

## RULE NUMBER 1



## When is the answer a question?

*The first and last rule of new business prospecting has got to be recognising the importance of questions.*

There are hundreds of sales techniques, self-help manuals, or sales attitudes within organisations, which can border on the semi-religious. Having experimented with a great many of these (the useful and the half-baked), they all boil down to one essential principle - the first and last rule of new business success is that you've got to ask questions.

Strategic and sustainable new business success for agencies is not, as is commonly perceived, about confidence or force of personality. Although this is suitable for models with thousands of sales prospects (e.g. media sales), for agencies with only a couple of hundred strategically important targets you can't afford to be pushy about it - you will turn off more than you turn on, with unacceptable consequences to your brand.

Likewise, there is limited and short-term value from insider knowledge or a well-guarded little black book of contacts. Knowledge becomes dated; contacts get used up quickly, or move on and become irrelevant.

The best new business people have small egos. Rather than being self-centred, they insist on seeing 'it' always from the other fella's perspective. They are curious and genuinely interested in other people and their plans. They are driven to uncover the facts, the issues that shape an organisation's agenda. With this information they want to help construct a proposal to solve the other party's problem. This is a creative quality, which is fuelled by the confidence and the ability to ask questions.

Questions are important at initial dialogue in determining issues and agenda. They are important during any further discussion to eliminate confusion and ambiguity, to clarify the position. They are important pre-meeting, to

prepare and focus, and post-meeting, to better define the brief. If a pitch doesn't work out, we must ask why. Where, in the process to that point, were wrong or perhaps insufficient questions asked, so that the prospect's needs were miscalculated?

With telephone prospecting, if you get stuck and don't know quite what to say, ask a question. As long as your branding has positioned you with some relevance and credibility (which we've advised on in some detail in previous Dimensions) and you're genuinely interested in them, people actually like talking about themselves and their brands/companies. It is this simple reorientation of the selling mind that opens doors and engages your agency with its strategic prospects, faster.

Three years ago, in *Dimension 1*, we looked at the value of marketing collateral, and from there other Dimensions tackled messaging, targeting, new business HR, pipeline management, public sector prospecting etc. Rule Number 1 is the secret at the heart of all of these. To formulate an effective proposition, you don't need ego or personality - you need questions: audience insights, competitor intelligence, client audits, self-awareness, etc.

Some will say this *Dimension 21* is trivial, a truism. But we'd argue no new business activity (be it critical or mundane) is effective unless a desire to ask questions (be they daring or routine) leads the process. And so the answer to new business success in every dimension is a question.