



**Open the Door  
to Your Next Sales Call**

# First Contact<sup>®</sup>



**Sam Hunter**  
**Learn How to Turn Strangers  
into Valuable Prospects**

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Strategic Book Group  
P.O. Box 333 Durham CT  
06422  
[www.StrategicBookGroup.com](http://www.StrategicBookGroup.com)

ISBN: 978-1-60911-760-3

United States of America

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# Preface



**SAM HUNTER**

I describe my background because I believe you can't have confidence in the advice, if you don't trust the source.

From the very beginning I was much more comfortable with oral communication. My first memories of school in the 1960s are not wonderful; having undiagnosed serious dyslexia did not set me up for a happy time with the primary school nuns. The Three Rs were not my strong suit, rugby was. Later, at an elite private secondary school in Sydney, I have vivid memories of a book called "Planned Analysis." Many nights for homework, we were assigned a new section of English grammar to learn from this horrible little book. The following morning, everyone in the class was asked one question like "Where is the subjective clause?" If you got the answer wrong, you were asked to stand at the back of the classroom and wait while all the other prisoners were interrogated. Anyone standing was strapped. I don't recall getting many questions right back then. What I do recall is being on the bus ride to school steeling myself for the inevitable. I went to school most mornings knowing I was going to be hit. Violence and learning were not in my case highly correlated.

I continued to struggle with a number of aspects of the English discipline. In my final year at school, I can recall going to remedial reading lessons with the junior school boys. There was not much help back then, it was sink or swim. I found memorizing anything that lacked context extremely difficult.

There was only one way forward. At about fifteen-years-old, I decided anything I couldn't do was just unimportant. I was not going to let a little negativity get to me. The alternative was to accept serious failure and forget any of my aspirations. I focused on my strengths, spelling and written communication was just not on the list.

I made it into Uni, just.

University was a godsend. I could use a calculator. Math was now something I could do and do well. I understood the concepts, just could not seem to add up, the calculator was a salvation, maths worked now. My mother corrected the spelling in my essays. I passed; in fact, I excelled at some subjects receiving commendation letters.

While at uni, I worked in my family's hotels. I was introduced to life outside school by the Matraville Hotel and the heroes of the South Sydney football team who drank in the public bar and lived in the aboriginal community close by. I learned a lot about what makes people tick, their motivations and mateship while pulling beer. These lessons stood me in great stead when, later in life, I was asked to make marketing value judgments. No university marketing course can teach these lessons in human behaviour.

I am sure those who knew me at school as "speller" have been shocked to see my career unfold. They would never have expected me to become responsible for the sales and statistical analysis for The Coca-Cola Company in Australia, or later to be responsible at different times for the marketing functions at Coca-Cola Australia, Coca-Cola Far East, McDonald's Australia, and Nestle Rowntree UK, spending many \$100s of millions via their communication budgets.

To write a book is a unexpected achievement considering the struggle I have had with the written word. Thank God for Val Johnson, my first secretary, and later, WordStar and now spell check.

I have, in my professional life, been asked many times to create and make marketing judgments about communications. In a true sense of the word, I am a communications expert, just one who could not really read a great deal till the age of sixteen. I had to become a verbal communicator, working in mostly audio and visual communications, i.e., radio and TV advertising. I was not confident enough to develop my writing skills. Now, I am doing the reverse. I am writing

about those communication skills focusing on the discipline of winning new business.

My whole life, I have been focused on understanding people so as to perfect audio and visual communications.

## **INFLUENCES AND PRINCIPLES**

There is one principle and three major inspirations that have ultimately led to the development of the **First Contact** approach.

### **The Principle**

Always look for the **Why answer**.

Not long ago I was driving to my office one morning, I heard Hugh Mackay, Australia's most accomplished social researcher who has made a lifelong study of the attitudes and behaviours of Australians, say that "most action takes place in the mind and that is where the real battle is." ABC local radio Jan. 14, 2009.

My introduction to this book changed because Hugh reminded me of some basics. It is not new to appreciate that to successfully sell in an idea or a product, that idea or product must meet the **needs, wants, or desires** of the buyers, or they won't buy. Period! Therefore, to create a successful sale, we must first know what those needs, wants, and desires are for our target and most importantly appreciate **Why** they are important to the individual or the organization.

Sounds too basic, but we are way too eager to forget the basics.

It does not matter if we change the method of communication from a TV commercial to an outbound phone call, the same communication disciplines should apply, but all too often they are not.

A TV communication may have media and creative budget of many millions of dollars linked to the activity, a phone call does not; it's a moment in time and the financial risk is minimal. Or is it?

When we chase new business, the financial calculation is not about the budget, it's about opportunity lost, ruined, or exploited. Each time you or a person working for you makes contact with a customer, it matters...lots.

In this analysis of communication I call on thirty years of marketing and communications practice and study, applying those lessons to the very practical topic of winning new business.

Understanding "**Why**" gives us the context to manoeuvre around the objections that inevitably come up in a selling situation. Under

standing **Why** lets us respond to those objections in a nimble and appropriate manner.

Once we understand **Why** then and only then can we look at our offering and begin to work on the best approach. The Hugh Mackay battle in the mind begins.

It took me some thirty years of looking at communication strategy and then new business approaches to appreciate how important the added dimension of what I simplistically call the **Why answer**.

### **The Three Influences**

#### **The First Influence—Back to Hugh Mackay**

I have met Hugh a couple of times. I'm sure, I remember him much more than he does me. I was his client in the 1980s as the marketing research manager for Coca-Cola in Australia. One year I decided that Coke no longer needed his research report on social attitudes in Australia. I called him to tell him that I would no longer be buying. He explained that all marketing and consumer behaviour needs to be understood from a broader social context and from that context we could begin to understand why the people we were trying to influence were making their decisions.

I did not realize it at the time but Hugh sparked a desire in me to understand at first the consumer decision-making process and more recently the enterprise decision-making process better. We at Coke continued to buy the Mackay Report.

#### *Second—Decision Choice*

At Coca-Cola: I began to look at decision choice and looked for help from people like Tom Reynolds who became interested in how choice was made. In the mid 70s, Tom began authoring a significant body of work under the “means end approach to decision-making”, the task is not complete he continues today. Tom visited us at Coke to help us make better TV commercials. “Means end analysis” of decision choice is based very much on the realization that people make choices based on aspects very much beyond physical product attributes to include concepts mostly based on psychology.

I think the best example now is that global warming is affecting investment choices for many people. This is a great example of psychology affecting choice in what was once an utterly financial decision. For many people, their investment choice has grown beyond the normal risk and return factors to include their unease with corporate behaviour and social impact concerns. Thirty years ago, according to

the then powers-that-be at the Coca-Cola Company, to suggest that consumers bought soft drinks for reasons other than thirst, taste, and refreshment was heretical. Today, we know and it is accepted that there are emotionally based motivational reasons for choice that really matter, as much as the practical attribute based reasons. In fact, those motivational or psychologically based reasons for choice always existed and it is the changing nature of decision choice which is so fascinating.

### *Third —First Hand Research*

The other great influence on my understanding of decision making was derived from all the firsthand qualitative research I conducted for my clients as Managing Director of Advertising Diagnostics Sydney. Advertising Diagnostics Sydney was started by Mike Bowden, Mike Sexton, and I in the late 1980s. Both Mikes were former heads of the school of marketing at Adelaide University and helped me look beyond the initial consumer response to help uncover the real consumer motivations and developing an understanding of Why those consumer motivations are what it is really all about.

### **The Rise of First Contact**

This book and the companion course were born intuitively some twenty-five years ago. Over time, the intuitive thoughts have been academically influenced. Recently, I have put the teachings into practice with my clients who employ me to make first contact with their prospects on their behalf. Now it's in a book.

#### **It works!**

Business today means being forced to deal with a myriad of competing issues, **First Contact** is above all else practical; I apply method to practical situations and real business issues, and I succeed.

Recent examples like World Youth Day 2008 where I took charge of the task of securing the support of FMCG companies and encouraging corporate Australia to get involved with what was to many of them in 2006 a low profile religious event. The supplier partners were encouraged to provide millions of food items for as little as possible (cost) in return for benefits including product sales at the events, sales to the not-for-profit community across Australia, and event marketing benefits. I created the contact and the relationship with the likes of GWF, Unilever, CCA, SPC, McDonald's, Mrs. Macs, Safcol, and Cerebos to great effect. Not only did we feed hundreds of thousands

of pilgrims many millions of meals, more importantly, we did it without the usual caterer margin.

**First contact** applies broadly, not just to business but to all initial communications, be that a new person or a new topic.

But don't take the label "First Contact" too literally. The skills may be used to assist with the first words you say to somebody you have never met before. However, the skills are also very valuable for times when you need to address a new topic with a person you already know.

I, too, have to go out and win clients. I have a wife who I would like to think I can influence on occasions and introduce new topics to.

**First Contact** helps us avoid the common problem, "the no thought, head-on approach" that occurs in the selling situations with devastating effects, but can also occur at work or at home as much as anywhere else. **First Contact** applies broadly, not just to business but to all initial communications. Every time we commence a discussion focused on new topic, where there is the need to communicate effectively, then plan for success.

# Acknowledgments

Unlike some, the following people were not surprised when I told them I was writing a book, and each was a great help.

- Mike O'Reilly
- John Moore
- Mark Stewart
- Geoff Bowyer

Special thanks to Damien Timmins, who reviewed the manuscript and collaborated on the core approach that became *First Contact*. Damien is a sales expert with a proven track record of delivering success to such blue chip companies as Unilever, Coca-Cola, Wrigleys, and Nestle. Damien never underestimates the importance of the customer relationship; he firmly believes in the concept that the customer is king, and a business can prosper only by serving the needs of the customer.

Thank you all—and most of all Tina, my wife.

# Observations

*“People go through life with their minds only half turned on, except when they are promised an adequate reward for their full attention. Ordinarily their attitude toward nearly everything they see, read, and experience is—so what?”*

—Maxwell Sackheim

For many managers, it’s easier to aim money at a problem than people, as money goes where you tell it to but humans often don’t.

However, sometimes only the personal touch will do.

Many fantastic salespeople just can’t, or won’t, make a cold call; something forces them to delegate the task of making first contact to the B team.

What’s that doing to success?

# Introduction

## “More a Tragedy Than a Strategy”

First Contact is designed to aid the enterprise-to-enterprise sale, specifically focusing on how to get the prime target interested in your offering right from the outset.

Up until now, there has been no help.

Too many salespeople are stuck on the old-school sales culture of being the “rugged individualist” and “going it alone.” Managers have bullied us with simplistic sayings like “get out in the trenches” and “beat the streets.” At best, they are poor attempts at motivation, and at worst, they demonstrate the lack of ideas and rigour applied by most sales forces. There are far more reasonable and sensible approaches to developing new and deeper customer relationships that work. I wanted to share these.

I, too, have been pushed around by bosses, and I have felt the necessity to sell. “Win this client or die” was in my mind as I began to formulate the ideas in First Contact-but I have also felt that I had never been given the tools to help me succeed. Sure I had a “GO” strategy, but in truth, that is more a tragedy than a strategy. I hope First Contact will give you the tools I never had.

The idea behind **First Contact** emanates from a simple belief.

**“That the process, discipline, and skills employed to produce outstanding TV advertising creative, can be applied to the goal of winning enterprise B2B new business.”**

Advertising professionals don’t know a great deal about the products when they first begin to think about the advertising they might produce. The great copy writers capture mood and feelings, express-

ing them **with extreme** simplicity. What this implies is that what we **know** is less important than what we **understand**, that the true power in communications, copy writing if you like, is in the ability to encapsulate that understanding in a brief advertising copy line.

“It’s the Real thing,” “Just do it,” etc.

**Understanding and dissecting the way advertising people have set about maximizing the effect of the communications they create can help us as we set out to create our own effect. We can rework and reapply a tried and true process (albeit a very rigorous process originally created to make great print advertising) to a “winning new business” enterprise; a one-on-one communication situation...which gives birth to a superior, winning, new business strategy.**

Believe it or not, the same communication skills used to speak to someone via a TV commercial can, and indeed, should be used to introduce a new idea or topic to your prospective new customer, boss, or partner. The reason is that one of first advertising effectiveness models [AIDA] for mass communication was in fact “purloined” from the world of one-to-one communications.

Back in the 1980s, I applied the AIDA model of advertising effectiveness to make great **Coke®** ads. The AIDA **model** simply states that effective communication should get **Attention**, hold **Interest**, arouse **Desire**, and then obtain **Action**. It is the traditional conceptual model for creating any advertising or marketing communications message. The AIDA model was originally designed with one-on-one communications in mind,<sup>\*</sup> not mass communication, meaning the model applies equally well, arguably even better to the business-to-business selling task. You may think that it differs as we are seeking only one person’s attention at a time not thousands, but if you think again, despite its broadcast nature and the fact that many see it at the same time, TV advertising is designed to influence one person at a time. Advertising will only work for those individuals to whom it is relevant, regardless of how many people see it.

At its core, advertising is no different than other communication types. However, by its nature, it is generally in a standard thirty second broadcast format. There are clients willing to pay millions of dollars for effective versions of it, hence the investment in the

<sup>\*</sup> E St. Elmo developed the model in 1900 way before the mass communications of today.

development of skills and processes to help deliver effectiveness for those dollars.

I take the skills developed in the advertising industry and reapply those tools to our new target and method of communication. Just because the perceived investment in a telephone call is less than that of a major advertising campaign does not mean the same disciplines should not apply. In fact, the reverse may be true. A contract lost (or not gained) should be viewed in opportunity cost terms.

First Contact is therefore a set of skills designed to enable you to become a far better communicator, allowing you to become more influential in the decision-making process, and therefore more successful. It's based on the skills developed by the great budgets and great minds of great corporations to ensure their communication is as effective as possible, and is now available for you to apply to interpersonal communication and your business selling task.

## **In Context**

As I said, First Contact is designed to aid the enterprise-to-enterprise sale, specifically focusing on how to get the prime target immediately interested in your offering. This is not about a call center environment, there are no lists.

If you find yourself feeling alone, staring at a telephone with a daunting new business call to make, "First Contact" can help by providing step-by-step methods to help devise successful strategies and tactics. This turns a terrifying selling situation into one where the task can be tackled with confidence.

**First Contact** is not a normal sales training book or course. If I was conducting a standard sales course, the topics would tend to make up a consultative selling approach to the task. I happen to believe that the relationship building style assists sales, but conventional approaches have assumed that a meeting has been set. We know that's not so!

Looking at the opening of the conversation to the close, these courses wrongly assume that the customer is ubiquitous and that a standard opening will suffice. These "normal" courses ignore that just as the first love is the deepest, the first sentence is the most impactful and the most difficult step to take.

# The New Improved Consultative Selling Approach

Let's get a meeting by straight up saying something of genuine interest.

## Summary

I was taught that the human mind is incapable of truly creative thought. Only God is so capable. Whether you believe the Jesuits or not, most new approaches are indeed additions to other work. Therefore, the framework which helps build a new idea or approach is important. The framework I use to sell and to contextualize my ideas **stems from** relationship or consultative selling.

In this chapter, I take the well-mapped skills of consultative selling and add to them the necessities to make the first steps of the sales process successful.

The right product and approach for the prospect is not able to be thought up in the shower. It takes work, and most often that work takes the form of research into the prospect and the business in which he works.

Some lawyers chase ambulances, we salespeople chase meetings. First Contact looks at how to prepare for the call thereby reducing the risk of rejection and then and only then how to engage the prospect with content.

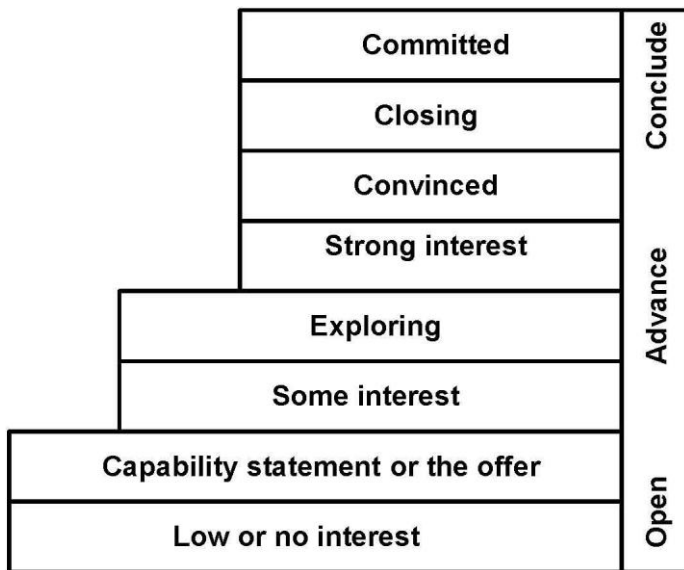
So your boss has turned around and said, *“We need new business. Go away and get some, there’s plenty of it out there. You just have to get up off of your arse and go.”* (I know many of you have been in the firing line of such a statement. Remember, tragedy not strategy!)

What now?

As I said if I was conducting a standard sales course, a “how do you sell more effectively” course, I would most likely take students through a basic linear progression of topics. The topics would make up a consultative selling approach to the task.

The meeting not set, and a standard opening will suffice. We need a more agile, more flexible, more targeted set of words or approach which is designed to engage the target right from the get-go.

**Figure 1** The Standard Consultative Selling Process or Approach



If you have taken sales courses in the past, I would be surprised if you haven’t been put through this process (Figure 1) or something similar to this.

We have a number of practical issues to deal with, rendering our situation very different. First, we don’t assume that we have a meeting. In fact, the meeting is our goal. Secondly, ubiquity is not good

enough for us! The First Contact approach is as different, as at its core it necessitates an individual customer or target focus.

First Contact takes the consultative approach and adds to it. The first thing it adds is the target market research necessary to create the interest to get the AIDA model working.

In its literal interpretation, consultative selling can be too vigorous in that it was originally designed for a mass market, low price product and not at all for the enterprise high value sale. Think of this process or training option as having been designed for the door-to-door salesperson. Yes, I know the training has developed over time but it still tends to assume that all you have to do is to knock on the door. That is not so today. Getting through the door to the right person is a genuine skill that needs to be worked on. We have to be much more considerate of the relationship we are going to create and of the consequence of the sale should we be successful. With success comes the responsibility of having made the sale, the delivery of the product or service, and the prospect of future sales. We want additional business not substitute business. After all, if we are truly successful, we will be dealing with this client for a long time.

If you are selling floor polish door-to-door, for example, you will deliver the polish instantly; there is no post-sale delivery issue. In the B2B enterprise sale, often the product or service we sell is a bespoke solution, an idea, a design, or a solution that needs to be built. There is an element of transaction risk. How we manage the whole process determines the level of our success. As there are generally competing products in almost all categories, I argue that it is the after-sale delivery that determines the longevity of the relationship.

I was reminded of this recently when I asked a customer if he was happy with the service from Coke®. He said no and rattled off delivery issues from last summer. He did not think for a moment of the money he had made from selling all those soft drinks, just the problems. We have to recognize we are going to have a debt to pay if we successfully sell. We are creating a partnership.

If successful, you have to deal with this client for a long time. In fact, we want to deal with this client for a long time. Most likely, the sale will lead to delivery and service issues. Accordingly, when we are successful, we are personally obliged to deliver, hence our respon

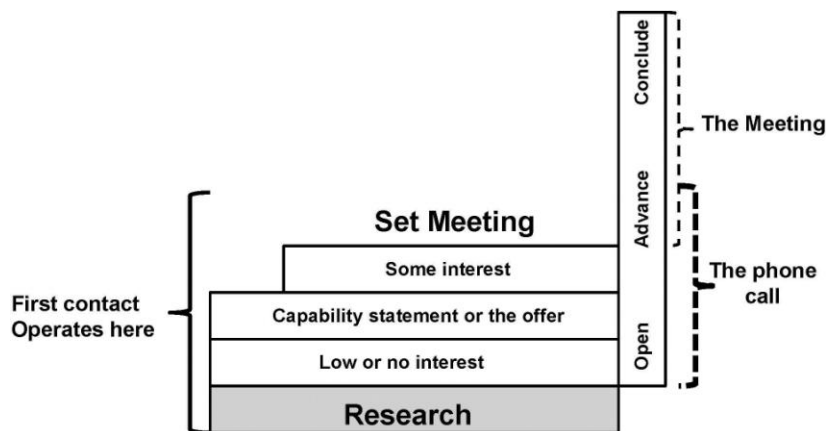
sibility is the high quality delivery. Your personal reputation rides on the delivery as does the next sale.

I augment and change the emphasis of the consultative selling process by including a rigorous research phase at the beginning. This phase is designed to ensure we really do have the right product for our target or client and that our introduction will hit a cord with the target.

The objective of First Contact is to give you the confidence and the skills to be able to generate more meetings. What you do with the meeting, or at the meeting, should also be based on the lessons encountered, the responses developed, the research undertaken, to get the prospect to allocate you time to present your offer.

Figure 2 represents a Revised Consultative Selling Process or approach consistent with the First Contact logic and methodology, where research has been added and the steps described leading up to the first meeting have been emphasized.

**Figure 2** The Revised Consultative Selling Process



**I am a salesperson, too. I am out there.**

What the customer thinks is, in fact, vital for our sales success. In a normal sales course, there is no section devoted to understanding the customer at all, it's simply assumed. They just start, assuming lots; they assume you are a rep and you are going to flog a couple of cases of Coke®, that you don't need to know too much about that outlet, the shop owner, past sales, etc.

**But that's absolutely rubbish!**

I knew before it was rubbish, but I have recently been selling again and have been reminded of just how off-target this approach is.

I am currently working to help one of my clients develop a better route distribution model, as part of that study I have made over 650 sales calls myself. I've been out "repping." Each Monday, I've been personally installing cooling equipment, I've been stocking the fridges, delivering the product, dealing with cash, merchandising, and installing signage, the whole bit!

This "in market university" I have put myself through, reinforced what I already knew, but had let slip from my day-to-day behavior. "Start with understanding your target customer."

In the instance where you have understanding, you are in a much better position to generate trust. I argue the selling cycle should start with research. Today, research in this context is much easier. You have the ability to use many different data sources at your disposal to assist the customer.

They include:

- The Net (company reports, etc.)
- The sales history of the outlet
- The market share data of the brands being sold
- The profit story vs. the competition

Given my hard earned lessons, *First Contact* focuses on customer research as an initial method of generating the information necessary to deliver the understanding that can create a competitive advantage. If your client tells you he uses your company because "you understand my business," then you win.

## **THE SCOPE OF FIRST CONTACT**

There are two parts to the process. There are two categories of activity for securing a meeting. Preparing for the call is the first half, and secondly the call itself follows. If you complete the first half diligently, the second half will be much easier to execute, as the call itself relies for content on the work undertaken in the preparation phase.

## First, preparing for the call

Think of the call as the tip of the iceberg and preparing for the call as what's underwater. As with icebergs, we all know a lot more is going on below the waves. Appropriately, we should spend a corresponding amount of effort and time looking at what you do before you hit the call button.

Unlike almost all telephone calls we make the new business call is a result of a deliberate process that I will reveal, and it begins by transporting yourself into the shoes of the target.

If you are able to metaphorically stand in the shoes of the target, you will be able to feel and understand the same influences s/he is influenced by, you will feel the pressures that s/he is under. Importantly, you will have a clear perspective as to how you can optimize your impact via the way you approach the customer. The enhanced confidence you get from your comprehension of the customer's issues will let you tailor the product offerings allowing you to become a much more successful salesperson.

How do you start to get into the customer's mindset?

To get into the customer's shoes, we need to become a little bit more professional. We must use research as our tool or key. We start by researching who the target might likely be, and what s/he might be looking for. Then, we can start applying what we have learned from our research and begin to refine the scope of our work.

We also look inwardly to understand the "Features vs. Benefits" of what we are trying to sell, and how important they are to the proposed targets and assessing how the benefits will be to constructing something as seemingly simple as our opening statement. We need to strive to make this statement claim expertise and craft it so that it is remarkable, because we want people within the target company to comment to each other as to the promise you have delivered.

I look at the physical environment of making calls, creating the notion of work zones and phone zones.

We look at how to develop a "Snapshot Proposition" that delivers the benefits in a **remarkable** fashion. When the customer puts the phone down, he should turn around and say to someone nearby, "*You know, these guys from XXXX, you know what they told me? They told me 'they could service all the equipment in two weeks.'*" The customer

is off talking about your claim, remarking favorably about your offer. We need to start thinking about the way we approach these customers, so that it's genuinely remarkable.

## **Second, making the call**

In later chapters, we look at how to get our target in discussion with us and at what you do once you have pressed the call button.

“**Gatekeepers**” is a topic of great interest. I have developed a number of ways to outmaneuver the gatekeeper, including some tactics for maneuvering through organizations and the correct use of both the phone and your body during a call.

All of which is aimed at looking at the process that you should follow.

1. Let's focus on the customer problem.
2. Prepare to sway them by delivering products and/or solutions to their problems; not to your boss' problems or to your problems.
3. Ask for the meeting.

Ninety-five percent of the work is performed **before** you make the call.

If you have the right introduction, you will elicit interest from the prospect and the AIDA model will begin to operate.

### **Change. Embrace it!**

Change is inevitable, it's everywhere and it's uncomfortable. We have to unlearn and relearn.

The question is how will you respond to the competition getting better at selling over time?

Let's be proactive with change; let's shape the future we want! I recognize change is not easy when forced upon us. But if there is a reason and the benefits are seen to accrue, then change is more readily acceptable. It's not about simply learning to cope with change but rather about using the dynamic situation to make improvements.

I do not ask people to learn to love change because I know from experience that deliberately making things change is frightening, uncomfortable, and full of the possibility of failure. Just letting change happen is akin to watching Rome burn. Businesses are outplayed by change and paradigm transformation all the time. A change

in management style somewhere between Nero and Augustus Caesar is desirable, where change is welcomed but also recognized as disconcerting.

Let's change the way we approach winning new business and take the process and hard-earned skills of advertising communications and apply them to winning new business more successfully. That's a change worth making. First Contact needs a change champion; it's a systematic approach for creating success.

