Better Appointments With Better Scripting

Gail B. Goodman

Our discussion today will be on how to write a better script for a call to a new prospect. As a financial professional, you are dependent upon getting new clients into your practice. We will address the various ways you find a new prospect and then how you write a script for your first appointment with them. The way that you market to create the lead has everything to do with how to write the script to set that appointment. What we’ll do is break down the appointment-setting phone call to better understand how to build a script that will be more effective. By understanding how every appointment-setting script is structured, you will be able to write all of the scripts you will need. I will also give examples of the types of leads that you probably call.

The most important message you can learn about scripting is that the first appointment-setting script is about the relationship. I am often asked, “How do you write a script for such-and-such person?” and the first question back is “How do you know this person? How did you get the lead?”

Let’s first look at how you make a sale and how the first appointment with a new prospect is part of this process. We need to agree on what you are trying to do on the phone. I sometimes think that you possibly mix up exactly where you are with this prospect in your choice of words. For example, when you choose to say phrases such as “I’d like to help you to . . .,” you are implying that you are the prospect’s financial advisor, and if you have not gotten agreement to that, you may be killing the chance for the first appointment.

Let’s examine the goal of the first appointment. Every sale has to have the following steps:

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Two, Lead. A lead is a name, hopefully more.

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Three, you then get on the Phone to call this person so that you can
Four, set an Appointment. Once you get inside the door and create rapport, you get into
Five, the Fact Find. Then you are in the sales process (which we won’t be addressing here).

Of course, if all goes well, you make money.
In order to understand the phone part of this process, it's important to clearly define an appointment. We’ll agree that an appointment is a designated time, date, and place to meet face-to-face, with the purpose of deciding whether or not you and the prospect want to have a new relationship or start a relationship, a relationship in which you are the financial advisor and the prospect is the client.

This is a critical part of understanding the phone call to the prospect. If you have already set up the potential for this relationship because you had some kind of conversation (for example, at a networking or social event) where both of you left that conversation knowing you are going to meet, then the phone call WILL NOT follow the scripting we are covering today. The essence of that script will be one sentence: “Hi, this is Gail. I’ve got my calendar in front of me. What’s best for you—this week or next?”

When you use the flowchart, please understand that your marketing efforts (whether they are seminars, canvassing, trade shows, referrals, or whatever) are going to affect what the content of your script will be. And the most important thing to remember is that the other person has not yet decided he or she wants a professional relationship with you. So you cannot use your sales words, that is, words that imply you are going to “help” them, when the prospect hasn’t yet decided if he or she wants a professional relationship with you. There is a tendency to really jump the gun by assuming that the prospect has already made the decision to do business with you.

Call Reluctance

There are many managers and trainers who believe there is such a thing as “call reluctance.” But there isn’t. I’ve spent 20-plus years of my life trying to figure out why the people in my classes won’t get on the phone.

And I’ve discovered that there are a couple of things that are true. I find that most financial professionals share four very important traits:

1. The first trait is that they are smart.
2. The second trait is that they are outgoing. They’re very people-oriented and social. They tend to be really good with other people, and they like to be with people. They’re not involved with machines; they’re not involved with the nonhuman environment. People in sales love to be with other people.
3. The third thing I know is true about them is that they’re verbal. They’re talkers! They like to talk and they tend to be better at talking than a lot of other people. They are the most verbally adept folks out there.
4. The fourth trait is that salespeople who are commissioned tend to have a history of success and be ambitious to be successful. Most of the people I train are in the financial services business, and I work with a lot of recruiters. They all tell me that even a young candidate must have a history of success in his or her endeavors.

So we can summarize the financial services professional as a good, smart talker. And if you put these people on a phone, and they think they are going to sound like blubbing idiots, they are not going to do it. It’s very hard for people to do anything that doesn’t match their self-image. People will not do an activity that is in conflict with their self-image. So if you have a verbally adept, smart person who feels that he or she is sounding stupid and tripping over words on the phone, that person is not going to do it.

I consider this a training opportunity. When people don’t feel that they are properly trained or are going to sound silly on the phone, it increases their anxiety. And when you’re anxious, you can’t be eloquent. So here you have a deadly combination of smart, outgoing, talkative people feeling like they are blubbing idiots. The only cure for call reluctance is to provide people with a sense of competence (which increases their confidence) by providing proper phone training.

Again, I don’t believe that there is such a thing as call reluctance. I feel that there are a lot of smart, talkative, outgoing salespeople who are anxious about the phone, need to be trained, need to practice, and also need to be fed the words. There isn’t a single professional athlete who would go out into a field of any athletic play without being trained, without knowing what he or she is doing, without practicing, and without having a coach. So having all those things in place changes the athlete’s experience. How do I know? Because I have been the coach. I have helped people prepare; I give them scripts and they go running to the phones. Even if they don’t make the appointments, they feel that they sounded better, and their confidence goes up.

Am I a motivational speaker? No. I am a trainer, and I feel that when people are trained they are naturally motivated toward success. What happens after my classes is that people go, “Aha! That’s what I’m supposed to be saying,” and they are more willing to get on the phone.

Scripting Versus Ad-Libbing

Let’s start out by discussing why we all hate scripts. Here’s what people say when I ask them, “Why don’t you like the scripts you’ve been given by your company?”
• They sound robotic.
• I feel like I’m reading.
• I sound like I’m reading.
• It doesn’t sound like me.
• It’s confining.
• I can’t respond to the client the way I want to.
• The message may not fit the client.
• I sound like a telemarketer.

All those things are true. But now let’s compare scripting to ad-libbing. What are the dangers of ad-libbing?
• You say “um” and “er” because you are thinking.
• You sound unprofessional.
• You might talk too much.
• You go out on tangents that don’t relate to getting an appointment.
• You miss the point of the call.
• You might be boring.

We can agree that ad-libbing can be dangerous, but an interesting truth to remember about ad-libbing is that you may, in fact, say something brilliant! But because you ad-libbed, you cannot capture the brilliant verbiage and then repeat it. By ad-libbing, you may be losing the best words you accidentally say because they were not written down.

So we have to find a happy medium between ad-libbing, going on tangents, just saying whatever comes to your mind, and being so confined by a script that you sound like a robot that is spitting out words you would never use.

The motto for good scripting is “Planned, not canned.”
You need to know what you are going to say, and yet you must be able to say something that fits your personality—and matches what you need to say to that particular prospect. Let’s talk about how to construct a script and yet put your own personality into it. It’s important to think in terms of good phrases instead of learning scripts by heart. I am not a big fan of memorizing a script unless you can memorize it but say it out loud in a natural way. Most people do a whole lot better by listing the key phrases in the script and then using their natural talking ability to get their message across.

**Mr. Potato Head**
There are seven components in a good phone script. In thinking about scripting, I want you to think of the game Mr. Potato Head. Mr. Potato Head is great because it teaches children the structure of the face, but it also teaches them that there are options. Eyes can be blue or green or brown, but eyes always go in the same place on a face. If you look at a room of people, all of the faces are structured the same, but there’s variety in the structure. That philosophy applies well to scripting. All scripts have the same structure, but within that structure there is room for personalizing.

The components stay the same, but as with most things, there is one exception. One element moves depending on certain factors, and I will explain which one that is and why. For each of these components, we will give it a name and share the options you can use. This will give you a good structure to work with, but you will be allowed to plug in your own personal style.

**Components of a Phone Script**
A good phone script includes seven components. Each of these seven components appears in the same order in all of your phone calls—with one exception. For each of them, there are options you can use to allow for your own verbal style.

The seven parts of a script are A, B, C, D, E, F, and G. We will go through each slowly so that you can see how they work together, how you can personalize each one, and how you have to change certain components so that you are making sense to the type of prospect you are calling.

Remember some key things about scripting: One, dumb down. All of you use so many big, polysyllabic financial words you are in love with, but those are not as good to use on the phone as the simpler words. Two, only use concepts that would be readily understood by a 14-year-old, American-born child who has grown up in our culture. These teenagers are pretty sophisticated, but they don’t go around talking about “wealth accumulation”; they would better understand “saving money.” On the phone, these long-winded phrases don’t work well.

What is the purpose of the call? To get in front of the prospect and have an initial appointment whereby you are making the decision to start a relationship or, for those who already know you, add a new relationship. And in this relationship, you are the financial advisor and he or she is the client. If you forget what the purpose of the call is, then you will use all kinds of sales words that don’t belong.

Let’s go through the components:

**A is your greeting.**
What is the first thing you say when you reach the prospect? “Hello,” “Hi,” “Good morning,” Good afternoon,” or “Good evening.” Do not to use any slang words or phrases. Always adhere to a professional manner of speaking when using the phone. Certain parts of the country have local greetings that may be used when appropriate. “Hey” is used
in the Mid-Atlantic states (Maryland, Virginia, and North and South Carolina) but might be inappropriate in other areas of the country.

**B is when you introduce yourself.**

There are four ways to introduce yourself. The most popular is to say, “This is ________.” The second is simply to say, “I’m ________.” The third way, for people you know very well, is to say, “It’s ________.” Avoid introducing yourself by saying, “My name is ________,” which is the fourth possible introduction. This introduction merely increases the initial tension.

**C is your company.**

This is the component that is the “moveable object.” The position of C is dependent on the D (which we’ll get to shortly). You have to get out of the habit of saying the first three components as if they were glued together: “Hi-this-is-Gail-Goodman-with-ABC-Financial” is a bad habit. You are going to separate your company name from your name because you may, in fact, mention your company after you say the D.

For the C, you might say, “with ABC Financial” or “from ABC Financial,” or when you call orphan policyholders from your company you would add “I’m calling from the Atlanta office of ABC Financial.” Let’s get to the D quickly so that you can understand why you may eliminate or move the name of your company in the script.

**D is called the “connector.”**

The connector, which is the most important component in your phone script, should be two sentences that (1) reiterate your relationship with the prospect, that is, how he or she knows you and (2) state the motivation for your call. (A phrase such as “The reason for my call is…” belongs in this part of the script.) This step identifies your connection with the prospect. There are three different types of Ds. They are in the order of easiest to hardest. I call them D1, D2, and D3. Luckily, there are more types of D1 leads than there are D3 leads.

_A good script plus an easy lead_ is the best way to lower your time on the phone each week but get more appointments. People often throw too much onto the phone call and the scripting in order to get enough appointments per week, but it has as much to do with your marketing as it does with the content of your script. Having said that, the better the script, the better the outcome. If you don’t write a really, really good D statement, you will lose the prospect’s attention immediately. And considering the fact that the entire script runs about 35 to 40 seconds, you are losing the prospect in the first half if you don’t write a D that tells him or her why you are on the phone.

Let’s go through the three types of Ds. For each of them, I will show you how we can change the position of C, your company name.

1. **D1s are called a “memory jog.”** This is for people you’ve already met at least once prior to making the phone call. These prospects will be the easiest category of leads with whom to make appointments. The following are the prospects in D1: friends and family, current clients, former coworkers and clients, neighbors, vendors; and also people you know from social events, your hobbies, alumni groups, networking, charities, politics, civic and volunteer groups, seminars, expos, fairs, shows, canvassing, and personal observation.

For all prospects in the D1 category, except your clients, this is one of the occasions in which you will want to put your company name _after the D_. So the first four components of your script would be A, then B, then D, and last C. For friends and family and clients you are close to, you will not mention your company name at all since these people _know_ the company you work for and it will sound funny to say, “Hi, Mom, it’s your daughter Gail calling from ABC Financial.” The compliance companies understand that you will not mention your company name at all in the few cases when you call really close relatives and clients.

Here’s an example of how you will put the C at the end of the D story:

Hi, this is Gail Goodman [A, B]. We met at the women’s entrepreneurial event last week and talked about how you were finding the cost of your benefit program to be the biggest problem for your bottom line [D]. You may recall that I’m an advisor with [name of your company] [C], and we have a lot of information on how you can approach this challenge differently [D].

Or if you are reaching out to friends and family:

Hello, this is ___________. As you probably know, I am a financial professional with [name of company] for more than ten years, and in all
that time, I’ve never called you on a professional basis. I am rectifying that with this phone call. I would like to position myself as a financial resource to you.

Notice that saying the company name is not required when calling your family.

2. D2s are one of three types of prospects: referrals, orphan policyholders of your company, or Web leads. Web leads are prospects who went to your company’s website and filled out a form indicating they wanted to talk to a consultant about a specific concept or product.

For a referral, follow the same script sequence as with prospects in the memory jog approach: parts A, B, D, and then part C. Remember, a referral, by definition, does not know you. So to lower the tension, you must mention the referrer, whom the prospect will recognize, as soon as possible. Here is how you would conduct a referral call where a third party is the connector between you and a prospect you have never met:

Hi, this is Gail Goodman. Your friend Jane Smith suggested that I give you a call. Recently, I did some great work with her, and she thought you might be interested in having me position myself as a financial resource to you as I did with her. I am with ABC Financial.

With an orphan lead or Web lead, the order of the script is parts A, B, C, and then D. This is because the company name is recognizable to the prospect and will be a positive when you make the call.

3. D3s are three different types of leads: mail responders (but not people who know you, as they are always in the D1 category), Internet-purchased leads (such as quotes for life insurance), and cold calls. These are by far the hardest leads for financial professionals. Because this is a relationship-based business, it is harder to write a good connector D sentence for these types of leads because you do not have a strong relationship. Internet leads are people who are shopping, and you will probably end up in a price war with other companies.

Cold calling is the hardest to do of all the leads you may consider. You don’t know the person, and he or she doesn’t know you and has no idea why you are calling. It is very hard to write a D statement for this type of lead when you can’t start with a relationship sentence. The best you can do is to say that you specialize in people like them and so you are reaching out to them as a way of starting a relationship.

Hi, this is Gail Goodman with ABC Financial, and I specialize in working with [individuals in the prospect’s profession or business]. I’ve been successful in showing people like you ideas for improving their employee benefits protection.

E is the offering.

Remember, when you are setting the initial appointment, you are offering information and your expertise. This is the first time in the script when you will mention the idea of an appointment. However, you have to be careful because this is where your “selling monster” tries to take over the phone call. Although the offering seems simple, it actually has three distinct parts.

The first part of the sentence is your “invitational verb,” where you are mentioning the idea of an appointment for the first time. Examples: get together, meet, visit, see you, sit down with, spend some time with, schedule, have coffee.

The second verb tells the prospect what you are going to do when you get together. Examples: talk, discuss, share, show, explore, provide, reassess, chat.

The third and final part of the E statement is a noun that completes the sentence. Examples: options, ideas, concepts, techniques, strategies, scope of the work I do, opportunities.
An example of an E statement would be the following:

I'd like to find a time when we can sit down and I can share with you the total scope of the work that I do. I'd like to schedule an appointment where we can talk about options that you have for your benefit program at ING Company. I think we should set a time to explore different techniques that can . . .

**F is the benefit.**

A benefit statement is the positive, emotional experience the clients will achieve if they meet with you. The best scripts are “artfully vague” so that you don’t fall into your selling monster language. Here is an example of the E portion plus the F benefit together:

I’d like to find a time when we can sit down and I can share with you the total scope of the work that I do. That way, you can use me and all the resources I have at my disposal any way that makes you feel the most comfortable.

**G is when you finally get to ask for an appointment.**

In parts A though F of the script, you introduced yourself and your company, stated the reason for your call, and shared the benefit of an appointment. Now you are ready to ask for the appointment.

Most of us have been trained to use the “alternative choice close,” which is still a good idea. But I may need to update you on how to do this. It is not a good idea to ask, at the end of a 30-second script, “Is Tuesday at 2:45 good or would Friday at 10:30 be better?” In 2011, I can assure you that this will be heard in a negative way. You want to continue to apply the strategy of not being too specific because you may turn off the prospect at any time. To update your alternative choice close, stick to large concepts of time and keep it vague. Examples: “In general, what is the least hectic time for you, days or evenings?” or “What is the least hectic time of your day, before or after lunch?” or “What would be easier for you, this week or next?”

Here is what a full script sounds like:

Hi, this is Gail, and I’m calling for two reasons [A & B]. I want to let you know that I started a career as an agent with ABC Financial, and I was asked to list the people that I am closest to and care the most about, and of course you were on the top of my list. I’d like to position myself as an additional financial resource to you . . . [C & D] and set up a time when we can get together so that I can show you the total scope of the work that I do [E]. That way, you can use me and all the resources I have at ABC Financial in any way that makes you feel the most comfortable [F]. I know that even with Michelle away at college you are still very busy, so what is the least hectic time for you generally, days or evenings [G]?

**Summary**

In conclusion, you want to remember that all scripts have the same components—A, B, C, D, E, F, and G—and that you have to be able to customize them for different groups of leads. You don’t have to change every word of every script for each person, and there will be scripts that can be adapted to a large variety of people. But the two parts that have to be thought out are these:

1. Where does the C, company name, go?
2. What is my D relationship sentence and motivation for my call? The motivation for the call is NOT to sell them something.

Remember to keep your selling monster in the closet with the door locked. Don’t let the sales words come out of your mouth.

And remember that every prospect is thinking the same three questions when he or she hears the phone ring: “Who is it? What do they want? and How can I end this call if I don’t like it?”