

Turning In Your Homework

One of the presentation techniques I teach in my *PRINTSELLING* seminar program is called *turning in your homework*. It's a technique to be used as part of the *opening* phase of a sales call. (In one of the four major segments of the seminar, we break the face-to-face sales call down into eight individual phases, or *manageable parts*.)

The purpose of *turning in your homework* is to show a prospect that you care...that you care enough about your own business to be alert to your marketplace, and even more importantly that you care enough about getting his or her business to have invested some effort in learning something about it.

It's by being alert to your marketplace that you turn up the information that becomes your "homework." By reading the newspaper, by keeping your eyes and ears open, and by talking to everyone you can about what's going on in the business community.

One Example

One example of turning in your homework might be to read or hear that a company in your area has won an award of some sort, or maybe a big contract. You react to that by doing the things you have to do to get an appointment (we cover that subject in *PRINTSELLING*, too), and getting yourself face-to-face with the printing decision-maker in the organization. In the *opening* phase of that sales call, you might *turn in your homework* with a comment and a series of questions that go something like this:

"I read in the paper that you just won a Good Corporate Citizenship award. I think that's wonderful. What was involved in winning? Did the company do anything to celebrate? Did you personally have a big role in winning the award?"

The questions, of course, are intended to get the prospect talking. What you'll have accomplished is to get the prospect talking about different issues than most printing salespeople can.

Other Sources

I've had very good success in picking up "homework" information on cold calls, *without*, by the way, ever seeing the decision-maker. The way I teach selling, seeing the buyer and being forced to make your presentation is the last thing you want to have happen on a cold call. (I'll write more about *that* another time.) A much better objective for a cold call is to *learn something and leave something*, in preparation for a much "warmer" face-to-face appointment to follow.

I always try to pick up some examples of the prospect company's printed materials as part of the *learn something* half of that objective, and I'll turn that homework in when I eventually see the decision-maker.

"Here's something that you recently had printed," I might say, handing the example over to the prospect. "Can you tell me a little bit about this piece? Is it part of an larger marketing program? Did it work well for you? Did the process of design and production go smoothly? Is there anything you would have changed if you could?" Then I might ask, "Is this piece typical of the things you're having printed on a regular basis?"

In this situation, you use *turning in your homework* to explore the breadth of the prospects printing needs. In other words, you use it to see how much business could be there for you.

And I think this is a much more "professional" technique for accomplishing that purpose than asking "What kind of printing do you do?" I've always hated that question, the people you're trying to sell to don't *do* printing, you do! I still get far too many guilty smiles in the seminars when I ask who regularly poses the question exactly that way.

I'd much rather see you start out with questions about a specific job, and then branch out to the rest of the prospects needs with the question about the first job being "typical." Even if you don't have an example as "homework" to turn in, you can still start the process by asking about "the last job you sent to the printer."