

How to Respond to Telemarketers

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Years ago, a salesman came to the door. He looked straight at me and asked, "Is the boss, at home?" In that moment I anchored a distaste for "sales people." I've matured and now some of the finest people in my circle are sales folk. Yet, there has been one area of sales that stumped my sense of grace.

Have you, like me, struggled to effectively respond to telemarketers—those "pesky" callers who tend to start the conversation with "How are you today?" In early January an email message was forwarded to me describing some ways to manage those calls. I decided to experiment with Number One on the suggestion list. When the inevitable call came in I said to the telemarketer, "Excuse me, I'm putting you on hold." After putting the receiver down, I continued with my work and waited for the dial tone.

Then I noticed how slimy, deceitful and embarrassed I felt. I was behaving in a manner that I would never want to be treated. I heard my internal morality and virtues voice saying, "After all you know about treating people with dignity and respect, you did this!" Healthy guilt is called regret. I concluded that I regretted my choice. To free myself from further self-guiling I resolved to find a win-win approach for the next "Hello ma'am, are you the woman of the house?"

That week at a Women in Psychology steering committee meeting my colleagues offered alternate responses such as: "Thank you no. I am not interested." Or "We have allocated our funds for this year." I defended myself saying that when I had previously used those lines the telemarketers tended to persist. But upon reflection, I believe my voice and words were indecisive.

Recently, I attended a workshop with Alice Wheaton, Canada's foremost cold calling trainer. There I was considering being that "pesky" caller to increase my professional speaking activity while judging such an activity as annoying. Alice dished out the menu answer to my telemarketing dilemma. She instructed us to adopt not only acceptance, but appreciation, for the telemarketer who is attempting to make a daily living by informing others of some kind of opportunity, maybe even a solution. Isn't that what I am doing when I call conference planners—offering a solution to their program needs? My attitude shifted. Then she offered this considerate, yet assertive, statement for speaking to telemarketers, who after all are doing the best they can in their jobs: "I don't need your product at this time and I appreciate the courage it took to call today." May you, like me, be at peace with telemarketing.

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