

## Cold Calling for Passive Candidate Recruiting

### **Introduction:**

It is important to keep in mind that cold calling for passive candidate recruiting (those not actively seeking a change in employers) is different in many ways from “cold calling” as it is generally referred to. Although your objective is essentially to sell the person you are calling on a position or opportunity, the advice given in cold calling books is generally geared toward those selling products or services. Not all of the information in these guides is applicable and some of it may actually lead to negative results in a recruiting environment. This guide is intended to provide some basic tips that should help anyone planning to call passive candidates.

### **Preparation before calling:**

#### **Will you be calling into a large multinational corporation or a small start up business or something in between? How is their phone system organized?**

This is very important to know before you start making your calls. Will you have to speak to a receptionist every time you call? This can be a very important consideration if you need to contact 100+ people at a company with only 1 or 2 receptionists, since eventually they will become familiar with your voice. Perhaps you only have a small number of people to contact but the receptionist asks your name and reason for calling when you dial in. There are ways to circumvent “gatekeepers” (receptionists, administrative assistants, etc...) but knowing how their phone system works will be EXTREMELY important in planning your calls and the timeframe of the project in general.

Remember that just because you need to contact 200 people at one company or because you are faced with an administrative assistant who asks your name and reason for calling, every time you call, that all is not lost. There are ways of using many voicemail systems to your advantage that will allow you to circumvent “gatekeepers” entirely.

Please see our whitepaper titled “Voicemail Surfing: A Comprehensive Guide to Using Voicemail to Circumvent Gatekeepers”, located here <http://www.rwstearns.com/articles.php>

#### **Who will you be calling?**

Are you reaching out to very high-level individuals with personal assistants, or inside sales personnel working in a “bullpen” environment. This is an important consideration. If your contact has a personal assistant that screens their calls, can you find a way to contact them directly, or will you choose to disclose some of why you are calling to their assistant?

If your target is an individual in a “bullpen”, then serious consideration must be made to the possibility that they may not be able to talk at all from their workplace and you may need to set up after hours interviews with them.

#### **Why should they be interested in your opportunity?**

Simply presenting an opportunity is almost exactly like trying to sell a product without pointing out its advantages. To avoid this, make sure you are prepared to point out the specific advantages of working for your company and the opportunity you are calling about. Your job as a passive candidate recruiter is to generate interest where none existed before.

### **Develop a “loose” script**

Having a tight script that you read from every time someone picks up the phone will usually elicit a negative response. Develop a “loose” script that contains the important information about the opportunity and your company, but the more natural your call sounds the better it will generally be received. Be prepared, but not TOO prepared.

## **Making your calls (leaving voicemail messages):**

### **Avoid speaking too quickly**

No one likes long voicemail messages, but if you speak too quickly, you will either sound nervous or confuse your target with an avalanche of information. Speak naturally: not too slowly, but do not rush yourself.

Use language that refers to the individual. Try and mention their name twice if you can make it sound natural. Also use language like “I am calling you specifically”. The idea is that you do NOT want these people to feel like they are on a long call list. They need to feel important and that they are being contacted because they are so very good at what they do.

**VERY IMPORTANT:** When leaving your phone number, speak much slower than you did in the first part of your message and enunciate the numbers carefully (people hate having to rewind their voicemail to get the number again).

### **Be persistent without being bothersome**

Leaving one voicemail and waiting for a response will more than likely result in nothing. Usually, multiple voicemail messages must be left before you receive a call back. Don’t leave a message every day or even every other day. The time between messages is a judgment call depending on your target, but usually between 4 to 7 days is a good timeframe.

### **Give them a reason to call you back**

Again, this will depend on the type of person you are contacting and the opportunity you will be presenting, but give them a reason to want to call you back. An example might be to mention the opportunity to advance within the organization, or the uniqueness of the opportunity (is it a new and exciting project in a groundbreaking area?).

## **Making your calls (direct contact achieved):**

Many rules on leaving voicemail messages are also applicable to direct contact. Don’t speak too quickly, and keep to a loose script (don’t be afraid of the occasional “umm” or “how do I put this”, etc... it will make your call sound unique, rather than one of hundreds).

One important difference between a call and a voicemail message, is that while you shouldn’t leave messages every day, there is nothing wrong in reaching out on a daily basis. **Remember the key is to get them on the phone. Call every day if you can.**

### **Avoid obviously fake or “schmoozy” verbiage**

If they answer the phone, don't say “Hi I'm Susan Jones, how are you?” and wait for a response. They may answer “Fine, how are you?”, but more likely they will respond with something like “Who are you again?” or “Why are you calling?” and their guard will go up.

When you call for passive candidate recruiting, it's best to go straight to the subject. An example might be “Hi I'm Susan Jones and I am calling you from XXX company. We (or they) wanted to speak to you specifically about.....”. Don't talk too long but present the basics, so they know as quickly as possible why you are calling.

### **Know your target's work environment**

If you are calling someone working in a “bullpen” type environment or where cubicles are close together, be sensitive to their potential inability to talk at the office. If you hear people speaking in the background tell them that it “sounds like you are not in a good place to have this kind of conversation, could I give you my number so we could speak later?”

If your target is a senior level individual in a private office, try to attempt to engage them immediately about the opportunity.

### **Assess their level of interest**

If they seem more than casually interested but can't talk at the moment, ask them when they will call you back. If they seem only casually interested be less aggressive (asking for when they will call you back might elicit an answer but might also make them feel pressured enough to lose interest). You may also try asking them if there is a better time for you to call THEM back.

### **If calling you back sounds like it might be inconvenient for them, suggest alternatives**

If they have concerns with speaking to you on their work phone or cannot because of their work environment, have alternatives available.

Suggest they call you in the morning (if most of the people at the company arrive at 9 and you are in the office at 8am, this is good for many people).

Suggest lunchtime calls. I take late lunches for a reason. Many people feel better calling from their cellular phone while they are out getting a bite to eat.

Suggest after hours calls. Make yourself available after 5pm. Many people will simply not have the time to speak to you from the 9 to 5 slot. Ask if you can call them in the evening.

Of last resort is email. Many people (notably Software Engineers) seem to prefer to communicate by email. The problem is that this limits your ability to address their concerns as they mention them. It is also impersonal and everyone knows the problems of emailing (easy to erase, can go into a spam folder, etc.). If you have no other alternative, email them, but only as a last resort.

Important note: Steer people away from giving you their corporate email address. It can be easily seen by someone in IT and reported. Tell people that most companies monitor their email and that you don't want to create problems for them. Perhaps they have a personal email you could send the information to?

### **Be prepared to tell them how you got their name and/or contact information**

People love to hear that they have been referred by a colleague, but this will usually not be the case. Good answers are similar to this might be, “well to be honest I'm not sure. In the past I could have told you that someone here either knows you or knows of you, but these days I know a lot of my

<internal clients, hiring managers> are using business networking sites like LinkedIn and they may have seen you there and saw something they really liked”.

### **Ask for referrals**

If it is appropriate to the project, ask your target for referrals if he or she is not interested. Many will be able to pass along your information to a colleague who is actively seeking employment elsewhere.

### **Network**

If they are not interested at the moment, ask them if you could keep them in your Rolodex (I prefer Rolodex to ATS or database because it sounds more personal) for something that might come up in the future that would be a better fit for them. Don't forget to ask them what that might be.

### **About RW Stearns, Inc.**

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Our policy of putting "strategy first" when undertaking client engagements has consistently led to timely and cost-effective solutions, accurate intelligence, and satisfied clients. For these reasons and more, RW Stearns has long been recognized as the premiere solution destination for hiring managers, recruiters and strategic planners around the world.

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