EXCEED9®

Selling Skills

Time Checker Top Tips

BMD GLOBAL

Time Checker – Top Tips:

The value of this guide is to demonstrate the importance and criticality of salespeople checking the time that is available with prospects and clients during their sales meetings.

While of course, as a discipline, we would recommend that you always telephone ahead (perhaps the day before) to confirm your sales meeting with your prospect/customer, the reality of business dynamics for your client sometimes means that even then they are not able to give you the time that they had first promised you when you show up - for a variety of different reasons of course.

So, the main objective for this guide is to help you with nine key areas around checking for time availability that we know through our experience work exceptionally well!

Ultimately, this is all about winning you sustainable new and repeat business and these little techniques all add up to an overall 'whole' from the recipient's point of view and they will also therefore be more likely to place business with you!

This guide also forms part of Exceed9 Selling Skills and is part of the Exceed Selling Skills Online programme, which will help you put many more things into perspective on this exciting subject.

- **Use the Right Time Check Language:**

Asking your clients 'How you are fixed for time?' is a great way to open the meeting, when you feel it is appropriate. They are empowered to 'frame,' the time they feel they have available for the meeting and it also gives them an opportunity to tell you how long they can spend on it, given current pressures on their availability. You are already behaving differently to many salespeople too!

Beware however the misuse of your words and your language! For instance, salespeople who ask their clients 'How long have you got?' may receive short thrift from an awkward buyer who wants to be difficult, or who doesn't understand the question. For instance, their response to that specific question might result in a surprised reaction… 'Err… well, how long do you <u>need</u>?' (Quietly thinking to themselves that they haven't got all <u>day</u> for this meeting!). Unintentionally, we can start off on the wrong foot here, being perceived as a tad 'impertinent!'

Also, be careful of stating your <u>own</u> time upfront (I see it happen!!!). So, for instance some salespeople will open the meeting with 'Okay Mr prospect… I have allowed for around two hours for this meeting… Is that okay with you?'… this is a little(?) presumptuous in my opinion and perhaps a degree arrogant too. After all <u>you're</u> the salesperson here! Early impressions are not best served in this way and we should minimise any 'risk' of a negative reaction and use the first approach above.

- **Point to your Wristwatch:**

A very good way of visually drawing people's attention to the time that you both have available for a meeting is to physically point or tap your index finger onto the face of your wristwatch at the same time as asking them how they are fixed for time for the meeting today? (while smiling at them). Not only does this come over most professionally, it can also take away a little bit of eye contact with the prospect/customer, especially at the start of the meeting - when things may be little pressured between salesperson and buyer. It also gives the prospect/customer a visual and therefore perhaps more memorable ‘placeholder’ in their heads that you've bothered to ask about this - demonstrating that you're there with their best interests at heart. Plus, it shows you care, from their point of view! We’re doing this for our own reasons of course too! They don’t know that!

❖ **Reset your Objectives:**

The value of checking time availability with your prospect or customer allows you now to adjust your objectives/priorities with this early knowledge in mind and before the meeting gets going.

On occasion, if the client says they only have 5 minutes for you, then I'm fully of the view that you should ‘keep your powder dry,’ and rather than trying to rush through a meeting inside 5 minutes, suggest to the client that because you have some important things to discuss, it's probably best if you were to reschedule the meeting for another day, when there's more time available for you both.

This just repositions you as a ‘Salesperson of Value’ and different to all the rest out there! It also raises the value and importance of your meeting with that client in <u>their</u> heads. Selfishly, they will ‘owe you one,’ next time around too and probably give you a bit more time than you would have been given otherwise! You will almost certainly gain more sales out of it.

There are some downsides mind!… and you need to be the best judge of this of course. But I have driven for four hours each way to a meeting such as this and decided to ‘turn on my heels,’ once there, due to a lack of prospect’s time availability and rescheduled it for another date. Even though it meant coming back yet again on another occasion - it was worth it in the end!.

If you **do** decide to stay (where the client or prospect has said that he does have some available time), which you decide **is** going to be long enough for you (but perhaps shorter than the original hour that had been agreed prior to the meeting confirmation you made in advance on the phone). Then with this feedback, it allows you now to focus on the most important objectives that you have in your list from the pre-call preparation that you've done beforehand. In other words, you can just focus on the major ones that you want to cover today - leaving the others to be tackled next time.

❖ **Remind them of Time:**

The topic of time is a very good one to keep people on track on during your meetings - especially those who insist on talking a great deal!

So a simple reminder such as… ‘So Mr Prospect, you said you had time availability till 10:30am this morning, are we still okay and on track with that?’… can be very useful for us as salespeople… This approach puts the onus on them to keep the momentum going - in a polite, but assertive way!

- **Manage New Entrants:**

How often are you running a sales meeting with a client, when suddenly you are joined by somebody else halfway through the visit? This could be a colleague from another department, or indeed a very senior decision maker who's 'just dropped by' to show his/her face! That is, the MD!!!! So, the value now for you is to make reference to time availability with that new entrant - with a nod of agreement as to what had been agreed before with your first point of contact and with whom you're already meeting.

If, for example it is the MD and he or she is only there for 10 or 15 min - as can be the case in these circumstances – i.e. they just drop into show their faces and are quickly gone again!. Then another time check at this point allows you to re-prioritise your objectives once more and maybe have time enough to ask some compelling questions of the most senior decision maker in the room.

In this way, you can make an impression and establish a unique point of difference for you in winning their business! After that individual has left the room, you can then decide how best to play it from there.

- **Ask what <u>They</u> want to Do?**

As before, from time to time it is necessary just to take time out and review progress against original plans. For example, there's no harm in restating to your client or prospect the fact that .. 'Okay so … we agreed that we had (e.g 60 minutes)/amount of time available for today's meeting and that I will be finished by 10:30am. It's now currently 10:10am… What do you think is going to be the best value for you Mr customer/prospect in the time that we have left to us now.?

Remember, if you do a good job, you will have 'sparked lots of discussion,' and 'fresh thinking,' in their heads and it may be that they have rethought their priorities too from where they first started at the beginning of the meeting. Doing this now, allows you 20 minutes of pure 'golden time,' to let them wax lyrical about the issues as they see them. Often in here are some unique needs into which you can put your focus and beat any of your competitors with this valuable knowledge in mind.

- **Observe the Time:**

Now, this is probably something which salespeople do automatically in any event, nevertheless it's worth restating it in this kind of guide….. Make sure that you keep looking around your meeting environment for clues to the time, i.e. don't just keep dropping your head to read your wrist watch!

See what's around you - have you 'clocked' the clocks in the room? Can you see your prospect or customer's own wristwatch….and tell the time upside down! Is there a microwave or a heating control unit with an LCD time display? Can you see a clock tower in the distance out of a window?

Remember, it's your responsibility to observe the time that you have both agreed in the meeting and if a prospect or customer is allowing you that trust to manage that, while they talk extensively about their issues and challenges that they face within their business, then they will thank you (subconsciously perhaps) at the end and reward you in 'spades' (sales!) in due course!

❖ **Reposition Time:**

Sometimes, at the start of the meeting it can be quite valuable to unclip your own wristwatch and pop it into your binder/sales presenter, so that it's face is just visible, next to your note pad. Same rules apply if you can get hold of a calculator that has an LCD readout/time feature, which again you can place in your sales presenter, next your note pad as before. Not only does all of this make it easier for you to review and regularly check time available as you make notes during discussions. It also allows you to 'magically,' keep a handle on your time management during a meeting…and the customer doesn't even know!

❖ **Visualise the Outcome:**

I have seen some very powerful results from sales people who have at the start of a meeting invited the prospect or customer to look at time availability for meetings in the following way:

.. 'So Mr Prospect, we've agreed that I will be clear and gone by 10.35 am this morning (it being 9:35 am now). So, when we shake hands at the end of this meeting, what will you have most liked to have gained from our discussions by then? Or…What would 'good' look like for you then?..'

Once again, very compelling coaching methods are being employed here in these sales 'time-framing techniques.' It's always interesting to gain views on 'current state' versus 'future state.' That is, where people are now…and where they would like to be at the end of the meeting. The objective is to get them thinking in their own heads as to what **their** desired outcome will/could ideally be at the end of this meeting for them. Of course, we should always revisit the key points which were highlighted at the start of the meeting at the end of our discussions and see how we stacked up against their original expectations (and ask them if have we achieved them?) - Often we will get some very positive feedback from our client or prospects using this technique, results in more sales for us.

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We hope you have found some of these techniques valuable for you in your sales role and know that you can start to use these pretty much straight away, whenever you choose to do so in your sales conversations with both clients and prospects alike.

These form just a tiny part of the overall BMD Global Exceed9 Selling Skills Programme, where so much more is available to you. The programme will certainly increase your sales professionalism, however long you've been in selling. Most importantly, it will help you win more business and better results!

We will see you soon! www.exceed9.com.

Be Different,
Tony Armstrong
CEO BMD Global | Champion of The Exceed9 Methodology

www.bmd-global.com +44 (0) 1202 570600