

## SEVEN EASY STEPS TO FOLLOW UP BY PHONE

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You know how critical it is to follow up initial contacts or mailings with a personal phone call, but somehow your list of calls to make always seems to get longer instead of shorter. Days or even weeks go by before you place important calls, and there always seems to be something more important to do. Why not make this the month you get off the dime and get on the phone? Here are seven steps to make it easy for you:

1. Know why you are calling. Sounds obvious, but we have all been guilty of making a call just because it was on the list, having long since forgotten why we were calling. Or worse, never calling at all because you aren't sure of your reason. Make it a habit to keep a note with each person's contact information about where you left off in your last contact and what is the appropriate next step.

The most productive calls are about something you know or suppose the other person wants from you, rather than something you want from them. In preparing to make a call, visualize that person in your mind. If you have never met, gaze at his or her business card or web site. Ask yourself, "How could I best be of service to this person today?" Whatever you answer, that should be the reason for your call.

2. Prepare a "script." A better name for this essential tool would be "introduction and talking points." The last thing you want is to sound like you are reading lines. Begin with a brief introduction of yourself and the purpose of your call. Say just enough to answer the question "what's in it for me" for the person you are calling, then check to see if they have time to speak with you.

Your talking points should contain mostly questions you wish to ask them, and answers to questions they may ask you. Each one should be no more than a breath or two long. If you have to inhale several times to get all your words out, you're making a speech, not having a conversation.

3. Get in the mood. Gritting your teeth is not the best frame of mind for making follow-up calls. Take a few moments to build a positive attitude about the calls you're about to make. Remember your highest purpose in doing the work that you do, whether that is providing for your family, changing the world, working toward a comfortable retirement, or serving the community.

Now, mentally direct that purpose toward the people on your call list. How best can you serve your purpose and their needs at the same time? If you find yourself feeling nervous, try one or all three of the following: stand up, look in the mirror, and smile.

4. Speak briefly, then listen. Imagine your call as a tennis match. You serve the ball by making a statement and asking an open-ended question. The other person answers and you listen for where the ball is going. Then you hit the ball back with another statement and question, or a question alone. You listen again. If you don't listen, you will miss the ball and lose the point.

5. Make it a conversation. Your talking points should be a loose framework, not an outline that must be covered. This is why listening is so important. Yes, keep your purpose in mind, but let the other person's responses guide the direction of the call. Especially at the beginning of the conversation, keep your focus on learning rather than on teaching.

Once you learn more about what your prospective client or networking contact needs or wants, you'll be able to offer assistance in a relevant, respectful way. There's no payoff in launching into a description of what you can provide without knowing first if your listener has any need for it.

6. Be yourself. If you remember none of the other tips on this list, remember this one. The person you are calling is another human being, with a family, responsibilities, problems, goals, and dreams. If you speak from that place yourself, you will establish a personal connection with the people you call. But if you put on some artificial selling persona, your listeners will immediately go on the defensive.

Keep in mind your own reaction when you answer the phone and realize you are about to be sold to. Isn't it usually, "Oh no, how fast can I get rid of this guy?" Make it a point to have your call be one that people enjoy getting, because they are speaking to a real person who treats them as if they were real, too.

7. Ask for the next step. Before you hang up the phone, be sure both of you know what will happen next. This isn't pushy; it is respectful and professional. Determining the next step for your interaction with the person you called is essential to being of service to them.

Your next step might be an in-person appointment, sending information, placing a call to someone else, or calling again after a length of time. Whatever it is, be clear, and get the other person's permission for what you plan to do.

You may notice that all of these tips suggest you hold your focus on being of service to the other person. That mental shift may be the most important thing you can do to make follow-up calls easier. If your intention is to help people instead of to sell to them, not only will you find it easier to call, the people you talk to will find it easier to buy.

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