

by Debra Kahn Schofield

Guerrillas know that people are more likely to buy from a friend than a salesman. As you know it takes a long time to build an enduring friendship. It is a lot easier to form a friendly, relationship based on mutual trust and common interest. The first step is establishing rapport.

Just how do you establish rapport? Are you resourceful enough to find something besides business to discuss after you open the conversation? Here are some techniques you can try. When calling to make an appointment, do these three things:

1. Get to the point in 15 seconds.
2. Be upbeat and humorous.
3. Try to learn something personal about the prospect.

You first begin to establish rapport by getting to the point! State the purpose of your call immediately. It's not necessary (and can be interpreted as insincere) to ask "How are you today?" Just state your name, your company name and how you can help the prospect. Once you've done that, both you and the prospect can relax. Now you set the appointment.

Is the prospect formal or friendly? Try to use humor a couple of times during the conversation (only if it feels natural; don't force it). People love to laugh. A brief joke can do more for buyer rapport than 20 minutes worth of sales talk.

Another way to gain insight is just by listening. People love to talk about themselves. The prospect's mood and personality will be immediately apparent. A few minutes conversation may reveal hometown, hobbies, pets, children and favorite vacation spots.

It is essential that you listen for and be sensitive to the mood of the prospect. If she is obviously blunt or abrupt, just say, "I can tell you're busy" (or, "this may not be the best time for you"). "Why don't we find a more convenient time for me to call."

Clinch the appointment with a personal touch. For example, if you're talking to a football enthusiast, you could say, "I know I can find the best telephone system for your company. With a 15-minute appointment I can show you all the options in the first ten minutes and still have the other five to discuss who has a chance to be in the Superbowl this year."

Sometimes the best way to make a sale is to stop acting like a salesperson. Clients may avoid salespeople because they hate all of the closing games and manipulations they've experienced in the past. Often they avoid calls because they don't want to be pressured. It is up to you to make it clear that you are on a higher plane than those salespeople and that time spent with you will be productive and beneficial. Here is where it pays off for you to know more about your

company's products or services, and how they can be utilized effectively by the prospect, than the prospect can glean by reading sales literature. If you can position yourself as a buyer's consultant as opposed to a salesperson, you'll have a much higher probability of success.