

## Chapter 16

### *Follow-up: A Profitable Habit to Get Into*

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■■■ The difference between a sales person who's really successful and one who's just getting by, can be summed up in one word: **Follow-up**.

*If your intention is to help people instead of to sell to them, not only will you find it easier to call, but the people you talk to will find it easier to buy.*

**B**est-selling author of *Get Clients Now*, C. J. Hayden ([www.getclientsnow.com](http://www.getclientsnow.com)) shares her seven easy steps to follow-up by phone and helps you make **follow-up your most profitable habit**.

#### **What's more important than follow-up?**

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 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?*

#### **Seven Easy Steps to Follow-Up By Phone**

##### **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 the appropriate next step is.**

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 website.

Ask yourself, *How could I best be of service to this person today?* Whatever you answer, that should be the reason for your call.

### **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 the prospect has time to speak with you.

Your talking points should contain mainly questions you wish to ask, and answers to questions the prospect 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.**

### **Positive attitude**

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 it is providing for your family, changing the world, working toward a comfortable retirement or serving the community.

### **Stand up, look in the mirror and smile**

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.**

### **A tennis match**

**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.

### **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.**

### **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.

### **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's 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, but the people you talk to will find it easier to buy.

Keep up the follow-up!

*C.J. Hayden*

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### **Bonus Tip from the Promo Biz Coach - How do you get past the Gatekeepers?**

**I** make Gatekeepers my allies by enlisting their help. I tell them who I am trying to reach, and then I ask what they recommend as the best strategy for getting in touch with that person. Sincerely asking for assistance works. I send them a thank you note for their efforts and frequently enclose a small promotional gift.

### **More Tips for Better Communication**

#### **Get permission and build rapport**

I don't have to tell you how hard it is to get a live person on the phone these days. And if you're lucky enough to get the right person, you have to be able to convey the benefits of what you do quickly, in order to pique their curiosity and have them want to learn more.

The first thing I encourage my coaching clients to do is to ask for permission to continue. A short sentence such as: "*Is this a good time to speak?*", goes a long way in building rapport.

People are busy and resent being interrupted at work. Rather than turning your prospects and clients off, you can show them that you **respect their time** by getting their permission to continue.

### **Warm calls with a connection**

Once the permission is there, establish a connection such as a referral, an organization you both belong to or a mutual friend. Cold calls these days are almost impossible to make effectively, and I don't encourage them as a way to get business. **I do encourage warm calls, where a connection, mutual interest or a referral has been established.** Once you have their permission to continue and have established a rapport, let your prospects know how your service can benefit them.

**“I’m calling because I help companies like yours attract more business.** I’d like the opportunity to meet with you and show you how I have helped make marketing easy and cost-effective for other companies like yours.” This is a low-key way to suggest a meeting and should put your prospects at ease.

### **Leave a better message**

What if you need to leave a message? **Respect your clients and prospects by making the message short, upbeat and benefit-oriented.** Rather than saying, “I’m calling to see if you buy promotional items,” say: “I’m following up on our conversation at the networking event. I’m the person that helps companies like yours stand out from the competition.” Say your name and telephone number twice and tell them you will try again if you don’t hear back from them.

Don’t take it personally if you don’t hear back and don’t take it as a sign that your prospect or client doesn’t need your service. As I’ve said earlier, people are busy and may expect you to call again. Also, try contacting your prospect in a variety of ways. If phone calls aren’t working, try emailing or faxing, using the same benefits-oriented approach.

### **What’s the next step?**

Many sales professionals are great at opening and engaging the prospect, but have a more difficult time **closing the sale.** If this sounds like you, try recapping the conversation to make sure you and your prospect are on the same page.

### **Ask for the business**

Ask if there are any concerns or questions you haven’t answered. Once you’ve done that, recommend a course of action such as a product, a plan or a program. Finally – and

this is crucial – **find out what the next step is and ask for the business!** Here are some good ways to do that:

1. What needs to happen for us to work together?
2. How does the ordering process at your company work? Is there anyone else I need to meet with?
3. What is the date you need these in hand? Are you ready to place your order today?
4. Never leave an appointment without asking: “What’s the next step”?

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► *What Can You Do Now?* ◀

- **Block time into your calendar every day for following up.** First thing in the morning, or at the end of the day, are frequently the best times to find people at their desks.
- Use a contact management system such as Microsoft Outlook® or ACT!™.