

# The Secret to Prospecting: Making Contact

By Russ McNeil

Applying the principles of prospecting requires conversation. Naturally, for the conversation to occur, someone has to speak first. Since you're the one with something to share, you go first. Maybe you're thinking, "That's easier said than done!" Simply break down the process into these steps: make a positive first impression, classify the target, make eye contact, and have an opening line or two ready to use.

## Step #1 — Make a Positive First Impression

For a few reps, starting conversation with strangers will be easy, maybe even fun. For many, though, it will be uncomfortable. **Realize that while most people are not comfortable initiating conversation, they do enjoy participating in it.** In other words, prospects will be glad to talk to you if you speak first. Try it!

But before you initiate contact, it helps to be prepared so that you will make a positive first impression. Your demeanor will set the tone of the encounter. Here are a few points to keep in mind so the first impression you make is the best possible one. Remember, actions – even unintentional ones – can speak louder than words.

- Be constantly aware of your facial expressions, or the attitude you are "wearing" on your face. *Look upbeat without overdoing it.*
- Pay attention to the way you carry yourself and walk with purpose.
- Speak clearly and with confidence. *Absolutely no mumbling or fast-talking allowed.*

Remember, if you come across as nervous by talking too fast or slumping over instead standing up straight, it may cause the prospect to keep his guard up. Nervousness will subside with practice, so give yourself time to grow with the process.

## Step #2 — Classify the Target

As you prospect strangers, you will encounter two types of prospects: stationary targets and moving targets. **Proper prospecting is always a win-win proposition.** A stationary target is a prospect that you know you can have access to on a regular basis, probably because of his location or job. For example, the person running a dry cleaner that you frequent is a stationary target. A moving target is a prospect that you meet in passing or may cross paths with only once. A person on the opposite side of a gas pump you are using is a moving target.

## Step #3 — Make Eye Contact

In some scenarios, especially with moving targets, the moment of eye contact is the best time to initiate a conversation. **It isn't imperative that you wait for eye contact, but when eye contact does occur, it is the most natural time to start.** If you look at each other and no one speaks, you might find it awkward to strike up a conversation later.

## Step #4 — Opening Lines

An opening line is a question or statement designed to initiate conversation. The purpose of an opening line is merely to get a conversation started. **Because of the need to engage quickly, effective opening lines are essential with moving targets.** Below are a few examples of opening lines and responses in action.

- **Scenario 1:** You're in a casual restaurant and at the table next to you, a person is reading the newspaper. You start by asking, "Is there any good news in there?" Think of this interest as a test probe, because you will have a good idea by his answer whether or not the prospect is interested in further conversation.
- **Scenario 2:** At a coffee shop mid-morning on a weekday, you run into a well-groomed, but casually dressed, man. He may be reading *The Wall Street Journal*, but isn't engaged in work at that time. Perhaps he's an executive enjoying a day off. You begin with, "I need your job!" He might reply with something like, "Why's that?" Then you follow with, "Are you kidding? Relaxed and casual on a weekday. What's your secret?" That will likely get a conversation going.

Occasionally, the prospect will beat you to the punch and speak to you before you speak to him. These people are literally asking to be prospected, so don't disappoint them. Be sure to have some responses ready to a general conversation starter such as, "How's it goin'?" Here are a few favorites that keep the ball rolling: "If I was any better, I'd have to charge admission just to say hello!" Or maybe try, "If I was any better, you wouldn't be able to stand it! The question is how are you doing?"

**The key is to get the prospect to engage in conversation.** Making a positive first impression, classifying the target, making eye contact, and having a few opening lines ready are the tools to help you accomplish your prospecting mission. Be patient with yourself and remember you're just getting started.

Russ McNeil has honed the skill of prospecting to a razor edge. Known as the "Guru of the Six-Foot Rule," Russ puts into practical terms the step-by-step process to success in prospecting. To learn more the concepts that achieve prospecting results, order Russ's book, *Principles of Prospecting Magic*, today at [www.pauljmeyer.com](http://www.pauljmeyer.com).

