

The Distracted Prospect

Getting your prospect's attention when he's busy doing other things

It's tough enough getting that appointment with a prospect, but when you finally end up in his office in that first sales call and he is totally distracted with other activities, what do you do? We are all very busy these days and it is common practice to multi-task (for instance, I'm doing three other things while writing this article). Some of us are really good at it while others struggle with simply walking and chewing gum at the same time. Regardless of your level of skill at multi-tasking, it's just plain rude to do other things while someone is trying to talk with you. I've written enough articles about listening skills where I discuss how to focus your energies on the other person in order to clearly demonstrate that you are interested in what they are saying. Nevertheless, we can't avoid it when other people don't show good listening skills to us.

I know this has already happened to you. You're in your prospect's office and you are trying to ask him questions about his business so you can determine the best solution for his problems (aka, doing a good job during your initial meeting), and all he is doing is shuffling papers around his desk, answering the phone, and taking interruptions from his executive assistant. You feel like a piece of the wall paper since you're basically being ignored. You feel like getting up and leaving but you obviously can't be equally rude and risk losing the opportunity (assuming there really is an opportunity to begin with). Your time is just as valuable as your prospect's, therefore you need to make sure that you have quality time with your prospect or else you are both wasting precious time. So what's a sales professional to do?



First of all, if your prospect is clearly too busy to pay attention to you and is constantly distracted by the phone, pop-in visitors, paperwork, etc., then politely ask him when would be a better time to re-schedule the meeting. Say something like, "I see that you are really too busy right now to meet with me. Should we perhaps schedule this at another time that would be better for you?" He will either re-schedule the meeting or realize that he is being disrespectful of your time and stop the interruptions. Either way, you showed professionalism and respect for your prospect, which can't hurt. He'll also feel a bit guilty if he needs to reschedule which means he will overcompensate next time and be all yours.

Another technique for avoiding distractions is to hold the meeting away from your prospect's office. If he has a conference room you can use, then try for that. This could be challenging if he brings you directly into his office. You'll have to be creative and delicate so as not to hurt his feelings or sound too intrusive. If you have a presentation you're giving or need to spread samples across a table or need room for whatever, you can politely suggest you move somewhere that has a larger space, such as his conference room. You could also try to

arrange for this in advance, when you schedule the meeting in the first place. If you have your own office location, you can invite him to come see you. Alternatively, try meeting for a cup of java at a local coffee shop or perhaps set up a breakfast or lunch meeting. Personally, I don't like first meetings at restaurants for two reasons. One, it makes me feel like I am trying to bribe the client into doing business with me, and second, it is frequently too noisy and loaded with distractions. But this is a personal preference. The goal is to get him out of his office and away from his phone and other interruptions so he can dedicate his time to you.

If you find that your prospect is being distracted and not paying enough attention to you, then be more assertive during the meeting. Depending on the layout of his office, you may be sitting in a chair ten feet away from his desk. You might as well be sitting out in the hall. Pull the chair up closer so you are sitting closer to the prospect or to his desk so he knows you're there. Lean forward and look him in the face (maintain eye contact). Place your literature, proposal, etc. in front of him and gesture to it so he feels more engaged in the discussion and interactive with you. This will make it more difficult for him to ignore you or treat you like you are just part of the woodwork.

Be sure to get him talking first. Since people prefer talking to listening, and they themselves are their favorite subject, then get him talking about his business, problems, issues, and pains, even his family, hobbies, interests and more. This is basic selling skills. Ask good questions and get him talking so you can learn as much about his needs as possible. This way you will be able to match the right solutions to his problems. This will also get your prospect totally engaged in the conversation and he will ignore all those pesky interruptions.

Finally, you can try getting a little gimmicky. I had a sales person once tell me that he brings an unmarked box of something special to a new prospect, like candy, and places it on the prospect's desk, unopened, during the meeting. He ignores it, but eventually the prospect will ask what's in the box, at which point he opens it and shares the contents. His prospect's curiosity gets the better of him, but in the meantime, he is more focused on you (and your box) instead of other distractions. Clever!

When prospects repeatedly get distracted during your meetings, then get creative and demand that they respect your time in polite, professional ways such as those mentioned here.

Good luck and good selling!

Russ Lombardo
(702) 655-5652
russ@PeakSalesConsulting.com
www.PeakSalesConsulting.com

Russ Lombardo is President of **PEAK Sales Consulting, LLC** (www.peaksalesconsulting.com) and an experienced CRM and Sales consultant, trainer, writer, speaker and radio show host. Russ works with businesses to help improve their customer acquisition and retention for increased revenue and success. Russ is author of the books, "CyberSelling", "CRM For The Common Man" and "Smart Marketing." He can be reached at **702-655-5652** and email at **russ@peaksalesconsulting.com**.