



Michael A. Brown's

Business To Business By Phone[®]

Special Edition: The Parity Challenge

BUSINESS PARITY: THE ELUSIVE KEY TO LEAD GENERATION AND QUALIFICATION

If you practice good *Business To Business By Phone*[®], your reps bring a number of important values to the marketing and sales process:

- Themselves
- Their diligent preparation for the call
- A powerful and compelling "reason for the call"
- A clear sense of what they want to achieve and what they want the customer or prospect to do as a result of the call
- A plan for managing the communication sequence

With all that in place, the moment of truth arrives when you get your prospect or customer live on the line. *Your callers absolutely, positively must communicate as business peers.* Train them and direct them to:

- Deliver their openings as planned, with enthusiasm, not breathlessness. Do *not* ask "How are you today?"
- Demonstrate respect for the prospect or customer's administrative and support staff, but *do not act like one of them nor communicate with them as if you were.* If callers behave as peers of administrative or support staff, they will find it almost impossible to achieve business parity with the real prospect. Your callers need to establish parity with your prospect or customer.
- Do not diminish the call's value with phrases such as "I know you're busy ..." or "Can I take just a minute of your time?" or "I'm just calling to ..." State the reason for the call. Do not plead for access nor apologize for requesting it.
- Attend to word choice: verbs compel attention and interest better than nouns or adjectives. Say lots of verbs.
- Make sure that each prospect and customer hears your reps' best inflection and modulation. Inflection means variation in vocal pitch.

Modulation means changing tone of voice and/or pace. Without these, calls sound deadpan and boring.

- Ask questions with interest rather than with emphasis on recording the answer. Temper enthusiasm and questioning with humility.
- Ask follow-on questions based on the prospect or customer's responses, *not* on the next data field on the contact screen.

And now the rub ... even with these techniques, achieving and demonstrating business parity often is very difficult for callers who, in their heart-of-hearts, may *never* consider themselves business peers of their prospects and customers. For example, a caller who recently provided office assistance to a VP may lack the life and business experience, and thus the ability, to talk at the same level as his or her old boss. Likewise, the self-important "hot-shot" who acts as if arrogance equals parity may bully prospects and lose more business than he or she wins.

Best Advice: Whether you hire marketing and sales callers directly or engage an outsourced phone service bureau to call on your behalf, make sure you have the right people, train them well, and monitor them often. We help you do those things. Call me at **800 373-3966**.

CLERKS AND CEOs

In 1963, my first real job was as a mail room clerk for the phone company in Washington, DC. On my route through the executive offices, the extent of my dialogue with the biggies there was, "good morning." I had no clue what a day in their life was like. Or the things they thought about or talked about. Have a business conversation? No way. We might as well have been of different species.

In 1977, with college, the army, and a few jobs on my résumé, I became project manager for a



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training materials company selling to Uncle Sam. I met frequently with mid-level military officers and government officials. By this time, I *did* know what a day in their life was like and had established credibility with them. We treated each other as peers. We had good conversations and did good business. But not once did commanding generals or President Carter want to talk with me.

In 1986, three companies, grad school, a few hard knocks and a few higher positions later, I opened my own business. Finally, the conversations with "C" level people were happening ... often, comfortably, and profitably.

What does my experience have to do with your callers? Plenty! To talk at parity with senior-level corporate prospects and customers, your callers first need to "pay their dues." They need life and business experience, emotional maturity, intellectual curiosity, and a bit of chutzpah, too.

That's why it is unreasonable to expect a kid who has never even *visited* a Fortune 500 company to communicate at parity with the people who run it. It is unfair to ask a customer service clerk to suddenly have enough background and standing to influence a CEO about a multi-million dollar purchase. And it is unrealistic to expect that a call guide or script will compensate for the brevity of time on earth and relevant business experience.

Please know that this is not ageism any more than the constitutional requirement that US presidents be at least 35 years old. Nor does it mean that young people cannot sometimes communicate and market and sell with competence and finesse beyond their years. It simply represents prevailing reality.

Best Advice: If you want to influence Spanish-speaking prospects, hire callers que hablan español. If you want to influence executives, hire callers with enough experience to know how executives think and act and who can empathize and communicate

accordingly. *Then*, provide excellent call guides, training, and practice.

PROVIDE "DAY-IN-THE-LIFE" TRAINING

Invite a few of your high-level prospects and customers to visit your contact center to describe how they prefer that your callers interact with them. *Make similar arrangements with the executives of your own organization!* The reason: to provide the visceral context into which marketing and sales conversations can take on full meaning.

IMPROVE COMMUNICATION SKILLS TO IMPROVE SALES RESULTS

Our K-12 teachers were right on the money when they tried to teach us how to speak correctly, apply proper syntax and grammar, and convey a clear thought. But many callers were not listening.

That's why we hear verbal performances peppered with self-inflicted speech impediments such as "y'know" and "like." We hear otherwise bright reps say, "let me axe you a question." We hear convoluted ramblings rather than cogent, understandable presentations. We hear unfocused product spiels, and calls that simply evaporate rather than culminate in orders. We hear callers who don't realize that verbs influence more powerfully and sell more reliably than puffed-up adjectives, and who therefore spout puffery instead. So it falls to managers and trainers to fulfill the role of remedial language arts teachers.

Best Advice: Get out the tape recorders and direct your callers to listen to their own calls. They will assess themselves even more critically than you will. And with your guidance, plus really good training available right here, they will improve.

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www.michaelabrown.net