

42

Rules

*of Cold Calling  
Executives*

MARI ANNE VANELLA

Foreword by Keith Ferrazzi



# “42 Rules of Cold Calling Executives” Book Excerpt

**By Mari Anne Vanella**  
foreword by Keith Ferrazzi,  
Author of “Never Eat Alone”

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## Foreword by Keith Ferrazzi

I spend my time helping people to reach out to others and build relationships. I consider this to be a key element in achieving success, in both business and personal endeavors. I discovered this principle early in life, as I watched the truly successful and sought to understand their paths. The common denominator in their lives was using the power of relationships so that everyone wins.

In my book, *Never Eat Alone*, I lay out the specific steps—and inner mindset—that I personally use to connect with the thousands of colleagues, friends, and associates, all people whom I have been able to help who have helped me.

Mari Anne's book focuses on the sales professional who must call customers and prospects to build successful relationships, rather than just make sales. She shows you how you can make every call a win for both parties, by helping you to understand how to think in your calling process, how to see both sides of the conversation, and how to organize your sales activity for maximum impact on your prospects.

Sales leaders must meet the challenges of a changing marketplace, with more competition and tighter margins. The ones who get the contracts are not the ones who push the hardest, but the ones who bring the most value to the relationship. *42 Rules of Cold Calling Executives* provides the guidelines for demonstrating that value from the very first contact. Mari Anne also recommends tools that will help you learn more about your customers, so that they become more



than just another routine call. They become people who can benefit from what you have to offer, and who may be able to help you down the road.

Her view is the long view of a business partner, which is in short supply in a quarter-driven business environment. However, this view dovetails perfectly with the view I recommend in all exchanges, that relationships power growth. So, if you have this book, you are a person interested in standing out. You have the desire to be successful and will do what it takes. Apply the advice in this book to your sales efforts and you will get there.

I believe you will find her experience and expertise valuable as you navigate your career and this will become an integral part of your professional library.

Keith Ferrazzi  
Author of "Never Eat Alone"  
<http://www.keithferrazzi.com>

## Introduction

Despite the advancement of sales processes and tools, the abundance of marketing and communication media, and the overall proliferation of the Internet, cold calling is still a big part of building the sales pipeline and will be for many years to come.

For some, the term “cold calling” has many negative connotations. Salespeople sometimes look for ways to avoid cold calling executives, or anyone for that matter. Traditionally, it has been considered a painful part of the sales process, and rightly so, given the rejection, hang-ups, screening, and the push-pull inherent to cold calling.

The good news is that it doesn't have to be that way. You've probably seen people who are very successful in cold calling at executive levels, and with good reason. Cold calling, in and of itself, is not the problem—it is the experience of those on both ends that needs adjustment. Even with all the different methods out there to soften the approach, cold calling remains the most effective manner to reach the people you want.

I built my whole business on the ability to successfully cold call executives. These 42 Rules make an easy-to-use reference guide, and give you something to take away and put to use quickly. My objective is to provide you with effective ways to align your approach to the thinking of the people you are trying to reach, so that you get results.

Some of these Rules will apply to you, and some won't. This book will give you methods to incorporate into your calling efforts. After reading the book, one of my clients said that it is so true that "the little things matter." And they really do; when you talk to people as if they are peers, when you listen, when you acknowledge what's going on within their world, when you demonstrate interest in their accomplishments—it all makes a difference.

You'll see how to build a relationship with a cold call, and you'll realize that it doesn't need to be painful. An enormous amount of information can be shared in a brief call that will help you penetrate the account successfully in a shorter time. Sales cycles can be reduced, and the overall engagement can happen on a much more equitable level by applying these Rules.

I have managed sales organizations for many years and coached countless people on how to neutralize sales resistance in their calls. I wanted to consolidate all my tips into a book that you can keep around as a handy reference, when you want to improve your results. So keep this book on your desk and flip through it when you need to. Ask yourself the question at the end of each Rule and see if you do need adjust your approach. Don't think that these things are far fetched, because they do work.

This book is for the sales teams in companies like the ones I work with, companies with solutions that are bought at executive levels and require a high-level approach to gain access. I have a lot of exposure to my clients' sales teams, and there are some super smart people out there who will get these points, and some who will struggle because they don't have the tools. This book is for those reps who struggle in some areas, but they want results, and want to be proactive about controlling those results.

These are the methods that provide success for my firm and benefits for my clients who subscribe to our programs. I get calls all the time from their sales teams, asking how we connected with executives, when they couldn't. Well, here it is, spelled out in easy-to-read Rules, which you can start using today.



## 2 Tell the Truth

**Honesty is not simply the best policy—it's the only policy for maintaining effective relationships.**

Calling executives means you are dealing with some of the smartest people in business. Being dishonest will not get you very far. The single biggest mistake you can make is to lie to your prospects. It is the one mistake a client will never forgive.

Starting with a lie, no matter how small, isn't going to lead anywhere good. Even when you encounter an issue that seems small—such as a client asking a question you can't answer—it's better to let them know you don't have the answer offhand than to give them information you'll have to retract later. You can say something like, "Rather than give you bad information, let me find out and get back to you" or "I am not the right person to have that conversation with, I'll have Joe get that for you." This approach puts you in the role of a valuable consultant, someone to be trusted to give accurate feedback, and provides an opening for a second contact with the client. When you find the answer in response to the query, you can use it as a point of reference when you speak with the client again.

Above all, maintain your integrity. One sales rep interested in selling prospect lists was trying hard to reach me recently. When he finally succeeded, he stated that he had obtained my direct line from my personal assistant, which I knew was a lie.

His dishonest approach ensured that I would never do business with him. A better approach would have been to say he had hoped to speak with me about some of my list requirements. Instead, he chose to manufacture a story about how he was able to reach me, which was totally unnecessary and caused him to lose any access to me in the future.

Another example happened to me recently. "Hi Mari Anne, this is so-and-so," said the caller on my voice-mail. "I wanted to ask you a quick question about something." She implied that she was working on something with which I was involved. However, when I called her back it turned out that she was trying to pitch me on something else entirely and she really didn't know me. I felt it was a dishonest way to get me to call her back, and it made me think about whether I want someone like that working with my clients. The tactic worked, but the strategy failed. A better way to handle it is to be confident, say who you are, and briefly state your purpose. You'll get much better results by being confident and to the point, rather than trying to dig yourself out of the ditch of lost credibility.

Using methods that are honest and forthright is what separates professionals from amateurs. Executives are not going to expose their company to somebody who uses an underhanded tactic to gain an objective. Your clients have to know you have their best interests in mind at all times.

On the other hand, you don't have to give a dissertation when trying to contact a prospect. Say what you need to say and be honest about it. If the receptionist asks why you are calling, you can say, "I'm with ABC Company and I'm calling to ask Bill about some planning around his financial systems." Mention specifically the things you want to talk about but don't go into great detail.

As you go through these steps, be aware of where you may be having problems with your process. You will want to always improve your process, fixing any areas where results break down and do not get you where you want to go.

**What are your methods for gaining access?**

# 3 Maintain the Right Attitude

**Your attitude controls your results.**

I read years ago, in a book called *Think and Grow Rich*, about how *thoughts* become *things*. In other words, what you think about becomes reality. This applies to almost every aspect of life. I know by personal experience that it applies to cold calling. Your thoughts about cold calling make a huge difference in your results.

If people are not getting results, one of the first things I troubleshoot is how they are interpreting their calls. For example, it is no coincidence that if people view their calls as a nuisance, then they have very little success. If you start with the attitude that the person on the other end of the line doesn't want to receive your call, your approach will be tentative, and your client will sense your lack of conviction. Without the confidence necessary to effectively promote your products/services, you will spend the rest of the conversation trying to convince the client, against his or her will, to commit to an appointment.

A poor approach will not only disrupt your call, it can completely prevent you from making that initial important contact with a potential client. One sales rep for a large telecom company told me that he regarded leaving voicemail messages as a waste of time. "Why would they want to call me back?" he asked. I have no doubt that the lack of conviction in his approach was communi-

cated in his message in some form. He is absolutely right: what client *would* want to call him back? Put yourself in the executive's place: You get a call from a rep at a database company every three months, and her voicemails sound apathetic, as if this is simply an obligatory follow up. As that executive, would you call her back? Probably not, because you have no cause to think she has anything valuable to offer.

Approach each call from the client's point of view. Take some time and think about what a client needs before making the call; asking questions during the call is also a great way to gather information. You are playing a positive role in every manager's search for the best solutions, and your approach should convey information tailored to that manager's specific issues. Companies expect to be approached with ideas. To be effective, be prepared, confident, and offer relevant information.

The most important task is to identify the problem that your potential client is having, so you can provide the solution. That means learning to listen. Approach the conversation as an interactive transaction, meaning that you have to ask questions in order to find out what the prospect needs. Then listen carefully to the client's responses. Once the prospect identifies the problem, then you are in a perfect position to recommend the remedy.

When you take the appropriate steps, you will find that cold calling can be positive and rewarding to the extent that you bring a client-centered approach to your work. Remember, your internal dialogue will manifest externally. Your attitude must be one of confidence, reflecting your belief that you are providing something of great value to your clients. Get it out of your mind that people don't like sales calls—what they don't like is a *bad* sales call. Think of how you are becoming part of their businesses and providing solutions that will make their jobs easier and more productive. Believe that you have a right to call.

**What is your attitude towards your cold calling efforts? Do you need to change it?**



## 4

## Always Follow Up

**Don't easily quit trying to reach a prospect.**

Perhaps one of the biggest complaints I hear is some version of "We left them a message, but they never called us back." It is self-deluding to assume that prospects will call *you* back, although you can be pleasantly surprised on the occasions when they do. It is far more effective to assume prospects will *not* call back. Because you are selling a product or service, the responsibility for making a connection and then following up on it is solely yours.

The task of identifying prospects, assembling appropriate contact information, and identifying an actual level of interest requires far too great an investment of resources to allow success to depend on the whim of busy people. Generally, the prospects will have every intention of returning a call but simply become sidetracked by other responsibilities. Put yourself in a prospect's shoes. Prospects are constantly interrupted, distracted, or confronted with unforeseen emergencies and have to prioritize their time accordingly. Returning sales calls may not be high on their to-do lists. It isn't that they aren't interested; they just need you to pursue them to keep the dialogue going.

If a client doesn't call back, never take offense or assume interest isn't there. You don't want to read anything into it. As far as you know, the client could be busy, out of the office, or sick. A

better follow-up model is to reach out every day to see if you can catch clients at their desks and a couple times a week just to leave a message. “Hi, this is so and so with XYZ Company. I left you a voice mail the other day, and I don't know if you got a chance to get to it. I was calling because...” You can end the message with a brief reminder about the discussion you had or what it was that generated the initial interest. When you finally make contact, the client will know who you are. Your voice-mail serves the purpose of letting clients know you are trying to connect and it keeps your name fresh to them. They may or may not call back—but don't give up.

Another good practice is to date stamp your calls so you know where you are with the prospect. Don't quickly set a prospect aside until you have made contact, no matter how many attempts you have to make. Sometimes you'll find that prospects are passive in their efforts to connect with you, but there is still an opportunity there. If you know they have interest, but you are having a hard time reaching them, just “zero out” to their assistants and ask if they are around this week; you may find out they aren't. Executives are busy people. Continue reaching out until they call back or you reach them at their desks. Don't leave anyone hanging. Passivity on your end is a key to failure.

One of my clients is a very large network services provider and one of the sales reps asked me how we get people to call her back. She was amazed at how we could get through to people whom she was unable to reach. I told her that we call every day and leave a couple voicemails a week. Within a few days of adopting this approach, she connected with someone who had been very difficult to reach and had discussed the opportunity she was pursuing. He actually returned her call—proving that consistent effort gave her the result she wanted. Remember, it is not the prospect's responsibility to make the contact happen, it is yours.

**How consistent is your follow up? Do you follow up on all your leads?**

## About the Author



Mari Anne Vanella is the founder and CEO of The Vanella Group, Inc., a Telesales firm serving the high-tech industry based in the Silicon Valley. For over 20 years, Mari Anne has designed and executed outbound calling practices that outperform traditional methods. She has worked with companies such as HP, Borland Software, Cisco, Guidewire Software, Savvion, and many others helping them identify opportunities for their sales organizations.

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