

## **A Million Dollar Meeting Gone Wrong A Lost Prospect Tells All**

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Landing a meeting with a prospective client with a million dollars to invest doesn't happen every day – especially when it results from a cold call.

But getting a chance to sit down is only the first step. Over lunch last week, a long-time friend who's a partner with a downtown Toronto law described a recent meeting with a financial advisor seeking his business and how some subtle errors and obvious mistakes cost the advisor the opportunity to do business.



This lawyer has assets of well over \$1 million – our conversation offers a number of important lessons for advisors.

The first relates to what it takes to get a meeting when you're calling cold.

### **Cold calling to get meetings**

Here's what the lawyer told me.

*"The original contact came a year ago from a guy calling on behalf of a broker with one of the banks. The only reason that he got through originally was that I get in early. So when he called the first time at 7:30, I answered my phone. I blew him off, told him I was happy where I was – but he said he'd like to send me a report from his firm on the outlook for markets regardless. He also said he'd like to touch base in six months. I said sure, figured I've never hear from him again – was a bit surprised when that report crossed my desk a week later"*

*"The same guy called me last fall at about the same time in the morning, guess he'd figured out when I get in – and I told him I still wasn't interested in meeting. And again he said that he understood, but would like to email me an article from Fortune Magazine that the broker he works with has been sending clients on the outlook for the economy and then touch base in about six months."*

*"In March, I got another call – this time from the broker himself. I agreed to give him half an hour over a coffee" the lawyer said. "I was impressed by his low key manner on the*



*phone and his persistence. My comfort level went up when he told me that he dealt with a number of lawyers and had been in the investment industry for 20 years. And I actually felt a bit of obligation, given that I'd twice said his assistant could send me stuff and then he'd followed through both times."*

### **Takeaways on getting initial meetings**

The obvious lesson is that when it comes to getting initial meetings persistence pays.

But there are other lessons as well.

First, if you want to get through to busy people you have to find the time that they're likely to pick up the phone – whether it be early in the day, later on after their assistant has left or on Saturday mornings. The only way to determine this is through trial and error – and once you've had success once, you need to record this for the future.

Second, one way to build trust is by making offers that prospects find valuable and then delivering. Sending those reports and articles helped build credibility – if the person calling for this advisor had said "Just checking to see if you're ready to buy yet", while it certainly would have shown persistence, it wouldn't have created the same impetus to meet.

Finally, one of the keys to winning over prospects is demonstrating patience. A critical factor to the success in securing this meeting was how the calls were spaced out. If the person calling had made the same three calls a month apart, chances are he would have been seen as a pest rather than calling on behalf of someone worth meeting.

### **A meeting that went wrong**

The second set of lessons relate to how you manage that initial interaction with a prospect.

The lawyer went on to talk about the meeting

*"We met at the Starbucks underneath my building. He already had a coffee and a table when we got there – he recognized me from my photo on our firm's website. On the phone he'd asked what kind of coffee I liked in case he got there first – and sure enough he had it waiting for me.*

*"Our conversation began just fine. He thanked me for taking the time to meet – said he'd like to learn a bit about my situation and would be happy to answer any questions I might have about markets.*

*"First he asked about how I was investing currently – I told him that I'd worked with a broker in the past but for the past 10 years had been investing on my own. He then asked about how I was invested currently."*



The lawyer paused and went on.

*“At that point something weird happened. I have a habit of playing with my pen; this is something I’ve always done.*

*As I was talking about what I own right now, this guy picks up his pen and starts playing with it also.*

*Then when I crossed my legs he crossed his as well – and for the rest of our meeting, every time I did something he did the same thing. Frankly, I didn’t know what exactly to think.*

*After about 15 minutes, this guy says: ‘I appreciate your taking the time today to talk. Let me tell you a bit about my background and approach.’”*

The lawyer finished our conversation by repeating this advisor’s concluding comments:

*“From what you’ve told me, I do think that I might be able to add value to how you’re managing money. As a next step, I’d like to suggest that we meet one lunch hour over a sandwich at my office to review your current investments in more detail – I’d be happy to give you an alternative point of view on what you’re doing right now. There would be no cost or obligation for this.*

*My office is just a block away from here. I’m free a week from Friday and on Monday of the following week. Which of these two would work better for you?”*

The lawyer wrapped up his summary of the meeting:

*“At this point, this reminded me of the one time I made the mistake of going to a time share presentation. I told this guy that I appreciated his taking the time to sit down and his persistence, but that I was not interested in talking further.*

*When he asked whether he could stay in touch, I told him that I’d really prefer that he not contact me in future.*

*The funny thing is that I went into that coffee open to talking further, given what’s happening to markets I’ve been thinking that I should look at working with someone. But a combination of that strange stuff with the pen and the legs and the high pressure close turned me completely off.”*

## **Learning from failure**



From this lawyer's description, this advisor had started off fine – he got there early, had a coffee waiting, asked questions to get the prospect talking.

And then he fell victim to old-school advice on how to establish rapport and close sales.

There is a view that one way to achieve rapport with someone is by “matching” or “mirroring” their gestures, the pace at which they speak, even the kind of language they use.

And this is true to a point. If you're talking to a client who speaks unusually slowly or quite quickly, it does make sense to slightly adapt your pacing, provided that you do this subtly. But this advisor had gone way over the edge and exaggerated this to the point that it became intrusive.

As for the advisor's concluding remark of “which would work better for you – Friday or Monday?” this approach is right out of the 50s – sometimes called the “alternate choice close” or “minor point close,” it's designed to box prospects in so that whatever they say leads to the outcome you're looking for.

At the exact time that you want to engage prospects, to get them to relax and to lower their guard, pressure-based approaches such as this one cause defences to instinctively go up and lead to a “flight or fight” response. Either we get a “fight” response in which objections are raised or more often the classic “flight” response – “I need to think this over.”

Advisors would be far better off if they entirely removed the concept of “closing” from their vocabulary and thought process and eliminated pressure-based approaches that today's educated investors see coming a mile away. Rather than asking how to “close” prospects, you should ask instead “how can I move this conversation forward?”

At the same time, ditch the manipulative, leading questions that make prospects feel cornered (for example: “*In light of what's happened to markets, are you 100% confident that you have the right portfolio for your needs?*”)

Never forget that your primary goal when talking to prospects is to establish an open dialogue about what they've done in the past, what they're doing today and what they plan to do in future – and where you might fit into those plans. As part of that, a key goal is to avoid triggering the fight or flight response that occurs when prospects feel pressured.

### **How the meeting might have gone**

Let's replay that meeting between the lawyer and the advisor.

First, the advisor would have lost the mirroring.



And after hearing the prospect out about what he's doing right now and a short description of this advisor's approach, imagine if the advisor had said:

*"I want to respect the fact that we were scheduled for 30 minutes. I've enjoyed the chance to chat and do have a suggestion to make about next steps, but first what questions do you have about me or my business that I haven't answered?"*

Let's assume that the lawyer had no questions. Now the advisor could have gone on to say:

*"In situations where it seems like there might be a fit, a next step is often to sit down and get into more detail about my process and approach and also about what you're currently doing. As part of that, I'd be happy to provide a second opinion on your current portfolio. In principle is this something you might be interested in?"*

Notice that in this scenario the advisor has reduced the "gun to the head" pressure of having to make an immediate decision. By cranking down the stress, chances are that the lawyer would have expressed interest in talking further – and at that point they could have found a time that worked for them both.

### **A final note on the alternate-choice close**

When I got back to my office after the lunch with my lawyer friend, I went online to see whether closing techniques such as the alternate-choice close are still being recommended today.

A few clicks later and I saw links to sites extolling the virtues of this technique for sales of timeshares, real estate and other goods and services; if you're sceptical, some of these are below:

[Using the Alternate Choice Close](#)  
[The Alternative Choice Close](#)  
[Increase Conversions With This Powerful Sales Technique](#)  
[Alternative of Choice Close](#)

Never forget that your paramount goal when meeting with prospective clients is to get them to open up and to engage them in candid conversation. Perhaps approaches such as this one work in some sort of alternate universe, but in the world in which you and I operate, any approaches that make people feel pressured do infinitely more harm than good.



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