

GETTING A JOB THROUGH COLD CALLING

It sounds a little like a telephone on ice, but the cold call is actually an important tool of networking. Cold calling is calling a person or business without prior contact in order to inquire about employment opportunities. For many, the idea of cold calling is chilling. Dialing up a complete stranger doesn't seem like a logical way to carry out a job search. Yet when done correctly, a cold call can showcase some important professional traits, including resilience, determination, and interpersonal skills. In the best-case scenario, it can also lead to an interview.

Cold calling is a salesman's device. The premise is that the more people you contact, the better your chances of scoring a deal. In a way salesmanship is integrally connected to the job search, only instead of selling a product or service, you're selling yourself. Specifically, you're selling the notion that you would be a valuable addition to a company's team. And therein lies the key to the cold call. When you pick up the phone, you must think of yourself not as a nervous jobseeker eager for a lead, but rather, as a confident professional who has the qualifications that would benefit an employer.

How do you make this leap? It's not easy, admits one woman in retail who had taken off several years to raise two children and wanted to rejoin the workforce. She admits the cold call took some practice. "I was much smoother on my eighth or ninth attempt than I was on my first.... I called up many businesses, and the majority of them didn't take more than fifteen seconds to decide they weren't interested. Finally, I caught one man who asked me where I'd gone to school. As it happened, we'd gone to the same college. He took a liking to me after that. I was asked in for an interview the following week."

This woman's example shows that it helps to make a connection with the person you are cold calling. However, this is not always possible. The plain truth about cold calling is that the failure rate is high. Yet the rewards can be great if you encounter even one person who recognizes your potential. Below are some techniques for making the cold call a little warmer.

- * Write a script for your cold call, outlining one or two of your most valuable Key Selling Points (see chapter 7). Remember that you are trying to impress the person on the other end of the line. Modify your script so that these selling points are in sync with each company's specific needs. A customized delivery is crucial.
- * Be clear on your goals and what you have to offer. Nothing will turn off an employer faster than a person who is not clear about his objectives.
- * Introduce yourself in a way that will spark interest. Saying your name immediately followed by your area of expertise might do the trick.
- * Work on your voice-make sure you sound professional, sharp, and cheerful, but never insincere or calculating. It helps to practice both your voice and your script on a trusted friend who can offer you feedback and suggestions.
- * Figure out who is on the other end of the line. Receptionists and other gatekeepers will usually pick up the phone before hiring managers will. Be prepared to answer gatekeeper-type questions such as "What is the reason for your call?" and "What company are you with?" A confident answer and an assured tone might allow you to pass through this initial screen. No matter who picks up the phone, be professional. Treat everyone with equal courtesy and respect.
- * Use the "rule of three." If you've tried calling three times, or left up to three messages with no response, throw in the towel. Calling any more than that will only irritate the person you are trying to reach. Says a senior human resources consultant with a wellknown mutual insurance company: "Candidates can call me and leave a voicemail message, but it's hard for me to do callbacks due to the volume of calls I receive." She goes on to say she does follow up with many people who leave inquiries, but that repeat messages "are more burden than value."
- * Substitute your e-mail account for your phone. These days many businesspeople are more apt to answer e-mails than voicemail messages anyway. E-mailing requires less effort on both ends because people don't need to think and speak on the fly; they can actually take the time to word their correspondence carefully if you're better at written communication than you are at oral communication, consider sending "cold e-mails" rather than making cold calls. In this case, though, you'll need to address your e-mail to a single person. Consider calling the company gatekeeper, who may be more inclined to pass along the e-mail address of the hiring manager than the phone number. Blindly e-mailing a company at a general address can pretty much guarantee a lack of results unless the company happens to be very small.
- * Keep track of your phone calls. If you leave a message, you'll want to know the name and title of the person who is returning your call and what information you've already provided.
- * Be prepared for standard responses from human resources personnel and other hiring managers. You will probably receive some brush-off responses like, "The only thing you can do is send your resume to our HR department," or even, "We are not currently hiring." However, some responses will allow you more opportunity to sell yourself. Be prepared to sell yourself if you hear a question such as "What kind of experience do you have?" or "What attracts you to our company?"
- * Don't become discouraged. Cold calling isn't easy, and a few hang-ups can make even the most stalwart person question himself. Take breaks and keep in mind that the process isn't personal.
- * Remember that your ultimate goal is to get an interview. To that end, if you do speak with someone who has hiring power and if you establish a rapport with that person, ask outright if you can come in for an interview. The question might seem presumptuous, but it's been known to work.