reflection of an element of core knowledge that we've already discussed: *Your next good customer will probably look a lot like a current good customer.* That holds true right down to the title of the person who's likely to be the buyer/decision-maker.

Purchasing Titles

Now, let's consider one specific type of title for a moment — purchasing titles, such as Purchasing Agent, Acquisitions Specialist, Purchasing Manager or Materials Manager. The question is, do you really want to deal with purchasing types? On one hand, they buy a lot of printing, forms, signage and promotional products. On the other hand, though, they tend to be more price driven than the "end users" of your products and services. My attitude is that I'll deal with them if I have to, but *only* if I have to!

When a gatekeeper tells me that the name I've been given is connected to a purchasing title, I'll say something like this: "You know, the kind of (printing/forms/signage/promotional products) company we are, I find that it's not usually a Purchasing person who wants to talk to me, more often it's a Marketing person. Do you have a Marketing Manager here?" (Obviously, the same strategy would apply if you're looking for one of the other titles listed above.) When I've had that conversation with gatekeepers, the most common response has been: "Oh, I'm sorry. You're in sales, so naturally I thought of our purchasing department. Our Marketing Manager is…." And that's a reflection of still another element of basic selling knowledge: *Sometimes, all it takes to get what you want is one more question!*

It's not *always* that easy, of course. I remember a gatekeeper who told me: "Bub, if you want to sell to us, you go through Purchasing!" OK, like I said, I'll deal with them if I have to, but I'm always going to ask. And I have had some very satisfactory relationships with purchasing types in the past. Doesn't it make sense, though, to avoid them if you can? Or maybe I should say that another way — doesn't it make sense to get as close to the *owner* of any order as you can? By *owner*, I mean the person who really has something to lose or gain on the back of any order.

Let's say that you're calling on a retail store, and the order on the table is for signage that will be part of a big sale. Let's also say that a Purchasing Agent will normally place the order, but the specifications will come from a Merchandising Manager. Which of those two will experience the most pain if the signs are printed wrong or not delivered on time?

Here's another element of essential selling knowledge: *People run* to *pleasure, and* from *pain*. I'm not sure there's a lot of pleasure connected to buying printing or forms or signage or promotional products, but I know there's a lot of pain! Now, let's consider still another element of essential knowledge: *Everyone you're not yet selling to already has a supplier for what you'd like to sell them, which means that the decision to start buying from you has to be accompanied by — or preceded by! — the decision to stop buying from that other supplier.*

That takes us pretty close to the bottom line in prospecting, I think. Why would they stop buying from that other supplier? If it's not for lower prices, it has to be for greater value, and that means getting *more* for their money or *less* for their money. Getting more for their money might qualify as *running to pleasure*, but more importantly, getting less for their money would definitely qualify as *running from pain*. I'm talking about less pain, of course, and less aggravation and less time spent dealing with problems caused by a supplier's poor performance.

The Blame Game

Think about this for a moment: what does the Purchasing Agent tell the Merchandising Manager if the signs for the upcoming sale are printed wrong or delivered late? Probably this: "The printer/sign shop screwed up. I got us a great price, but they didn't do what they were supposed to do!" Does the Purchasing Agent suffer if the sale is a flop? Possibly, but probably nowhere near as much as the Merchandising Manager suffers.

Now the critical question. Who gets the next signage order? It may be a different supplier if the Purchasing Agent places the order, but the decision will probably still be driven by price. It will almost certainly be a different supplier if the Merchandising Manager places the order, and I think the chances are far greater that this buyer's decision will be driven by *value*.

So here's another element of essential knowledge: *If you can't sell on price, you have to sell on value.* Maybe I should rephrase that and say that if you *don't want to* sell on price, you absolutely have to sell on value. As we just discussed, *value* has two components — *more* for your money and *less* for your money — and that raises the question of which is more compelling.

Let's consider a *more for your money* scenario: in addition to supplying printing and signs, the salesperson brings donuts over regularly. Now let's consider a *less for your money* scenario: the donut guy's company screws up pretty regularly, but a new guy makes a very compelling case for his company's quality control and on-time-delivery record. Who gets the next order? Does it make a difference whether the Purchasing Agent makes that decision as opposed to the Merchandising Manager? You may be familiar with the term *strategic selling*. This sort of situation analysis is what *strategic selling* is all about, and *strategic sellers* work hard to get close to the *owners* of the orders.

The Donut Guy's Bad Day

OK, maybe donuts are not a very good example of *more for your money*. I used that scenario, though, to set the stage for a story. I was out on calls with a young salesperson who brought donuts very regularly to his customers and prospects. On this particular day, he got a "get over here now" call from his #1 customer — something that definitely qualified as *urgent and important* — and we arrived to find the Marketing Manager in tears because the open house event was that evening and the posters and banners were wrong. "Paul," she said, as we walked in, "there's not enough donuts in the world to make up for the pain this is causing me."

Let me rephrase that, with some artistic liberty, but I think you'll understand: "Paul, I have always liked you but I don't think I can trust you anymore." Here's another piece of essential selling knowledge: *Pain is a pivot point. It makes people think about changing suppliers.* And here's still another piece: *If you lose their trust, you'll probably lose their business.*

The flip side of that one, of course, is that the key to *gaining* their business is to gain their trust!

Strategy, Duh!

Strategic selling is all about situation analysis. It's also about strategy.

That's a "duh" statement, I know, but stay with me — what I mean is that strategic sellers understand that selling is a process which is driven by an overall strategy, and the strategy itself is nothing more than a plan for dealing with predictable obstacles. Let's consider where we are so far. You have identified a suspect company, and you have identified a buyer. You have made the decision that you would like to meet with this buyer, because so far, it looks like he or she (1) buys exactly what you sell, and (2) buys enough of it to make your pursuit worthwhile. Now the challenge is to arrange that meeting, and among the obstacles you can anticipate are: (1) buyers don't respond well to cold calls, (2) most buyers have a lot of noise in their lives, and (3) most buyers use voicemail to screen out some of that noise. Now think about this — *all of that is why my strategy includes "I want to send some information about our company in the mail to your company" in the first place!* In other words, cold calls don't work, so let's do something to warm up your first contact with the buyer.

We'll get to the *what* in just a moment. Before we do that, let's consider the *how*, or the means of transmittal for this information. What I have in mind could be delivered via traditional mail or e-mail, and I hope you're already thinking that there'll be a phone call somewhere in the future to follow up on whatever information you send. All of that means that I'd like to finish up with the gatekeeper having captured all of the information I'll need to reach out to the buyer and then follow up: physical address, e-mail address, phone number and fax number, and let's not forget the correct spelling of the buyer's name if it's anything that sounds tricky!

Critical Contact Information

Do you recognize this list of essential contact information? As a reminder, here are the 8 essential fields I specified in our discussion about Contact Management:

- Company Name
- Contact Name
- Title
- Physical Address
- E-mail Address
- Telephone Number
- Fax Number
- ID/Status

You have (hopefully) captured the buyer's title earlier in your conversation with the gatekeeper, and the only field left after physical address, e-mail address, telephone number and fax number is ID/Status, and for that I recommend something like "Suspect Worth Taking The Next Step With."

Now, quickly, what document will almost always have all of this information you're looking for right on it? Yes, the buyer's business card! I will *always* ask the gatekeeper if he/she has the buyer's business card handy, and I will always wait patiently if he/she says "No, but I'll run back and get one for you." I've found it interesting that some gatekeepers won't be willing to give you all of the information you're asking for, for example, the e-mail address. But they will give you the business card which probably has the e-mail address on it, and many business cards also have direct phone numbers and even cell phone numbers on them. That's not logical, perhaps, but it's illogic that works in our favor.

Now think about this. You can do everything I've just described — this whole interaction with the gatekeeper! — over the telephone, with only one exception: getting the business card. That's one of the key reasons I recommend live canvassing whenever time and distance considerations allow it. Yes, you can make more prospecting phone calls in an hour than canvassing visits, but I think the quality vs. quantity equation swings in favor of live canvassing. It has also been my experience that gatekeepers are more willing to answer your third, fourth and fifth questions when you're physically in front of them. Remember, when you're on the phone with the gatekeeper, you're tying up a phone line, and for many gatekeepers, answering and routing phone calls quickly and efficiently is a big part of their job.

Gatekeeper Objections & Obstacles

Gatekeepers come in all shapes and sizes, and a very wide range in terms of level of cooperation. I've seen guarded and open, cold, warm and hot (yes, that's exactly what I mean!), friendly and hostile. I think I've also heard all of the standard and therefore *predictable* objections and obstacles from gatekeepers, and remember that selling strategy at its essence is really nothing more than a plan for dealing with predictable obstacles. Here are some of the most commons ones, and the way that I'd address them:

Obstacle/Objection: "We don't use much/any (printing/forms/signs)."
Response: "Do you ever find yourself running out to Kinko's (or some other local supplier)?"

If the answer is yes, ask: "For what sort of things, and how often does that happen?" If the answer indicates enough potential to get excited about: "You know, that may not seem like a lot to you, but it's enough that I'd still like to send my information to the person who makes those decisions." Key point: Remember, if they don't buy enough of exactly what you sell to make pursuing them worthwhile, they are not a prospect! If that's the case, the gatekeeper is doing you a favor!

Obstacle/Objection: "We get it all from our home office."
Response: "Where is that home office?"

If it's somewhere in your local marketing area, go there! If not, you should probably move on to the next suspect. It's true that some companies buy their printing/forms/signs/promotional products from long distance, but the vast majority purchase these products locally, and for good reason! This is another *strike zone* issue. Sure, you might hit a pitch that's out of your strike zone, but more often you'll miss, and maybe hurt yourself doing it. I've seen a lot of salespeople spend a lot of time chasing low percentage opportunities and ending up with nothing to show for those efforts. I think that qualifies as *hurt*!

While we're on this subject, here's a trap I've seen more than a few salespeople fall into. The gatekeeper says: "We get it all from the home office." The salesperson says: "How's that working for you?" The gatekeeper answers that they often have to wait a long time to get their printing/forms/signage/promotional products. The salesperson sees that as opportunity, and decides to pursue the suspect. I think the value proposition is pretty obvious — *if you buy from me, you won't have that particular pain anymore!*

Unfortunately, some pain just can't be relieved, and here's the way it breaks down: *supplier pain* can often be relieved, *bureaucracy pain* most often cannot. Sure, there are exceptions, but given that your prospecting time is probably limited, I think you're lots better off swinging at pitches that offer you a greater likelihood of success.

Now, before I get too far off this subject, here's a caveat to that last comment. It's perfectly OK to have a few "speculative" or low percentage possibilities among your active suspects. It's not OK, though, to focus all of your prospecting efforts on that category. Remember that, ultimately, the most important of the three qualifying criteria is that they show real interest in buying from you!

Obstacle/Objection: "We do all of our printing on our own printers."
Response: "Does that include business cards? Checks? Brochures? Price Lists? Posters? Banners?"

The idea here is to list some of your common products, and the strategy is based on that knowledge that the gatekeeper is a *civilian* — remember, that's my term for anyone who doesn't actually work in our industry! To many gatekeepers, *printing* is limited to letterhead, envelopes and possibly simple forms, and in some cases their definition might be limited to internal documents. Sometimes, *the power of suggestion* makes them realize that they do, in fact, buy what you sell. Just remember that many small companies can support all of their printing needs on their own printers, and if that's the case, they simply don't qualify as prospects.

Conversation With Kinko

I remember a conversation with Paul Orfalea quite a few years ago, the founder and curly-haired namesake of Kinko's. He was talking about the bright future of Kinko's and the industry in general, and I asked him if there was anything that scared him as he looked at the future. "Two things," he said. "The office supply superstores and laser printers."

> The superstores scared him because of their low-price strategy, and that fear has certainly been borne out as those stores have sucked up so much of the high-volume copy work that Kinko's and the quick printing segment used to thrive on. Laser printers scared him because they minimized the demand for an outside supplier to handle low-volume printing and copying, especially in color, and I think that fear has been borne out as well. Modern laser and inkjet printer technology has put a lot of printing power on the desktop, but there's still plenty of opportunity with companies who can't meet their needs on their own printers.

Obstacle/Objection: "We're happy with our current supplier."
Response: "Who is that?"

It's been my experience that the gatekeeper will often tell you, and when given a name, I will continue: "Oh yeah, they're very good. In fact, they're probably the second best (printing/forms/sign/promotional products) company in the area." Say that with a smile, and you'll probably be rewarded with a smile or giggle, which tells you that they get the joke. Then you can say: "Seriously, they're very good, but do you think your company should ignore the possibility that we're even better?" Remember, you're not trying to sell your products or services to the gatekeeper. You're only trying to sell the idea that he/she should give you the name of the buyer, so you can approach that person directly. I've found that a little humor — coupled with pretty sound logic! — will often get you to that objective.

> **We Don't Give Out That Information**
>
> I promised to continue the story about walking into a building in San Francisco, where the salesperson asked for the name of the person she should address her information to, and the gatekeeper said: "We don't give out that information." The salesperson gave me a "what

now?" look, so I stepped forward toward the receptionist and said: "Hey, tell me something, whose stupid idea is that? Did you get that instruction from some moron upstairs, or was it your own stupid idea?"

As you might expect, the gatekeeper was horrified by my rudeness, and the salesperson looked a little freaked-out too, so I took her by the elbow and said: "Come on, we should probably leave now." By the time we reached the street, she was totally freaked-out and screamed "What's wrong with you! Are you X$%X&# crazy?"

"No, I'm not," I answered calmly. "I did that for a very specific reason. I wanted you to know that you didn't do anything wrong in there. In fact, I think you did your best job yet of approaching the gatekeeper and introducing yourself and saying what I want you to say. What she said back to you really was stupid, and unfortunately, you're going to run into stupid people with stupid ideas on a regular basis. What's important is that you move on and say —to yourself! — 'OK, I met another stupid one, so now I'm going in the next door to look for another smarter one.' Don't let the morons get you down!"

Don't let the morons get *you* down!

A Little Bit Of Research

Another key reason I recommend live canvassing is the opportunity to bring another one of your senses to bear on your prospecting challenges. On the phone, all you'll learn is what you hear/what you're told. In person, you will also learn from what you see. For example, many companies have racks of brochures, etc, in their lobbies. That can help a printing salesperson to determine whether they do, in fact, buy exactly what you sell. Many companies have other clues to the nature of their businesses in their lobbies; for example, copies of trade publications.

Looking forward toward the meeting that is the goal of the prospecting process, I hope you'll see the value of gaining knowledge about the company in advance. I recently met with an insurance salesperson, and his first question after sitting down in my office was: “So, what does David Fellman & Associates do?” My answer was: “Well, we don’t spend much time talking with salespeople who aren’t professional enough to do a little research before they come to try to sell us something.” Then I got up and pointed to my chair.

“Come around and sit here at my computer,” I said. “Find your way to Google. Then search on ‘David Fellman & Associates’. OK, now follow that link to davefellman.com. Is there any reason you couldn’t have done that somewhere in between setting the appointment and arriving here today?”

I’ll have more on the best strategy for your first meeting a little further along. For now, I hope you’ll embrace the idea that *knowledge* is a significant selling advantage. That raises a question, though: should you do research before you go out prospecting, or afterward?

The answer is: it depends! It depends on whether you are canvassing or working from a list, and if you’re canvassing, my advice is to Google afterward. Go out into the marketplace, talk with as many gatekeepers as you can, and then Google the companies/organizations that seem to have prospect potential.

If you’re working from a list, Google first to see what you can learn before you call. Many company websites provide a wealth of information, including names and titles of key personnel. In fact, sometimes an Internet search eliminates the need to even talk to the gatekeeper.

One caution, though: it should take *no more than 2-3 minutes* to pre-research any company on the Internet. If you’re spending more than that, you’re wasting time. Remember, at this stage you’re only evaluating the likelihood that a suspect will turn out to be a real prospect. Later on in the process — for example, when you’re preparing for a scheduled meeting — you will probably benefit from additional research. For now, though, I want you to do only enough to make a go/no go decision on whether to take the next step with any individual suspect.

The time management considerations here are really pretty straightforward. A 2-3 minute *investment* is appropriate at the suspecting stage. That's all it should take to support a go/no go decision. A 10-15 minute investment might be appropriate at the meeting prep stage, but you don't make that investment until you have scheduled the meeting!

Introductory Letter

Now we get to the *what* to send in the mail. I recommend a short introductory letter, and by short, I mean no more than 3-4 paragraphs. As noted, this should be something that can be transmitted either by traditional mail or by e-mail, and 3-4 paragraphs fits that bill. What exactly should your introductory letter say? Well, you'll find 5 versions in the online appendix: www.davefellman.com/onlineappendix — one each for promotional printing, operational printing, large format printing, signage/ graphics and promotional products — but before you look at those letters, let's talk about the thinking behind them.

As noted earlier, I don't want to make cold calls, and I do want to build trust, so the thinking behind this strategy is to open a "window of recognition" and then make a promise, which I will keep. As you'll see when you look at the letters, the general theme goes like this:

> *I'm interested in you because…* (I've been told that you buy exactly what I sell)…
>
> *I think you'll be interested in me because…* (We specialize in exactly what you buy)…
>
> *So with that in mind, I'm going to call you to set up a meeting…*
>
> *And, by the way, here's why I think you should take the time to meet with me…*

You may be surprised by how little these letters say, but remember, part of the challenge they face is to get read in the first place, and *short* is good strategy in that regard. If you feel that you need to provide more information about your company, you can certainly include some sort of company brochure with a letter, or a PDF brochure or a link to your website with an e-mail. I would not do that, though. In fact, I wouldn't even enclose my business card with a letter. Less is better, here, and my reasoning goes beyond simply keeping it short so it's more likely to get read. Another part of my thinking is that this whole strategy is really aimed at setting up a meeting. The danger with sending *literature* is that they might actually read it and say to themselves: "OK, I know what this company can do, and I don't need that right now (or I'm happy with my current supplier right now), so I'll just file it away in case I want to call them someday."

Think about this for a moment. The real *solids* are not going to meet with you. The *gases* probably are, but there are probably not enough of them out there to make you rich. The *players* tend to be more like solids than gases, because they already have a group of trusted suppliers. The *price monsters* tend to be more like gases than solids, because the more salespeople they talk to, the more likely it is that they get even lower prices. The *liquids* are the real target of this strategy. In fact, I think the liquids are the ones who *are* most likely to make you rich. Remember what makes a liquid a liquid: they are generally happy with their current supplier — which indicates that they buy on trust, not on price — but they'll talk to you and give some thought to whether you're better than what they already have.

You have to help them to decide to talk to you sometimes, though. *That's* what this strategy is all about! (That's a variation on one of my core philosophies on selling, by the way: *The decision to buy from you is way too important to be left up to them!* Think about that for a second. Do you really want to trust them to read your brochure and understand exactly what you and your company are all about? I don't! I want to talk to them, and I don't want to do anything that might lessen the chances of having that conversation.)

OK, part of the plan here is to open a "window of recognition." Would you agree that getting a letter or e-mail from you — putting your name and your company name in front of them, possibly for the first time — is far less obtrusive than getting a cold phone call? Your intro letter or e-mail also tells them what's going to happen next, and it positions you to make a far warmer follow-up phone call: "Mr. Smith, my name is Dave Fellman, and

I'm from Dave's Printing (or Dave's Signs or Dave's Promotional Products). I wrote to you the other day, and I promised that I'd be calling to see if we can set up a meeting. How does that sound to you?"

That's exactly what I'd say! The key obstacle, after all, is a lack of interest in meeting with me, so why not get right to the point? If the answer is: "Yeah, that sounds good," all that's left is to establish a time and place for the meeting. (Sadly, it's not usually that easy, but I'll cover the common objections in just a moment.)

Exact Words

Look back again at the exact words I use: "I wrote to you the other day and *I promised* that I'd be calling." I don't want to make cold calls, and I do want to build trust, so I've engineered a strategy in which the phone call is the second communication, and it keeps a promise that was made in the first one. Remember what I said earlier about promises being the essence of your job. *If you can get them to believe your promises,* I said, *they'll think seriously about maybe buying from you.* The best way to show them they can believe the *big promises* you'll be making later on is to make *smaller promises* and keep them early on.

Now, look back again at that core philosophy of selling: *The decision to buy from you is way too important to be left up to them!* I'm not willing to assume that my early-stages suspect will connect all the dots here and remember that I made a promise and now I'm keeping it. That's why I'm actually going to say it: "I wrote to you the other day and *I promised* that I'd be calling." I'm trying to plant the seed of the most important sale any printing/forms/signage/promotional products salesperson can make, and that's when you sell the idea that when you say something is going to happen, it will happen, period, end of story, and they can take that to the bank!

Common Obstacles and Objections

I wrote earlier about dealing with the most common gatekeeper objections. With one notable exception, I would apply the same strategy to those obstacles and objections if I heard them from the buyer/decision-maker. That exception is to “we’re happy with our current supplier,” and I’ll come back to that in a moment. First, let’s consider a few of the other common “O&O’s” that are encountered at this level.

Obstacle/Objection: “I’m really busy right now!”
Response: “When would be a better time?”

This is really pretty straightforward in terms of your question, but the buyer’s response will tell you something about his/her interest in meeting with you. I have always treated “Call me in a week” or 2 weeks or 3-4 weeks — anything less than a month! — as an expression of real interest, and my reply would be: “You got it!” Then I’d note the details and schedule the follow-up call in ACT. Key point: I’m going to start that call by reminding the buyer that I was asked to call at this point in time. “Mr. Smith, this is Dave Fellman from Dave’s Printing (or Dave’s Signs or Dave’s Promotional Products). I hope you’ll remember our recent conversation. You asked me to call back around now, and I promised I would, and I hope you’ll note that I kept that promise. We were talking about setting up a meeting. How does your schedule look?”

Here’s another key point. A lot of salespeople seem to want to push hard at a “soft” obstacle, and that’s how I’d characterize “Call me next week.” I frequently hear “What day next week?” or “What’s the best time to reach you?” or “Can we set a time now for me to call you next week?” You don’t need to be that pushy in the face of a positive response, and I think you’re a lot better off with “You got it!” and the strategy I described above.

You *should* push hard at a “hard” obstacle, though, and that’s how I’d characterize “Call me in 6 months.” In my experience, what that usually really means is “I’m not interested and I hope you’ll forget about me between now and then!”

Here’s how I’d handle that one: “Mr. Smith, I can certainly do that, but while I’ve got you on the phone, I have one more question. I think I’ve learned in my travels that when someone says ‘call me in 6 months,’ there are two possibilities. One is that you really want to meet with me, and 6 months from now is the right time for it to happen. The other, though, is that you really don't want to meet with me, and you're hoping that I'll forget about you between now and then. Here's my question, which of those situations do we have here? And please, don't worry about hurting my feelings. If it's bad news, I can take it!"

I remember a buyer who answered: "Well, if you're sure you can take it…" I laughed, and said "OK, well thank you for your time." It has always been part of my philosophy that if you're not going to be successful with someone, you're better off knowing that sooner rather than later. I hope you'll understand that as a time management concept, and that you'll relate it to those three tests a suspect has to pass in order to be considered a fully-qualified prospect — specifically the one about showing real interest in buying from you!

I remember another buyer, though, whose response struck a different chord in me. He said something like: "Your feelings are your business, but I think you understand where I'm coming from." So I said: "I don't get it, why would you *not* want to talk with the representative of a really good printing company?" That took him aback, and then he stuttered something about being happy with his current supplier. OK, that's a whole different objection, and the "second best" strategy might be just the ticket to address it. As promised, though, I'll suggest another approach to this particular objection a little farther along.

Two more key points for now: First, the first objection is not always the most important objection, or even a real objection. Challenging each objection as it's thrown at you is analogous to peeling back an onion, and remember, as long as you're still in the competition, you have a chance of winning. Second, there will be times when you simply have nothing to lose by pushing harder, and even if that strategy doesn't keep you in the competition, it at least lets you feel like you went down swinging. Remember my story about the gatekeeper in San Francisco. You will run into morons out there. Don't let the morons get you down!

While we're on the subject of pushing harder, here's a variation on the strategy for dealing with "I'm really busy right now." Rather than "When would be a better time?" you could also say: "Yeah, me too. In fact, there's no way I can meet with you over the next couple of weeks. I do have some time after that, though, how would (a day and date that far out) work for you?" One of my clients was intrigued with this approach, and he called me after trying it for the first time.

"It was great," he said. "Complete silence, and then she stuttered something like 'OK, I guess that would work.' She probably answered the phone thinking that her time was a lot more important than my time, but I think I established that my time could be valuable to her."

Obstacle/Objection: "I don't need anything right now."
Response: "I think that means that now is the best time for us to talk."

Most salespeople seem to view *immediate need* as their best opportunity. It probably won't surprise you by now that I view things differently. Remember what it takes to be a fully qualified prospect: (1) they buy exactly what you're trying to sell, (2) they buy enough of it to make pursuing them worthwhile, and (3) they show some interest in buying from you. On one hand, I don't care if they need something right now, it's how much they'll need over the course of a year that really matters in terms of being qualified. And on the other hand, I think I'm more likely to win some of that business if I have time to build a relationship — to build some trust! — before they start comparing my prices to my competitors'. I expect my price to be higher than what they're paying now, or at the very least, not enough lower to win the work strictly on that basis. And I know that in the absence of a solid relationship, (which everyone except the *gases* already has with at least one other supplier, right?) price is all they'll probably measure.

I remember a conversation with a buyer which started out just like I've described above. He said: "I don't need any printing right now." I said: **"**I think that means that now is the best time for us to talk." He said: "I don't think I understand," so I said: "Well, here's the way I look at it. At this point, you don't know me at all, and you don't have any reason to believe the promises I'm going to have to make to get the order from you when you *do* need something printed. And I don't know enough about your situation to be anything more than an order-taker at that point. If you'll give me the time to start getting to know you and your situation now — when there's no pressure on you to get something ordered, which would probably make it easiest for you to just buy from someone you'd bought from before — maybe I'll be able to suggest a better way of doing it when we get to the point where you do need something, and maybe you'll be more inclined to believe me and believe *in me* when I say 'here's what I think you should do.'"

There was silence on the other end of the line for a moment, and then he said: "You know, that might be the smartest thing a salesman's ever said to me. Let's get together this week." I was very proud of myself that day!

Obstacle/Objection: "We're under contract."
Response: "Can we explore the *length, width* and *height* of that contract?"

The first issue surrounding contracts is that there are basically fours kinds of them: *formal/written, implied, assumed* and *imaginary*. In my experience, there are relatively few *formal/written* contracts in the printing/forms/signage/promotional products market segments, and most of the contracts referred to fall into one of the other three categories. Both the *implied* and *assumed* categories reflect the belief that some pricing level is dependent on some level of sales volume, and the *imagined* category is simply a strategy for pushing you away.

The response is still the same, though, and the best question surrounding the *length* of the contract is: "When do the renewal discussions begin?" (From your perspective, the intention is to begin them *now!*)

The best question surrounding the *width* of the contract is: "Does the contract cover (letterhead/envelopes/business cards/business forms/ interior signs/exterior signs/posters and banners/imprinted t-shirts/etc.)?" — in other words, don't just ask: "What does the contract cover?" *Prompt* the buyer to make sure he/she fully understands the breadth of your product line, and that you probably have interest in items that aren't covered by the contract, real or otherwise.

The best question surrounding the *height* of the contract is: "Are you completely satisfied with the quality and service you're getting in return for your contract commitment?" Most people tend to look at contract pricing as the only binding consideration, and I've had a few conversations with buyers during which their answer indicated that the other supplier had already broken the contract. "Yes, they promised you attractive pricing if you made a commitment to them, but didn't they also promise you a level of quality and service that would meet your needs and make you happy? If they're not giving you that — even if they are giving you the pricing — they're not giving you all that they promised and I think that means the contract is broken!"

Remember, your objective when faced with any obstacle or objection is to get past it and continue the discussion. *Length, width* and *height* should give you something to work with!

Obstacle/Objection: "Send me some literature and let me look it over."
Response: "I can do that, Mr. Smith, but all that will really do is tell you about my company. I think it's a lot more important that I learn about *your* (printing/forms/signage/promotional products) needs and wants. Do you see that there's a difference, by the way, between needs and wants? Lots of us can sell you the products, but I'm trying to be the one who learns how to make your life easier or makes your marketing more effective, the one who really adds some value."

Remember the definition of prospecting: an activity chain which begins with the identification of suspect companies, and ends with your first meeting with the buyer. Prospecting is all about getting that meeting! Sending literature is not enough, because *the decision to buy from you is way too important to be left up to them!* The essence of dealing with this obstacle — with most obstacles, in fact! — is to position your goal as a benefit to the buyer.

This approach doesn't always work, by the way. In fact, this may be a good time to tell you that I've never found anything in selling that *does* work every time. My goal here is to give you something to *work with*, a strategic response to a predictable objection. And if it doesn't work, your *Plan B* might be to send the literature that your suspect has asked for.

Just don't forget to follow up and ask again for the meeting. (Do you remember how not to forget? ACT — or any one of the other contact management products.)

Obstacle/Objection: "I'm happy with my current supplier."

As noted, this is an obstacle/objection that I will approach differently, depending on whether I hear it from a gatekeeper or a buyer. With a gatekeeper, I'll use the "second best" strategy I described earlier, and I might try the same strategy if I hear "I'm happy with my current supplier" from the buyer on the first phone call after my introductory letter or e-mail. If it doesn't work in that situation, my *Plan B* is what I call the "How Happy" letter. You'll find the letter itself in the online appendix: www.davefellman.com/onlineappendix. For now, let me tell you the story behind it.

One of my clients called me and described this situation: "I called the suspect to ask for an appointment, after sending out my intro letter, and she said 'I'm very happy with my current supplier, but your timing is good because I always like to get pricing from another company around this time of the year, just to make sure that what I'm paying is competitive.'" My client asked: "How many items are we talking about pricing here?" and the answer was four or five. "I'm willing to do that," he said, "but I want the opportunity to meet with you and learn more about exactly what you're doing." The suspect agreed, and in the course of that meeting, my client learned that this buyer was an excellent candidate for an online ordering "portal" but her current supplier didn't have that capability. When he called me, he said: "I think there's real potential here if I can get her away from that 'happy with my current supplier' mindset."

I put together the "How Happy" letter, which asked the suspect to consider just how happy she was in terms of five specific criteria: quality, service, pricing, general ease of doing business, and innovation/bringing new ideas to the table, each on a scale of 1-20 points. That, of course, adds up to 100 possible points, and the situation I was hoping for was a total score of 90 or below — in other words, less than an "A" grade. As it happened, the final score was 87, and I made my point: "You have *good*, but there is room for improvement. You can have *better*. You should talk to me about that!"

The "How Happy" strategy has worked well for quite a few of my clients, and the letter can be delivered by e-mail or traditional mail. This strategy can also be executed in a face-to-face conversation or over the telephone. I hope you'll see that this is a strategy which *tests solids* to see if they might really be liquids! Remember, the entire objective of prospecting is to get to the meeting stage. That's all you're trying to sell at this stage of the game!

Voice Mail

OK, now we come to what most salespeople tell me is their greatest source of frustration — voice mail! "They hide behind it," a salesperson told me recently, but I don't think that's true. Voice mail is a tool, and it's a great tool for both the receiver and the caller. In fact, sometimes in seminars I joke that voice mail was invented by a printing salesperson. (When I'm in a really playful mood, I add that this salesperson was a direct descendant of Benjamin Franklin, one of America's first printers and legendary inventors. It's not true, of course, but I think it helps to make the point that voice mail is a very useful tool for salespeople.)

Here's what I love about voice mail. It lets people talk to me when I'm not available to talk to them, and vice versa. Let's start with the "talk to me" perspective. My phone rings 30-50 times most days, and the callers range from suspects to prospects to customers to family and friends and finally to people trying to sell me stuff. I would answer all of those calls if I could, but the nature of my work doesn't allow it. When I'm in the office, I spend a significant portion of my time on outbound calls, ranging from prospecting and follow-up calls to the sales coaching and consulting activities I get paid for. I will occasionally ask someone I'm talking with to hold while I take another call — caller ID is another great tool! — but I try to avoid that unless the "caller waiting" is a very high priority. Everyone else goes to voice mail. When I'm on the road, everyone who calls the office goes to voice mail, and so do most of the people who call my cell phone, since it's consulting or speaking work that takes me on the road, and I apply the same sort of prioritization to the decision on whether to interrupt what I'm doing to take a(nother) call.

I check my voice mail messages frequently, and I apply Stephen Covey's principles to *when or whether* I return the call — urgent and important, important but not urgent, urgent but not important, or neither urgent nor important. So I'm not hiding behind voice mail, I'm using it to help me manage my time! I will call you back quickly if you are urgent and important. I will call you back when you get to the top of my priority list if you are important but not urgent. I may not call you back at all if you are urgent but not important or neither urgent nor important.

Now, do you understand your voice mail challenge a little better? I'm not sure there's much a prospecting salesperson can do to make himself/herself truly urgent, but you damn well need to make yourself seem important!

Vice Versa

From the "vice versa" perspective, I love voice mail because it gives me a way to tell people why I think it's important for them to call me back. And that raises a very key point, *when you get connected to voice mail, your objective is not to sell them printing or forms or signs or promotional products. Your only objective is to get them to call you back!*

So here's what I'd say when the follow-up phone call to my letter or e-mail takes me to voice mail: "Mr. Smith, my name is Dave Fellman, and I'm from Dave's Printing (or Dave's Signs or Dave's Promotional Products). I wrote to you the other day, and I promised that I'd be calling to see if we can set up a meeting. Please give me a call, and let's set up a time to get together. You can reach me at 800-325-9634." (By the way, that's my actual phone number. Don't hesitate to call if you have questions on any of what you're reading here. The way I look at it, having bought this book makes you a customer, and that earns you the right to call me if I haven't explained something clearly enough. Fair warning, though, it also gives me an opportunity to sell you more of my products and/or services!)

Overall Strategy

Did you recognize that voice mail message as being substantially the same as what I'd say if Mr. Smith answered the phone when I called? Remember, this is all part of an overall strategy to avoid cold calls and to build trust. And that leads to another important point. I know salespeople who won't leave a message, they'll just hang up and call again later and keep on calling in the hope of finally reaching the suspect. That's a very bad strategy, for two reasons. First, because I know people who never answer their phones. They let voice mail answer every call. That creates a perpetual tail chase, and you can call as many times as you want to but you're still going to get voice mail every time.

The second reason is even more important in terms of my overall strategy, and I think the best way for me to make this point is to ask this age-old question: If a tree falls in the woods and there's no one there to hear it, does it really make any noise?

I'm asking you this as a question of philosophy, of course, not of physics, and the application to prospecting is simply this: If a salesperson makes a promise in a letter or e-mail, but then doesn't leave a message to prove that he/she kept the promise, does that salesperson gain any *trust points* from the exercise? The answer is *probably not*.

Follow-Up Schedule

After leaving my message, I'll give my suspects a day or so to call me back. To be more specific, I'll give them the rest of the day I leave the message and all of the next day, but if they don't return my call, I'm going to call again on the following day. As an example, If I leave my message on Wednesday, I'll give them the rest of Wednesday and all of Thursday before calling again on Friday.

That raises the question of when you should make your first phone call after sending an introductory letter or an e-mail. My feeling is that sooner is much better than later. If I mailed a letter on Monday, for example, and I thought it would be delivered on Tuesday or Wednesday, I would make my first phone call on Wednesday afternoon, or on Thursday at the latest. If I sent an e-mail on Monday, I would make the phone call on Tuesday.

Remember, half of the purpose of this introductory letter or e-mail is to open a “window of recognition.” By nature, that tends to be a brief window, so you need to act while it’s still open. The ideal scenario, in fact, would be (1) the suspect reads the letter, (2) the suspect puts the letter down, and (3) the phone rings and it’s you. If I could figure out how to master that timing, I’d be a very happy man!

Now, there is some risk with this strategy, that you’ll be calling before your suspect has even seen your letter. That’s OK, because that situation is easily dealt with. You simply say: “Well, it was a short little letter. Let me tell you very quickly what it said. It said ‘I’m interested in you because I’ve been told that you’re the person who buys the (printing/forms/signs/promotional products) at your company, and I think you’ll be interested in me because we specialize in exactly that kind of (printing/forms/signs/promotional products).’ The letter promised that I’d be calling to follow up, and it also mentioned a couple of specific reasons why I think you should take time to meet with me. Those reasons are… So, what do you think?”

I have had salespeople call me and make reference to letters or literature that I’ve never seen, and when I tell them that, they almost universally suggest one of two things — either waiting a few days for the Post Office to get its act together, or sending another copy/package and then calling again. Bad strategy either way! I think you’ll agree that getting a suspect on the phone in the first place is a low percentage proposition, and I don’t want to have to count on that happening twice in the early stages of prospecting.

I hope you’ll also see how one element of this strategy — a *short* letter — sets up a later element, the ability to say “It was a short little letter. Let me tell you very quickly what it said.” I think that brings you pretty close to even with the 1-2-3 ideal scenario I mentioned earlier.

Second Message

So now it’s Day 3 after your first voice mail message, and your suspect hasn’t returned your phone call. It’s time to call again, and if Mr. Smith answers the phone, you should say the same thing you would have said if he had answered your first call: “Mr. Smith, my name is Dave Fellman, and I’m from Dave’s Printing (or Dave’s Signs or Dave’s Promotional

Products). I wrote to you the other day, and I promised that I'd be calling to see if we can set up a meeting. How does that sound to you?"

What if you find yourself in voice mail again, though? You can't leave the same voice mail message, because that didn't work the first time. It's time to be more assertive, and here's the way you should look at this situation: You *asked* Mr. Smith to return your call and he didn't do that. Now you have to *tell* him why he should.

I see this as a message in three parts: the first part will identify you, the second part will attempt to grab his attention, and the third part will provide a compelling reason for him to call you back. Here's an example:

"Mr. Smith, my name is Dave Fellman, and I'm from Dave's Printing (or Dave's Signs or Dave's Promotional Products). I wrote to you the other day, and I promised that I'd be calling to see if we can set up a meeting. Please give me a call, and let's set up a time to get together. You can reach me at XXX-XXX-XXXX. (This, of course, is the part that identifies you.)

"You know, I'm sure you get a lot of calls from salespeople, and I bet that returning all of those calls isn't at the top of your priority list every day. This is a call I think you should return, though, and let me tell you why." (This part will grab many people's attention. It's *not* what they're used to hearing from salespeople. Put a little pause in between your phone number and this part of the message.)

Now we come to the fun part. What would be a truly compelling reason for this suspect to call you back? There's no one-size-fits-all answer to that question, but here are a few possibilities:

> "I think you should call me back because I've been doing this for a long time. In fact, this is my XXth year in this business, and what I think that means to you is XX years of product knowledge. I don't think it's too much of a stretch to think that XX years of specific industry knowledge could be of value to you, and I know that if you talk to some of my current customers — and I'll be happy to put you in touch with a few of them — they'll tell you that's exactly the value I bring to their businesses. They tell me what they're trying to accomplish, and I can usually tell them the best way to go about it. So

> if that would be of value to you, Mr. Smith, you need to call me at XXX-XXX-XXXX."

I'm sure you'll agree that significant knowledge and experience represent a competitive advantage. But what if you don't have that kind of experience? What if you're on the opposite end of the experience spectrum, just getting started?

> "I think you should call me back because I've been a (printing/forms/sign/promotional products) salesperson for two entire months. That may not sound like something to be bragging about, and there are certainly people with a lot more experience than I have, but I'll tell you what I don't think you're going to find. I don't think you're going to find anyone who brings more *enthusiasm* to the job, or someone who has a better understanding of the need to work hard to earn and keep some people's business. If that would be important to you, Mr. Smith, you need to call me at XXX-XXX-XXXX."

Is *enthusiasm* as compelling as *significant experience*? Maybe not, but it might be more compelling than it seems at first glance. I've stressed that, for most people, the buying decision is driven mostly by trust in the salesperson. Now let's talk a little bit about the *not buying* decision — the decision to change suppliers. I've seen research which indicates that about 10% of all people who change printing/forms/signs/promotional products suppliers say they did so because of quality problems, and another 10% say they changed because of service failures. (Those are certainly *trust-breakers*, right?) Another 15% say they changed because they found "better" prices, and 5% changed for a variety of miscellaneous reasons (including this one: "My mother got a job selling printing, so I'm going to buy all of my printing from her!") The largest group of all, though — fully 60%! — say they changed suppliers mostly because they didn't feel like the one they'd been buying from really valued their business. Now let's say that you're that inexperienced salesperson, and you're leaving that *enthusiasm and hard work* message on someone's voice mail. If that someone has been feeling underappreciated by his/her current supplier, you may very well get a return phone call.

What vs. Why

I hope you'll see, by the way, that there's a difference between "I'll work very hard to earn and keep your business" and "I don't think you're going to find anyone who has a better understanding of the need to work hard to earn and keep some people's business." The first is a *what* statement; the second adds a *why* component. People generally respond better to the *why* than just the *what*, because the *why* provides a reason to believe that the *what* is likely to happen. Most salespeople never get beyond the superficial; they make *what* statements, but they don't address the *why* or the *how*. The great salespeople know that the *why* and the *how* are what sells the *what*!

Other Possibilities

Here are a couple of other possibilities for the *why* component of your second voice mail message:

> "I think you should call me back because I'm the owner of (your company name), and I don't know about you, but I always like dealing with the owner. I think that can be especially important if you've ever had to deal with late deliveries because your salesperson didn't have the horsepower to get your orders to the front of the line. You won't have that problem dealing with me, so if that's an issue for you — or if you just like the idea of dealing with the owner — give me a call at XXX-XXX-XXXX."

> "I think you should call me back because I worked on your side of the desk for X years before taking this job as a salesperson, and I think that means I have a good understanding of both what you need and what you want from a (printing/forms/sign/promotional products) company. To give you an example of what I mean, I often needed something delivered by a certain date, but I also wanted to know that my order was on track all through the process so I wouldn't end up with a problem

when it was too late to do anything about it. So for me, it's all about communication. If that's what it's about for you, you should return my call at XXX-XXX-XXXX."

"I think you should return my call because, like I said in my letter, I'm more of an idea person than a pure salesperson, and I think it's fair to say that my ideas have saved time, aggravation and even money for my customers, and also helped some of them to make more money through more effective marketing. I can prove all that, by the way, with testimonials from those same customers, and if you'd like to talk with some of them yourself, that can be arranged. Please call me at XXX-XXX-XXXX, and we can take the next step." (Please remember that the letter I'm referring to can be found in the online appendix: www.davefellman.com/onlineappendix.)

It's All About You!

Did you notice that all of these messages are about *you*, not about your company? This is an important point, and it relates back to something I said earlier about how most salespeople face two core selling challenges. The first is to sell themselves. The second is to "close the sale" on a product or service. At the prospecting/voice mail stage of selling, you're not anywhere near closing the sale on a specific product or service, so it's all about selling yourself.

Most salespeople do this wrong, and leave messages about their printing or forms or signs or promotional products capabilities. Remember, you'll have covered that in your introductory letter or e-mail — 'I'm interested in you because I've been told that you're the person who buys the (printing/forms/signs/promotional products) at your company, and I think you'll be interested in me because we specialize in exactly that kind of (printing/forms/signs/promotional products) — the question before the buyer right now is whether to return your call or not. Not a company's call, *your* call!

Here's another important element of voice mail strategy. You should *always* ask them to call you back. You should *never* say that you'll call again, or even that you'll call again if you don't hear from them. The latter will probably be assumed, and the former just gives them a reason not to call you. Remember that one of the things we're trying to measure is their interest in buying from you, and returning your call might be an expression of interest. Granted, sometimes they'll call you to tell you that they're *not* interested, but even that has the benefit of giving you closure. As I said earlier, from a time management perspective, if you're not going to succeed with someone, you're better off learning that sooner rather than later. And as I also said earlier, an "I'm not interested" response doesn't have to be the end of the discussion. You still have the option of challenging it, for example: "I appreciate your kindness in making the call, but I still find myself wondering, why would you not want to at least talk with me?"

Grammar/Structure/Scripting

Take a look back at the "scripts" I'm suggesting. As I wrote them, I found myself thinking about my 8th Grade English teacher, Miss Anna Collins. She once said something along these lines to me: "David Fellman, I will tolerate some variation from good grammar and sentence structure in the spoken word because it passes through the mind so quickly. The written word, however, has permanence that demands a greater respect for our language. In other words, you bozo, you don't write the way you talk!"

With all due respect to Miss Collins, if we're talking about scripting, you *do* want to write the way you talk! The recipe for effective scripting is to take advantage of the opportunity to think about what you want to say and how you want to sound while you're not under any pressure — like, for example, when you're on one end of a live phone call talking to a person or to his/her voice mail!

How you want to sound is every bit as important as *what you want to say*. You want to sound comfortable and natural — not like a salesrobot reading off a script! So stay away from words that you wouldn't normally use, and don't be afraid of contractions and awkward-looking sentence structure. The best strategy is to write and then practice and then edit and then practice and then practice and practice and then practice some more. When you think you're ready, here's a (hopefully) final step in the scripting process — call home or call your cell phone and leave your scripted voice-mail message on your own voice mail or answering machine. Then listen to it. I think you'll know then if your message is ready for prime time, and if it's not, see edit and practice and practice and practice etc. above.

What Next?

I hope you'll see the *escalation element* of this strategy. First, you *ask* them to return your call. If that doesn't work, you *tell* them why you think they should. OK, but what if *that* doesn't work? Again, I'll give them the rest of the day of my second message and all of the day after that, but if I don't get a return call, I will call again on the following day. I'm not going to leave a third voice mail message, though. This time, if I don't get to talk to the buyer, I want to talk to the gatekeeper, and here's what I'll say: "My name is Dave Fellman, and I hope you'll remember speaking with me the other day, and by the way, I want to thank you again for giving me Mr. Smith's name as the person who buys the (printing/forms/signs/promotional products) for your company. I wrote to him, just like I promised that I was going to, and I've called a couple of times to follow up on that and left messages and he hasn't returned my call. I'm just wondering, can you tell me if there's a time that I'd be likely to catch him in the office?"

I remember a gatekeeper who told me to call early in the morning. "Anything after 7:30 or 7:45 and you're not going to catch him," she said, "he'll just be caught up in the craziness of the day." I remember another gatekeeper who told me that her boss stayed late every Monday and Wednesday to catch up on paperwork, and that I could probably reach him around 7:00 PM. Still another one told me that the man I'd been calling had been in China for the last two weeks, and wouldn't be returning for another month. That's all good information, right? Sometimes it's not a lack of interest, but more a matter of timing.

Sometimes, though, it is a lack of interest. I remember still another gatekeeper who said: “Let me make sure I understand this. You wrote to him and you’ve called him twice and he hasn’t returned your call?” I answered: “Yes, Ma’am,” and then she said: “Well, what’re you stupid? He obviously doesn’t want to talk to you!” She hung up, and then I hung up, and as I recall, I got up and walked around the office for a couple of minutes before I made my next call. Key point: I *made* my next call, knowing that you can’t sell to everyone, and also determined not to let the morons get me down!

Based on what I learn from a gatekeeper, I might schedule another phone attempt, or I might decide to try e-mailing my suspect. *I’m trying hard to connect with you*, I wrote to one recently, *to see if there’s a match between your needs and my expertise. Do you have any interest in talking to me?* The suspect wrote back: *Not really.* OK, not the response I was hoping for, but a response nonetheless. So I wrote back to continue the dialog: *I don’t get it. Why would you not want to at least talk to me?* Do you see how the same basic obstacles and objections seem to raise their heads from different places? The good news is, once you develop a response to each objection, you can use it no matter where in the process the objection arises.

Closed-Ended Question

Here’s something else to think about. After hearing that story, a recent seminar attendee told me that I set myself up for a negative answer in the way I asked the question. “You asked a closed-ended question,” he said, “and you gave the guy an easy way to get rid of you, just by saying ‘no.’”

“I look at it a little bit differently,” I said. “From my perspective, I gave him any easy way to get us to the next stage of a relationship, just by saying “yes.’ But I wasn’t afraid of a negative answer, because I have a response ready for that answer, and I’m willing to push him to see if he might not be a little more *liquid* than *solid*.” Remember that people are often satisfied with *good*; your challenge — your opportunity! — is to get them thinking about *better*.

Now let’s look at how that dialog developed. He didn’t respond to my voice mail messages, so I sent him an e-mail. *Do you have any interest in talking to me?* No. *I don’t get it, why would you not want to at least talk* *to me*? I'm happy with my current supplier. *Oh, who are you using?* From there, I might go into my "second best" routine, or I might decide to use the "How Happy" letter.

Do you see how an assertive strategy allows you to "peel back the onion" and identify the real obstacle/objection? Do you also see how this whole prospecting process is driven by an overall strategy? As I wrote earlier, the strategy itself is nothing more than a plan for dealing with predictable obstacles. I didn't develop this strategy by asking myself what should I do first. Instead, I looked at the desired end result — a new customer! — and started working my way backward through the predictable obstacles.

When To Give Up

As I hope you remember, you can't sell to everybody, and from a time management perspective, if you're not going to succeed with any individual, you're better off knowing that sooner rather than later. I used the term *fast-break* earlier, and there's another basketball term that's appropriate to this discussion: *full court press*. My prospecting strategy is to throw a lot of interest at each suspect over a short period of time, to see if they return it. If they don't — after a letter or e-mail, two escalating voice mail messages and then a pretty blunt e-mail, all delivered within a pretty brief timeframe — I think you have to accept that this is a person who has no interest in you right now.

The *right now* part is important, because the situation could change. *Solids* can become *liquids* and even *gases*, right? So how do you position yourself for an opportunity if something changes? You *don't* do that by continuing to call until the first note of your voice sounds like, well, whatever noise would make you cringe the most. A much better strategy would be to *retreat and recycle*; in other words, to back off and try again 3 or 4 or 6 months later.

By that time, any number of things might have changed — including the identity of the buyer! Because of that, I would start the process from scratch at that point, going all the way back to a quick Internet search, or to the gate-keeper to ask who you should send your information to. If the name is the same, I would suggest a modified version of the introductory letter or e-mail: *I hope you'll remember me. I wrote to you several months* *ago to introduce myself. I'm writing again because I'm still interested in you, and I still think you might be interested in me, and as before, I'm going to call on the phone to see if we can set up a meeting.*

Retreat and recycle has proven to be a far better strategy than *persist and annoy*.

Long Messages

I would not be surprised if this thought crossed your mind as you were reading my thoughts on the second voice mail message: "Damn, that's a long message! No one's going to listen to that, they're going to delete you before you're halfway through!"

It's true, many people are going to do just that, but I don't care, because they're not the people I'm talking to. This is another element of the coordinated strategy I'm trying to teach you, and it takes us back to the introductory letter or e-mail. As I hope you remember, the letter makes a promise — *I'm going to call you to ask for an appointment.* If you look at it from a slightly different perspective, though, that promise might also be seen as a warning — *I'm going to try to get you to buy from me instead of whoever you're buying from now!* The people you're writing to are (hopefully) not idiots. They understand your objective, and it's been my experience that many of them make the decision about whether to meet with you or not right at the point where they read your introductory communication.

I know from experience, in fact, that the majority of people I've written to over the years reacted something like this: *OK, this sales guy wants to come in here and try to convince me to buy all of my (printing/forms/signage/promotional products) from him. I'd rather go to the dentist than let that happen!* I know that's true, because the majority of people I've written to over the years wouldn't take my calls or return my calls. I also know, though, that some of the people I've written to reacted differently. *Oh yeah,* they must have thought, *I want to meet with this guy*. I know that's true, because they took my calls — some even called me before I called them! — and quickly agreed to meet with me.

Here's something else I know. There's a third group, and their reaction goes something like this: *Yes, I should meet with this guy, but I'm really* *busy (or I don't need anything right now) so I'll put calling him back and meeting with him on the back burner.* Here's what I want you to understand: *These* are the people I'm talking to when I leave that long, second voice mail message. I'm not talking to the people who've already decided that they're not going to meet with me, and I'm not talking to the people who've already decided that they are going to meet with me. I'm talking to the people who might call me back and agree to meet with me — all of this sooner rather than later! — if I give them a good reason to.

This is *proven* voice mail strategy, so I hope you'll embrace it. It is not, however, a strategy that guarantees that 10 out of 10 people will call you back. Here's what you can expect, though: it's a strategy that can take you from 1 out of 10 people calling you back to 2 out of 10 or maybe 3 out of 10. And I don't know about you, but 2 out of 10 is a 100% improvement over 1 out of 10, and I'd be pretty happy with that.

Prospecting — Closing Thoughts

Prospecting is similar to Time Management in that it's the subject of a lot of talk, but often not a lot of action. The real winners in printing/forms/signage/promotional products sales have what I like to call a *prospecting attitude*, and that attitude can come from one of three factors. First, a lot of the real winners have a prospecting attitude because they want to make *more money*. Second, most of the real winners have a prospecting attitude because they want to minimize the likelihood of making *less money*. Third, there are some among the real winners who have a prospecting attitude mostly because *management wants them to*.

Here's my perspective: I don't care which of these three factors — or which combination — motivates you to have a prospecting attitude, as long as you have one. As we've discussed, time is money, and customers are money too. If you're not making enough money, part of your problem is probably that you don't have enough customers, and the solution to that problem is prospecting for some new ones.