

No More Selling Scripts

5 Ways to Be Yourself Again

by Ari Galper, Founder, Unlock The Game

Last week I was sitting at my desk and the phone rang.

I picked it up and said, "Hello, this is Ari." The caller said, "Hi, Ari, my name is Steve, how are you I knew right away that he was using a structured sales script, and that triggered the negative "salesperson" stereotype in my mind.

I didn't want to hurt his feelings so I let him continue with his pitch for a few minutes. Then I gently said, "Hi, Steve." He was so startled that he completely stopped speaking. He had no idea how to react to my simple, normal greeting.

Why?

Because he was totally focused on his selling script and not on my reaction to it.

If you've been selling for a while, chances are you've been asked to use sales scripts to make cold calls. And even if you feel scripts are unnatural and impersonal, you've probably used them anyway because they were the only way you knew to start a conversation with prospects.

Maybe you've even made some sales using scripts.

But here are some questions you need to ask yourself.

- How do you really feel when you use a script?
- How do your prospects feel when they know you're using a script? (And they do know.)
- Most important, how many sales are you losing because you're using a script?

When people call me and ask how they can throw out their scripts and cold call the natural way, the first thing I do is ask them whether they're willing to role-play with me using their script.

As soon as they start reading their script, a couple of things happen. I hear their voices go up in volume so they sound enthusiastic. They also talk faster, and their voice takes on a canned, robotic quality. All these things trigger the negative "salesperson" stereotype.

After a few moments, I gently stop them and tell them they're sounding like a totally different person from the one who called me and talked with me so naturally about their sales issues.

You know what they always say? "Ari, you are so right. When I use a script, I feel as if I can't be myself. I feel like a robot or an actor, and it's very awkward and uncomfortable. Is there any way I can be myself again?"

Here are 5 ways to throw out your linear selling script and be yourself again:

1. Admit that scripts make you sound "scripted."

When you begin your sales script, prospects detect the very subtle change from your natural voice to your unnatural scripted voice within seconds. "Fine," you might say, "I'll just work on making myself sound natural." But that in itself creates a conflict.

The first step is to realize and admit that you can't "work at" being natural. However, you can let go of your script as a crutch. The idea may sound scary at first because you've been programmed to believe you have to have a script to make a successful to make calls without a linear step-by-step script.

2. Start your cold call as a conversation, not a one-way pitch.

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If you're used to scripts, you're probably shaking your head and wondering, "How the heck will I know what to say without a script?" You might want to ask yourself why you think you won't know what to say, because the reason for that is important. It means you're basing your call on what you have to offer -- and not on what's important to the prospect, because you haven't found that out yet.

Pitching your solution as soon as you begin a call is one of the biggest problems with linear sales scripts because you trigger sales pressure and cause prospects to react with defensiveness or even abrupt, immediate rejection.

Here's another option.

Write down 2 or 3 core issues or real problems (not benefits or features) that your product or service solves. Then take that "problem statement," as I call it, and put it into words your prospect can understand. In fact, the wording should be so familiar to your prospects (because those are the words they use every day in their business) that when you start discussing the issue, they'll feel a sense of comfort knowing that your mental focus is on helping them solve problems, not on making the sale.

3. Create openings rather than forcing a "yes."

Selling scripts are designed to be linear and step by step so you can move calls in the direction you want them to go. From the traditional selling point of view, that direction is toward a "yes," because if you don't get a "yes" at the beginning of the cold call, you're not "selling." But that's the biggest problem with scripts. They give you only one path to follow.

If you can start a conversation that triggers a "What do you mean?" response from your prospect, you'll find you can explain yourself in a natural way that creates a two-way dialogue, which in turn lets you learn what you need to find out by flowing with the conversation, without feeling you're getting off-track. Developing your problem statement makes this much easier.

4. Record yourself talking with someone you know. Then record yourself reading your script.

Have you ever heard yourself calling a prospect and reading your script? Probably not. That's why most people who use scripts think they sound natural. They've never heard themselves. But if you do this simple exercise, you'll hear the same kinds of differences I hear when people role-play with me.

In our day-to-day personal relationships, we simply want to get to know and communicate with others. But when we go into sales situations using scripts, we have an agenda -- to make the sale.

And because scripts trigger the perception that that's all we want, the people you talk with sense this immediately and put up their guard. Between our hidden agenda and their reaction, there's no chance to build trust through communication.

Also, because we've been taught for so long that we have to control the process, we never stop to think that scripts make it impossible for us to be flexible in how we communicate and build trust.

5. Set a new goal for your calls. Focus on simply opening the conversation rather than trying to control it, so prospects will feel comfortable telling you the truth about their situation.

Does surrendering your use of a script seem scary? Try this alternative and see how it feels. Begin the conversation with “Hi, maybe you can help me out for a moment...” Most people will respond with something like, “Sure, how can I help?” You can say, “I’m just calling to see if (problem statement)...,” which makes it easy for the prospect to reply, “What do you mean?” or “Tell me more.” And after that, the possibilities of your conversation are endless.

What do I mean by this? If you target their issues, create a conversation around the problems or issues you know they’re facing, and explain how your solution solves those problems -- in a conversation that is completely void of sales pressure -- prospects will share their truth with you.

They’ll tell you whether solving the issue is a priority, whether they have the resources to commit to it, and everything else you need to know.

When you let go of a linear script, you’ll find that you’ll no longer fumble for words if prospects get “off track” by taking the conversation away from your sales process and into their buying process. In fact, that’s exactly what you hope they’ll do, because that means they’re telling you the truth.

Now that you understand why linear step-by-step scripts create the negative “salesperson” stereotype by making it impossible for you to be your natural self, you can begin learning how to engage total strangers on the phone in ways that feel as comfortable as calling a friend.

Yes, it’s possible, and don’t let anyone tell you it’s not.

