



Turning Over Rocks

by
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When I was in my rookie year as a bag-carrying sales rep, I worked for a sales manager who insisted that we spend one day a week outside cold calling. I was selling computer systems and, at the time, the concept of selling such large-ticket systems “door-to-door” seemed to me suspect at best and most unproductive at worst. I tried to convince him that I had better and more effective ways to spend my time but he was the boss and so out I went – funny how it always worked that way. And, at the end of the week, we had to provide a report, including who we had called on and what the outcome was.

For the first few weeks, I really - and I mean *really* - did not look forward to Wednesday’s door knocking. So I tried another tack and tried to convince my manager that it was just as effective and more efficient if I stayed in the office and made telephone calls. He still wasn’t buying, so back out I went. Interestingly enough, after weeks of kicking against this concept and a few weeks of actually doing it, I realized how much I was learning by actually getting out there and talking to people face to face. Even if I didn’t get past the receptionist, I would learn all sorts of things about the company by their facilities, their reception area, and other indicators that you could only notice by being there.

I also learned to sniff out territories where others had not been recently. That’s how I discovered Cornwall - a small city on the St Lawrence River that had its fair share of industry but was a couple of hours drive from Ottawa and Montreal and therefore escaped the scrutiny of the majority of other computer sales folk. So each Wednesday I would get up slightly earlier and head off to the paper mills and light industry of Cornwall. Each week I would pick a location in the morning and one in the afternoon, park the car, and start walking from door to door in the industrial estates.



Late one morning I stopped by a manufacturer of fiberglass bath/shower stalls. I asked at the reception if there was someone I could talk to about computer systems. She asked me to wait a moment, and then a large, older and somewhat gruff character came around the corner to talk to me. He asked me where I was from and what I wanted. Well, it turns out that he was the retiring owner of the business, having just sold the company to a larger conglomerate. Even more interestingly, he actually had one of our systems running his operation. More interesting still, it was this very computer system that stood between him and his much-desired retirement.

He explained to me - as if it was my fault - that the computer system had to communicate over the phone line to the new owners of the business and was failing to do so, despite several days of effort. I asked to see what he had and he took me out back and introduced me to the individual who was trying to get this piece of equipment working. Well, it so happened that I could immediately tell that they had the wrong multiplexer board and could swap that for the correct one for about \$2,200. I even gave them the name of one of our distributors where they could get one the next day for even less.

Needless to say, his attitude towards me changed very quickly as I turned from foe to friend. He asked me if he could buy me lunch and off we went to a great little local fish restaurant. Over fish and chips, he asked me what the heck I was doing in this remote industrial area. I explained that I was actually discovering what businesses there were and what they may be doing for their computer systems. He said that his daughter just happened to be the executive assistant to the CEO of one of Cornwall's newest research companies and would I be interested in meeting with him? You bet! One phone call later, I was confirmed to meet the CEO at 4:00 p.m. that day.

It turns out that he was about to sign a \$1,000,000 order for two computer systems from one of our competitors and didn't really realize that there were alternative approaches. Six weeks later, I had my first million-dollar order, thanks to cold calling and turning over rocks.

As sales professionals, we must take each opportunity to turn over every rock in our path. Not to suggest we lose our way by taking too much time examining *all* the possibilities. However, we must network, discover who's who and what opportunities there may be.

From Martyn Lewis' upcoming book "Sales Wise - an anthology of selling stories, follies, and fables", each with a *relevant* and *timely* sales message. If you wish to be notified of publication date please email us at saleswise@market-partners.com