

STEP SIX: BE PERSISTENT—NARROW THE GAP

“Flaming enthusiasm, backed up by horse sense and persistence, is the quality that most frequently makes for success.” —Dale Carnegie

You know that one person who hounds the hell out of you about going to the gym, or volunteering at the church bazaar or just basically tries to either get you to do something you don't want to do, or sell you something you don't want to buy? Know how you cringe when you see their number pop up on your Caller ID? How the sound of their voice is reminiscent of fingernails down a chalk board or unexpected feedback from a microphone?

Yeah. We've all got one, don't we? *Don't* be that guy.

There's a difference between being unapologetically persistent and tactlessly annoying. I find that this most often happens when the person I'm dealing with has developed end-goal tunnel vision. Targeted determination is a wonderful thing and I firmly believe that every good businessman should have it, but that doesn't mean that practical communication skills aren't still in effect.

It's good to believe in yourself, to believe in your product, to be totally all in and sold out to the future success you envision, but part of that future has to include common

courtesy—which, sadly, isn't quite so common anymore—and the ability to work well with others. In a world where stress levels are at an all-time high and everyone is looking for ways to weed unnecessary tension from their lives, the last thing you want to be is an unwelcome dandelion cluttering up someone's designer sod.

Be assessable. Be easy-going. Let your product do the talking.

Remember, all new business is based on *new* ideas.

These executives aren't vaudeville villains sitting behind their desks tweaking their evil mustaches. They're dedicated professionals who are looking for ways to increase their bottom line. The idea that they're hidden away in ivory towers or behind locked doors with limited access is simply a myth and, while it's certainly okay to utilize social media and various professional web sites like LinkedIn to make the connections you need to make, sometimes the good old-fashioned approach works best.

Just pick up the phone and call.

Emails are too easily deleted or ignored—I've got staff who sorts through mine. Just *call*. If you're not comfortable doing that, then that's all the more reason you should. Good phone skills are a *must*. As a matter of fact, that's how I got the snow machine into the theme parks. I simply picked up the phone, politely asked the receptionist the name of the special effects director and you know what?

She gave it to me. Simple as that.

Armed with his name, I disconnected and called back, then asked for him. Wonder of wonders he was at his desk. Can you believe it?

“Hi, Mr. Kelly, my name is Francisco Guerra. I've developed a new special effects product I'd like to show you. Would you have time for a demonstration? I'd love to bring it by.” I gave him a brief description of my snow machine.

“Sounds promising,” he told me. “I'd love to see it.”

Two days later I took my snow machine on site, met with Mr. Kelly and proceeded to show him what it could do. No

fancy power point slides, no board room meeting—just me and my product. Simple, streamlined and efficient. Guess what? Turns out the park was in need of a snow machine that would produce evaporative snow that wouldn't leave a slick residue or surface, and two months later was installing \$150,000 worth of equipment in one of the most beloved theme parks in the world. That single phone call netted me an instant significant return, opened the door into the theme park market and resulted in a twenty-plus year relationship with those companies.

Initiative and a good product—you simply can't beat that combination.

Does that mean that you're not going to hit the occasional road block? No, of course not. But when that happens, just get creative. I can't tell you how many times I've used the "I'm-writing-an-article" ruse to my advantage.

I'm-writing-an-article ruse? But, Fran, isn't that dishonest? *Well...* Okay, yeah, maybe, in the strictest sense of the word, but I prefer to think of it as "resourceful communication."

Dale Carnegie says "Talk to someone about themselves and they'll listen for hours." And you know what?

He's right.

People *love* to talk about themselves. You call up the head of a research and development department at a company—let's call him Dwight—and ask him why he chose a specific product, I can promise he's going to tell you. In detail and with enthusiasm. Ahhhh. Did you feel that breeze? That's the window of opportunity opening up. Crawl on through it and plant your feet firmly on the ledge.

"You know, as it happens, Dwight, I'm an inventor as well and I've got something I think you'll be interested in..."

I've got a buddy who owns a web design business who actually used this technique to grow his business. He and his partner were spending so much time slinging code they didn't have time to dedicate to sales. They were maintaining the business, but not growing it and, despite multiple marketing attempts, couldn't seem to reach that next level.

“Fran, I don’t know what else to do,” Al confided. “My well of good ideas seems to have gone dry.”

I recommended the I’m-writing-an-article approach. “Target web sites that are in desperate need of an overhaul,” I said.

Albert was uncomfortably quiet for a moment. “Let me get this straight. You want me to call up these companies, tell them that I’m writing an article and would like to ask their permission to use their web site as an example—“

“Of what not to do,” I interjected. “Tell them how terrible their web site is, how it’s the best example of what *not* to do, ever.”

Another lengthy silence. “Um, right.”

“Trust me.”

His hesitation screamed across the line. “I don’t know, Fran. I—“

“*Trust me.* They’re going to ask you what’s wrong with their web site and then you’ll be able to offer a solution to their problem. Nobody wants to be used as a poor example for anything.”

A week later I get a call from Al. “You were right.”

Ab. Be still my heart. My three most favorite words.

“Business is booming,” he went on. “I’ve hired a sales rep who does nothing but cold call poorly designed sites. You know, Fran, I’ve got to admit I had my doubts, but... Wow. It’s fantastic. I can’t thank you enough.”

Of course, I was right. I usually am, after all. “A fifth of Gentleman Jack will do.”

Is the above-referenced approach always the best? Obviously not, but if you’ve exhausted all other potential avenues, then certainly give it a shot. Nothing ventured, nothing gained and the risk is definitely worth the reward.

The most important thing to always keep in mind is to never give up, because you never know what’s going to work, when that phone call is going to get answered, that email returned, when a cold contact will suddenly burn hot.

Years ago I was visiting a coastal city in California and had

gone for a walk when I came upon a statue of a man feeding seagulls. I'd heard the story about the statue and the man depicted in it before--I'm sure lots of people have--but as luck would have it, further down the beach I actually happened upon him. Amazing, right?

"That's you, isn't it?" I said, gesturing back toward the statue.

The old man looked up at me and smiled, his weathered face a testament to many years and a life well-lived. He nodded. "It is," he said, tossing another handful of fish out of his bucket. The birds swooped in and out, plucking the food as much from the air as the ground.

"Wow," I said, for lack of anything better. "You must feed the seagulls quite often."

"Every day for the past forty-eight years," he told me.

Shock detonated through me and I felt my eyebrows climb toward my hairline. *Every day? For the past forty-eight years?*

"Really?"

He nodded again, chuckled low at my expression.

"Really."

Admittedly, that was impressive. I couldn't commit to a workout schedule for more than a month and this guy has been feeding seagulls every day for nearly *fifty* years? Wow. Just wow. Talk about dedication. I wanted to hear the story first-hand, so I waited, hoping my patience would be rewarded.

It was.

"Yeah, well, a single seagull saved my life and the life of the men under my command a half century ago, so it's my way of saying thanks, I guess."

"You're a vet?"

"World War II. Navy. We took a hit, had to abandon ship and managed to climb into a sad little life boat with too little room and no food or water. Floated out there for days beneath the blistering sun. You want to know the measure of a man, son?" he said, shooting me a look. "Face death with him and you'll find out pretty damned quick. I'll tell you, we

were nearing the end, had just about had all we could stand. We were dehydrated, starving. Slowly, painfully dying and were all contemplating suicide, myself included," he added, shooting me a look. "Miles and miles of ocean, not a single bit of land in sight, not a single boat, plane...nothing. I kept telling them that I was certain that they were looking for us, that they'd find us, but the truth was I'd just about decided that the military had concluded that we'd all gone down with the ship, and that there wasn't a rescue party combing that bit of ocean at all."

I shook my head. I couldn't even begin to imagine that kind of danger, much less predict how I'd behave should I ever find myself in the same situation.

"So there we were," he went on. "Trying to decide how we were going to do it—how we were going to end our own lives—when out of nowhere—*literally nowhere*—a single seagull suddenly lit on the side of the boat. They're never alone, seagulls," he added. "Think about that. They always travel in, at the very least, pairs. And yet here was one, miles and miles from land, in a place it shouldn't be. We all froze, didn't so much as breathe. And then I grabbed it." He calmly tossed out more fish. "We shared that raw bird and it was just enough to restore our spirits and our failing bodies and two days later we were rescued."

More in awe than I could have ever imagined, I passed a hand over my face and glanced at him. "That's... Wow, that's incredible."

He just smiled, lifted a shoulder. "That's hope for you," he said. "I've been to that awful place where it vanishes like a spent match in the darkness, and I feed these birds every day as a reminder that I don't ever want to go back."

It's been fifteen or more years since I had that conversation with that old man and yet every second of it is embedded in my memory. I've met lots of people from all different walks of life since meeting him, and I can tell you that there hasn't been a message that's been any more significant or profound.

Never give up, fan that flame of hope as though your life depends on it—even if it doesn't because you never know when it *might*—and be thankful for every good turn that comes your way, because you never know what could be just around the corner.

Be patiently persistent and I'll promise you this, kid—your seagull moments will come, too. You can bet on it.