

Be a farmer

My grandfather was a farmer and my dad, until his teenage years, grew up on the farm. When they left the farming life and moved to Chicago, they did not turn their backs on the farm but would continue to visit it from time to time. When I was growing up we would take trips to the old homestead and visit relatives who now ran the “old family farm.” The stories about farming always amazed me. There was a pattern of doing certain chores depending on the season. Overhauling the equipment in the winter, planting in the spring, harvesting in the fall, and always praying for the right amount of rain and good growing weather.

A farmer labors over sowing seeds in the spring, but does not have any material gain until the fall harvest. The farmer needs to work hard planting if he wants to enjoy a bountiful harvest. It takes planning, preparation and patience, and some good luck, to run a farm successfully.

I think the similarities to selling are obvious. The rewards are not immediate from our initial sales calls. However, the harvest can be fruitful if we tend to what we have sown.

A case in point is a recent call I received from the president of a firm. He had some disappointing results in his first year of operation although his business was profitable. He called to ask if I'd be interested in coming by and talking about what I could do to help his business. He mentioned my initial call on him when he first opened his business and how I had kept in touch over the months with periodic notes and articles of business interest. I was delighted to get his call and after setting a time to meet, I hung up the phone and did a victory dance. I then reflected on how his interest in doing business with my firm occurred. The first meeting established an understanding of his business and mine (I sowed the seeds of interest). The follow-up thank-you letter for meeting with me added to anchoring the seed. And the once-a-quarter notes, some with appropriate business articles, allowed the seeds to germinate, although with no promised return at a specific point in time. Keeping a future focus and interest in developing a long-term relationship eventually paid off. Once he was ready, he knew I was the firm to call since I showed, by keeping in touch, that I was interested in his businesses and not just a quick sale. Now it was harvest time!

So when you get depressed with the lack of immediate results, renew your efforts by staying in touch with past prospects, and your farming efforts will be richly rewarded.

A similar situation occurred with what I thought was an ideal client. We had a good conversation on the phone, which resulted in a face-to-face meeting. We

agreed to meet again in 30 days once he completed a major project. During the agreed upon week, I called and left a message about meeting again to take the next step. I waited for his return call – nothing. I called again, of course he was in a meeting, and I left an upbeat friendly message reminding him of the benefits he wanted to accomplish. No reply again. I sent reminder e-mails and letters – nothing!

One's mind starts, at this point, to conjure up all sorts of reasons for the prospect's lack of response. Did he find another supplier? Did he not like my follow-up letter? Did he not like the way I combed my hair? The self-questioning can quickly lead to self-doubt which leads to more confusion. All of this is unproductive and a waste of time. I decided to go for broke and send a fax to the prospect. The fax simply asked him to check a box:

- Don't call me again!
- Call me in a month, I'm busy now.
- I no longer have a need for the service.

I heard nothing from him and finally resigned myself that the prospect was a dead end. Thirty-five days later my fax machine started to print – it was my old fax form with a box checked and a side note saying, "We have gone thorough some operational changes and have been very busy. Please let's plan to get together on the 16th and discuss your proposal." I was stunned, shocked, and elated. The small seed had developed into a plant, which I will nurture all the way to a productive harvest!

Post-Call Summary Sheet

You made the telephone call, you set up an appointment to meet, you completed the Pre-Call Strategy Sheet, you met with the prospect, now what do you do? Simply wait for the order? NO!

Obviously you asked for the order during your meeting. However, there is a 98% probability the response was, "Let me think it over." What is the next step? The answer is easy – complete the Post-Call Summary Sheet on the following page immediately after your call. I hear you exclaim, "Not another sheet to complete!" Yes, and a very important one.

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