

TECH SALES PLAYBOOK

# The Cold Calling + Mock Call Playbook

Pass the Mock Cold Call. Book More Meetings.  
Scripts, Openers, Objection Handlers, and Practice Drills.

[TechSalesPlaybook.com](https://TechSalesPlaybook.com)

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# Chapter 1: The Promise

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## What This Playbook Will Help You Do

This is a field manual for two pressure-cooked moments in sales: the mock cold call interview standing between you and the job, and the real dial tone standing between you and your quota.

Work through the chapters and you will:

- 1. Pass the mock cold call interview.** Know what hiring managers score on -- the six-category rubric covering opener, discovery, objection handling, close, tone, and coachability -- and rehearse each component until it is automatic under pressure.
- 2. Handle any objection without panicking.** Not interested. No budget. Send me info. We already have a vendor. Understand the psychology behind each pushback and use reframe frameworks to keep conversations alive.
- 3. Open with confidence in ten seconds.** Eighty percent of cold calls die in the first twenty seconds. Know which openers work ("How have you been?" at 10% success) and which kill you ("Did I catch you at a bad time?" at 0.9%), and deliver yours like a peer, not a beggar.
- 4. Book more meetings on live calls.** Top performers connect at 13.3% versus the average 5.4% and book at 3x the rate of average reps. The gap is technique and preparation. You will have the system.
- 5. Ace the redo test.** The live coaching exercise is the single biggest eliminator in SDR interviews. A poor redo is automatic disqualification regardless of first attempt. Learn to take feedback, implement it visibly, and signal the coachability that hiring managers rank as their top hiring signal.
- 6. Build a practice system that compounds.** Confidence is not the absence of fear; it is the willingness to proceed with it. Leave with a pre-call routine, daily drill structure, and feedback loop that makes every call -- good or bad -- an input for the next one.

## Who This Is For

**The candidate panicking about the role-play.** Interview in three days and you just learned there is a mock cold call. You do not know the scenario, the scoring, or why they do a redo. Chapters 2-8 and 14-16 are your fast path.

**The new SDR who needs to book meetings now.** On the job, quota clock ticking, making dials but not having conversations -- or having conversations that end with no meeting. Chapters 9-13 give you the live-call system top performers use.

**The current SDR with flat connect rates.** Dialing but not connecting, connecting but not engaging, engaging but not closing. The rubrics and drills here will isolate your gaps and fix them.

**Anyone who keeps failing the mock call.** Done the interview before, got feedback, did not get the offer. Tired of "great energy, not the right fit." This playbook defines right, wrong, and exceptional so you stop guessing and start passing.

## How to Use This Playbook

Pick the track that matches your situation -- or run both if interviewing while improving live calls.

**Interview Track (Chapters 2-8, 14-16):** For candidates preparing for the mock cold call interview. Covers interview structure, scoring rubrics, company research, opener craft, objection handling under pressure, the redo, the self-assessment, and reverse-interview questions.

**Job Track (Chapters 9-13):** For SDRs in-seat who need to book meetings. Builds your live cold call system: pre-call block routine, the opener that earns twenty-seven seconds, discovery questions that surface pain, objection frameworks, the calendar close, and the daily rhythm that compounds into quota attainment.

## 7-Day Prep Plan

Day	Interview Track	Job Track
1	Read Chapters 2-3. Research the company: website, ICP, three value props, recent news.	Read Chapter 9. Audit last 10 calls. Count talk-to-listen ratio; note where each call died.
2	Read Chapter 4. Draft your 60-90 second pitch. Write 4-6 qualifying questions for the buyer persona.	Read Chapter 10. A/B test two openers -- "How have you been?" vs. current, 20 dials each.

3	Read Chapters 5-6. Build objection cheat sheet for 7 most common pushbacks. Record yourself handling each.	Read Chapter 11. Run top 3 objections through reframe frameworks. Record responses.
4	Read Chapter 7. Practice the redo: partner gives 3 feedback points, implement all 3 on attempt two.	Read Chapter 12. Practice calendar close on every call -- specific day, time, and agenda.
5	Read Chapter 8. Rehearse self-assessment script. Practice taking notes during feedback.	Read Chapter 13. Build daily call block routine. Protect sacred windows: 10-11:30 AM and 2-3:30 PM.
6	Read Chapters 14-16. Run 3 full mock interviews: role-play, feedback, redo, debrief, reverse questions.	Run a full call block with the new system. Record calls. Note one improvement and one win.
7	Do one final mock cold call cold -- no prep, realistic. Review notes. Sleep 7+ hours.	Review numbers: dials, conversations, meetings, conversion rate. Compare to Day 1 baseline. Adjust one variable.

**One rule for both tracks:** do the drills out loud. Reading about cold calling is not preparation. Speaking the words, hearing your voice, recovering from stumps -- that is preparation. Start on Day 1, not the day of your interview or performance review.

The playbook gives you the frameworks. The speaking is what makes them yours.

## 2. How Mock Cold Calls Actually Work

Most candidates walk into a mock cold call interview with the same anxious question: *What exactly are they going to throw at me?* The answer, thankfully, is more predictable than you think. Across hundreds of tech companies, mock cold calls follow a nearly identical three-part structure, draw from a small library of scenario types, and score candidates against rubrics that have become industry-standard. Understanding the machinery before you step into it doesn't just calm your nerves---it gives you a tactical advantage that most candidates never bother to acquire.

This chapter is your field manual. By the end, you'll know the exact sequence of events, the six scenarios interviewers recycle, the scoring rubrics that determine your fate, why the redo test is the single biggest make-or-break moment, and the preparation checklist that separates candidates who survive from candidates who advance.

### 2.1 The Mock Cold Call Format

#### 2.1.1 Three-Part Structure: Role-Play → Feedback/Redo → Reverse Interview

Every mock cold call interview, regardless of company size or industry, follows the same three-act structure. The total session runs 30--60 minutes, but the role-play itself---the part that actually gets scored---is compressed into 5--10 minutes of high-stakes performance.

##### Part 1: The Role-Play (5--10 minutes)

The interviewer sets the scene in about thirty seconds: "You're an SDR at a cloud security company. You're calling Jordan, an IT Infrastructure Manager at a mid-sized software firm. Your goal is to schedule a demo." Then the clock starts. You open, navigate discovery, handle objections, and attempt to close---all while the interviewer stays in character, throwing curated resistance at specific moments. This is not a conversation. It's a compressed skills assessment disguised as a conversation.

##### Part 2: Feedback and the Redo (5--15 minutes)

The role-play ends. The interviewer asks the first trap question: *"How do you think you did?"* This is not small talk. It is a deliberate test of self-awareness, one of the strongest predictors of sales success. Your answer here is scored.

After your self-assessment, the interviewer delivers 2--3 pieces of specific, actionable feedback---for example, "You opened with a question before earning the right to ask it" or "You sped up after I objected; that's when you should slow down." Then comes the redo: same scenario, same objections, with the explicit instruction to apply the feedback. This is where coachable candidates separate themselves from everyone else.

##### Part 3: The Reverse Interview (5--10 minutes)

You get to ask questions. This is not a formality. Hiring managers score the quality of your questions---candidates who ask what the product does, how big the company is, or anything answerable by thirty seconds on Google signal poor preparation and curiosity. Candidates who ask about the sales tech stack, how top performers stand out, or what the first 90 days look like signal that they think like sellers.

#### 2.1.2 Six Scenarios Interviewers Actually Use

Interviewers don't invent new scenarios for every candidate. They draw from a standard library of six. Know them in advance, and you can prepare frameworks rather than scripts.

Scenario	What It Tests	The Prospect's Mindset
<b>Standard Cold Call (Outbound)</b>	Core skills: opener, discovery, close, objection handling	Never heard of you. Goal is to get off the phone.
<b>Gatekeeper</b>	Professional navigation, respect for process, creative persistence	"I screen calls. It's my job to say no."
<b>Objection-Heavy</b>	Resilience, reframing skill, refusal to argue	Will throw "not interested," "no budget," "send me info" in rapid succession.
<b>Skeptical / Distracted</b>	Composure, tone reading, ability to adapt pace and approach	Annoyed, multitasking, terse. Testing if you panic.
<b>Competitor Lock-In</b>	Differentiation without trashing competitors, curiosity about current solution	"We're already using [Vendor X]. Happy enough."

<b>Warm Call / Inbound Lead</b>	Qualification discipline, not getting lazy because the prospect knows you	Downloaded something, attended a webinar. Still needs to be sold.
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Each scenario is designed to stress-test one or two competencies. The standard cold call is your baseline. The objection-heavy scenario is where most candidates crumble because they try to overcome every objection instead of acknowledging and pivoting. The skeptical prospect reveals who can read tone and adjust in real time. The competitor lock-in separates reps who can ask intelligent questions about the incumbent from reps who bad-mouth the competition.

The warm call scenario is the most deceptively difficult. Candidates relax because the prospect already has some familiarity--and then they skip discovery, assume interest, and fail to qualify. A warm lead still needs to be sold. Treat it like a cold call with a slightly shorter opener.

## 2.2 What Hiring Managers Actually Score

### 2.2.1 The 100-Point Rubric: The Industry Standard

The most widely adopted scoring framework comes from Prospeo, a sales training platform whose 100-point rubric has been validated across thousands of mock cold call interviews. It breaks down as follows:

Category	Points	What "Good" Looks Like	What "Exceptional" Looks Like
<b>Opener</b>	15	Permission-based, under 10 seconds, earns time to continue	Pattern interrupt + stated reason for calling + immediate relevance hook tied to a real signal
<b>Discovery Questions</b>	25	Role-specific, open-ended, builds on the prospect's previous answers	Each question telescopes from the last; surfaces pain the prospect hadn't articulated
<b>Objection Handling</b>	20	Acknowledges the objection, reframes toward pain, doesn't argue	Turns the objection into an opportunity to learn more about the prospect's situation
<b>Close / Next Steps</b>	15	Specific ask with a proposed date and time	Calendar close with exact day, time, and a clear agenda for the meeting
<b>Tone &amp; Rapport</b>	15	Conversational, confident, not robotic or rushed	Sounds like a peer having a business conversation; pace adapts to the prospect's energy
<b>Coachability</b>	10	Applies feedback on the redo, asks clarifying questions before attempting	Implements 2--3 changes with visible improvement; explicitly references feedback during the redo
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>		

#### Scoring Thresholds:

- **85+:** Strong candidate---ready for live calls with minimal ramp
- **70--84:** Solid foundation with targeted gaps to address
- **Below 70:** Fundamental issues that need significant work before going live

Two categories carry nearly half the total weight: Discovery Questions (25%) and Objection Handling (20%). Together they account for 45 points. This is not an accident. Hiring managers have learned that a rep who can ask questions that surface real pain and handle resistance without becoming defensive will figure everything else out. A rep with a perfect opener who can't discovery-handle will book meetings that go nowhere.

### 2.2.2 Three Complete Scorecards from Leading Platforms

Different companies use different rubrics depending on what they prioritize. Below are the three most commonly referenced scorecards in tech SDR hiring.

#### Scorecard 1: TalentSprout Behavioral Rubric (1--5 Scale)

Competency	1 -- Needs Work	3 -- Competent	5 -- Exceptional
<b>Communication</b>	Rambling, vague, hard to follow	Clear, concise, structured responses	Crisp, persuasive, commands attention without dominating

<b>Prospecting</b>	Tactical only; no system or strategy	Structured approach with consistent methodology	Data-driven strategist who iterates based on metrics
<b>Objection Handling</b>	Defensive or dismissive	Neutral, acknowledges without emotion	Consultative; reframes objections as exploration
<b>Resilience</b>	Generic answers with no specifics	Self-aware about failures and recovery	Growth-focused with specific, quantified comeback stories
<b>Curiosity / Team Fit</b>	Shallow interest; asks no questions	Engaged, asks relevant questions	Learner mindset; demonstrates self-directed improvement

Passing guideline: Average score  $\geq 3$  with at least one 4+ in Communication or Prospecting.

### Scorecard 2: Meritt.io Coachability Scoring Matrix (17-Point Scale)

This is the most predictive and the most brutal. Meritt.io analyzed 1,000+ SDR interviews and built a matrix specifically around coachability---the single trait most correlated with long-term SDR success.

Question / Exercise	Max Points	What Strong Sounds Like
<b>Q1: Changed approach after receiving feedback</b>	3	Specific situation with clear before/after and measurable improvement
<b>Q2: Walk through your worst sales call</b>	3	Brutally honest self-assessment, owns mistakes, identifies clear learning
<b>Q3: Live coaching exercise (Initial role-play)</b>	5	N/A---this is the baseline observation of how you perform cold
<b>Q3: Live coaching exercise (Redo)</b>	5	Implements 2--3 feedback points, references feedback explicitly, asks if applied correctly
<b>Q4: Skill you are actively improving</b>	3	Specific skill with documented learning plan and measurable progress
<b>Q5: Coaching that didn't work for you</b>	3	Tried the feedback first, can articulate why it didn't fit their style/situation
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>17</b>	

### Hiring Thresholds:

- **14--17 points:** Highly Coachable---strong hire. Prioritize even if baseline skills are weaker.
- **10--13 points:** Moderately Coachable---proceed with caution. May plateau.
- **6--9 points:** Low Coachability---do not hire.
- **0--5 points:** Not Coachable---hard pass.

**Critical rule:** If a candidate scores 0--1 on the live coaching exercise redo, it is an automatic disqualification regardless of total score. No amount of experience compensates for an inability to receive and implement coaching in real time.

### Scorecard 3: Yardstick Team Mock Discovery Call Scorecard (0--4 Scale)

Competency	0	1	2	3	4
<b>Preparation</b>	Not enough info	Unprepared, no strategy evident	Basic prep, generic approach	Well-prepared, tailored to scenario	Extensively prepared, innovative angles
<b>Questioning Strategy</b>	Not enough info	Few or irrelevant questions	Basic qualifying only	Probing questions that uncover needs	Insightful questions revealing hidden opportunities
<b>Active Listening</b>	Not enough info	Interrupts or misses key information	Listens passively	Good listening with relevant follow-up	Exceptional; builds on responses to drive conversation

<b>Value Articulation</b>	Not enough info	Cannot articulate value	Generic value propositions	Tailored value aligned to expressed needs	Compelling unique value that reframes the conversation
<b>Objection Handling</b>	Not enough info	Defensive or unable to respond	Basic, surface-level responses	Effectively addresses with relevant information	Skillfully reframes objections as opportunities
<b>Next Steps / Follow-up</b>	Not enough info	Fails to establish any next step	Vague or generic next steps	Clear, mutually agreed-upon steps	Compelling action plan with genuine prospect buy-in

*Overall Recommendation:* 1 = Strong No Hire, 2 = No Hire, 3 = Hire, 4 = Strong Hire.

## 2.3 The Redo Test

### 2.3.1 Why It's the Most Predictive Exercise

The redo test is the single most predictive exercise in the entire SDR interview process. Here's why: there is nowhere to hide.

In the initial role-play, a candidate can mask weaknesses with preparation. A polished opener, a rehearsed pitch, a practiced close—all of that can be memorized. But when the interviewer stops the call, delivers specific feedback, and asks the candidate to run it again, memorization becomes useless. The candidate must process new information, adapt their behavior in real time, and demonstrate that they can actually change how they sell—not just talk about being coachable, but prove it under pressure.

Non-coachable candidates reveal themselves within 90 seconds of receiving feedback. They defend their original approach. They make surface-level changes without understanding the principle. They blame the scenario, their nerves, or the artificiality of role-play. Coachable candidates do the opposite: they implement at least two of three feedback points immediately, adjust their tone or pace meaningfully, and explicitly reference the feedback during the redo ("Like you said, let me slow down here...").

The redo follows a strict three-step sequence:

#### Step 1: Initial Role-Play (5 minutes)

Run the cold call scenario. The interviewer throws objections. The candidate performs cold.

#### Step 2: Direct Coaching (3 minutes)

The interviewer stops the exercise and delivers 2--3 specific, actionable feedback points. Example: "You opened with a question about my SDR team before earning the right. Start by stating why you're calling in one sentence. When I said we're not hiring, you tried to overcome the objection immediately. Instead, acknowledge it and ask a question. You're speaking quite fast—slow down by 20%, especially after you ask a question."

#### Step 3: Implementation Round (5 minutes)

"Let's run it again with those changes. Same scenario, same objection. Show me how you'd apply that feedback."

### 2.3.2 Automatic Disqualification Rules

Some outcomes on the redo trigger immediate rejection regardless of how well the initial role-play went:

- **Cannot implement any feedback:** Repeating the same mistakes without awareness is an instant signal that coaching this candidate will require heroic effort.
- **Defends the original approach:** "That's just not my natural style" or "I think I do better when it's a real call" are phrases that end interviews.
- **Makes surface changes without understanding:** Changing a word or two while missing the structural principle behind the feedback signals low adaptability.
- **Blames external factors:** Attributing poor performance to nerves, the artificial scenario, or having to remember too many things at once indicates a fixed mindset.

The data behind this is stark. Coachable SDRs reach full productivity 40% faster than average (8 weeks versus 12 weeks), improve their call-to-meeting conversion by 35% within 90 days, and are three times more likely to exceed quota in months six through twelve. Yet 73% of sales managers still hire based on years of experience rather than coachability. Companies that use the redo test correctly are filtering for the trait that actually predicts success.

## 2.4 Passing vs. Exceptional

Understanding the difference between a passing mock cold call and an exceptional one helps you aim for the right standard.

A **passing** mock cold call demonstrates a solid opener that earns permission to continue, 2--4 qualifying questions that reveal something about the prospect's situation, basic objection handling without defensiveness, an attempt to close with next steps, a professional tone, and willingness to accept and apply feedback on the redo. On a 1--5 scale, this translates to an average score of 3 or higher with at least one 4 in Communication or Prospecting.

An **exceptional** mock cold call is different in kind, not just degree. The opener uses a pattern interrupt that scrambles the prospect's brain in a good way. The questions build on each other telescopically---each answer informs the next question, so the conversation feels like exploration rather than interrogation. Objection handling reframes the objection as an opportunity to learn more, not as a wall to climb over. The close is a calendar close with a specific day, time, and agenda---not "let's connect sometime."

On the redo, exceptional candidates implement 2--3 pieces of feedback with visible improvement, explicitly reference the feedback during the second attempt, and ask clarifying questions about the feedback before attempting the redo. In the self-assessment, they accurately identify what went well and what didn't, with specific moments from the call. They take notes during feedback delivery. And in the reverse interview, they ask questions that show deep research and seller-thinking.

The single sentence that captures the difference: *Most candidates fail by giving a polished pitch instead of having a real conversation.*

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## 2.5 Pre-Mock Preparation Checklist

The candidates who pass mock cold calls don't wing it. They prepare systematically across three time horizons: 24--48 hours before, the day of, and the final hours.

### 24--48 Hours Before: Research and Materials

#### Company Deep-Dive

- Read the company website thoroughly: product pages, pricing, features, integrations, case studies
- Identify 3 value propositions tailored to different buyer personas
- Understand the Ideal Customer Profile: industry, company size, organizational structure
- Read recent news, funding announcements, product launches, press releases
- Study case studies to understand actual customer outcomes and metrics
- Look up current SDRs at the company on LinkedIn to understand the role and career path
- Research the interviewer's background on LinkedIn

#### Prepare Your Arsenal

- Write out 4--6 qualifying questions for the company's ICP
- Prepare responses to the 7 most common objections (not interested, no time, competitor locked in, no budget, send me info, not a priority, need to ask my boss)
- Craft your 60--90 second value pitch with a clear one-liner
- Prepare your 30/60/90 day plan
- Write out 3 STAR-format stories: a time you overcame rejection, a time you hit a target, and a time you collaborated with a team

### 2--3 Days Before: Practice

- Run 4--6 mock cold calls with a friend, coach, or AI tool
- Record yourself and review for filler words, pace, tone, and talk-to-listen ratio
- Practice the redo: have your partner give you mid-call feedback and immediately apply it
- Time your opener: it should be under 10 seconds before you earn permission to continue
- Practice closing with a specific calendar ask (exact day, time, and agenda)
- Practice the self-assessment framework: strengths, improvements, what you'd do differently

### Day-Of Preparation

- Rehearse your 2-minute personal pitch and your 60--90 second role-play intro out loud
- Print or have accessible: your outreach examples, scripts, metrics/stories one-pager
- Confirm interview time, platform, and link (or phone number and dial-in)
- Test your tech: camera, microphone, internet connection (for virtual interviews)
- Prepare a quiet, distraction-free space
- Bring: notebook, pen, printed questions for the reverse interview, water
- Dress professionally---at or above the company's dress code
- Arrive 10--15 minutes early (in-person) or join 3 minutes early (virtual)

## Mindset

- Get 7+ hours of sleep
- Avoid caffeine overload---steady energy beats jitters
- Internalize the key principle: they are not testing product knowledge; they are testing how you sell
- Expect the redo. It is not a sign you failed. It is standard procedure at every professional mock cold call interview
- Remember: the interviewer wants you to succeed. A strong candidate makes their hiring decision easier. Your job is to be that candidate.

## Mock Cold Call Format Template

For reference, here is the exact template that interviewers use to structure a 30-minute mock cold call session:

Time	Phase	Interviewer Actions
0:00--2:00	Setup	Give scenario brief, confirm candidate understands the context and goal
2:00--7:00	<b>Role-Play Part 1</b>	Play the prospect, throw 1--2 objections at natural moments, stay in character
7:00--10:00	Self-Assessment	"How do you think you did?" Listen for self-awareness, specificity, and honesty
10:00--13:00	<b>Feedback Delivery</b>	Give 2--3 specific, actionable feedback points with clear reasoning
13:00--18:00	<b>Role-Play Part 2 (Redo)</b>	Same scenario, same objections; watch for implementation of feedback
18:00--20:00	Redo Debrief	"What felt different?" Test for learning, self-awareness, and adaptation
20:00--30:00	Reverse Interview	Candidate asks questions; assess research quality and seller mindset

### Total: 30 minutes

This template is not theoretical. It is the structure used by companies ranging from seed-stage startups to major SaaS organizations. Know the flow, know what happens at each stage, and you eliminate surprise. Eliminate surprise, and you free up cognitive bandwidth to perform.

## 3. Cold Call Psychology

Most sales methodologies teach you *what* to say. They skip the part where your heart races, your throat tightens, and your finger hovers over the dial button for thirty seconds too long. Cold calling is not primarily a technique problem — it is a psychological one. Master the internal game and the external tactics work. Fail to master it, and even the perfect script collapses in your hands.

This chapter is not motivational fluff. Every tool here is grounded in neuroscience, behavioral psychology, or data from hundreds of thousands of recorded calls. Use them literally.

### 3.1 Why Cold Calling Is Psychologically Hard

#### The Amygdala Hijack

Cold call fear is not "in your head" in the abstract sense. It is literally in your brain — wired into the amygdala, a small almond-shaped cluster in the temporal lobe that functions as your threat detection system. When you anticipate a cold call, the amygdala activates, flooding your system with cortisol and adrenaline and triggering a fight-or-flight response. Your prefrontal cortex — the region responsible for decision-making, emotional regulation, and executive function — goes offline. You cannot think clearly because, neurologically, your brain has decided you are in danger.

Daniel Goleman coined the term **amygdala hijack** to describe moments when emotions overwhelm rational thought. During a hijack, your voice thins, your breathing shallows, and your confidence collapses. The biological irony is severe: the brain structure designed to keep you alive from predators treats a stranger saying "not interested" as an existential threat.

Research confirms that **social rejection activates the same neural pathways as physical pain**. When a prospect hangs up, your anterior cingulate cortex and insula process it like a physical injury. This is not weakness. It is neurobiology. Understanding this is half the battle — you cannot logic your way out of an amygdala hijack. You must use physiological tools to calm the amygdala first, then re-engage the prefrontal cortex.

#### Box Breathing (Navy SEAL Protocol)

Box breathing is a four-step cycle used by Navy SEALs to force the nervous system out of fight-or-flight and into a controlled state:

1. Inhale for 4 seconds
2. Hold for 4 seconds
3. Exhale for 4 seconds
4. Hold empty for 4 seconds

Repeat 4–6 cycles. This technique lowers cortisol, deepens vocal pitch, and anchors a confident tone. Use it before every call block and between calls when you feel anxiety spiking. It takes twenty seconds. There is no excuse for skipping it.

#### Call Reluctance by the Numbers

**90% of salespeople experience call reluctance at some point.** 64% of sales professionals report being scared of picking up the phone. 48% hesitate to start the process due to fear, and 53% give up easily when cold calling. If you dread dialing, you are in the overwhelming majority — and the majority is not who you want to emulate.

The only clinically validated cure for call reluctance is **systematic desensitization**, a behavioral therapy technique developed by Joseph Wolpe. The principle is simple: fear and relaxation are mutually exclusive. You build a hierarchy of scenarios from least scary to most scary, learn relaxation techniques, and gradually expose yourself to each level until anxiety subsides. Start with listening to recorded calls. Then role-play with a colleague. Then call warm leads. Then call cold leads. Then call C-level executives. Each level desensitizes you for the next. Anthony Iannarino put it directly: *"The only way to cure sales call reluctance is to make enough calls that you are eventually desensitized to potentially unpleasant outcomes."*

### 3.2 The Statistics That Should Calm You

The numbers are brutal, but they are also liberating. Once you internalize the baseline, every outcome becomes predictable — and predictability kills anxiety.

Metric	Baseline / Average	Top Performers	Source
Dial-to-meeting conversion rate	2.3%	5–8%+	Cognism 2025 (204K+ calls)

Calls to reach a decision-maker	18 dials	5–6 attempts	Gong, Bridge Group
Dials required per appointment booked	209 dials	~40–50 dials	Bridge Group, Cognism
Buyers who accept meetings from cold calls	82%	—	RAIN Group
Calls going to voicemail	72%	Lower with direct dials	Gong
Reps who give up after one follow-up	44%	—	Brevet Group
Reps who give up after four "no's"	92%	—	Marketing Donut
Prospects who say "no" four times before "yes"	60–80%	—	Marketing Donut, Scripted
Average successful cold call duration	5 min 50 sec	—	Gong
Average unsuccessful cold call duration	1 min 24 sec	—	Gong
SDR dials per day (average)	40–50	50–70	Bridge Group, SalesHive
Reps hitting quota	~68%	90%+	Bridge Group

**What this table means in practice:** 97.7% of your dials will not result in a meeting. That is the game. The top 5% of sales reps earn 85% of available business because they internalize these numbers and keep dialing anyway. Your job is not to win every call. Your job is to work the law of averages as efficiently as possible until convergence kicks in.

Short-term results fluctuate wildly. An average SDR making 50 dials a day might book zero meetings on Monday and three on Thursday. But over a quarter, actual results converge to true skill level. The only way to lose is to stop before convergence.

### 3.3 Reframing Rejection

#### The SARA Model

Top performers do not avoid feeling rejection. They process it faster. Research on resilience shows that elite SDRs move through rejection using the **SARA model**:

Stage	Experience	Duration (Top Performers)
Shock	Initial sting of the "no"	~30 seconds
Anger	Frustration, self-doubt flare	1–2 minutes
Resistance	Urge to ruminate, deny, or vent	2–3 minutes
Acceptance	Letting go, moving to next dial	<b>Under 5 minutes total</b>

Average reps carry one bad call for hours. Top performers complete the full cycle before the next ring tone. The goal is not to eliminate the emotional response — it is to compress it.

#### Six Mental Reframes

Use these exact reframes before, during, and after your call blocks. Write them on a sticky note attached to your monitor until they are automatic.

##### Reframe 1 — The Learning Frame:

"What can I learn from this? Was it timing, fit, or delivery?"

Every rejection contains data. Categorize it: timing rejection, fit rejection, messaging rejection, or genuine disinterest. Only one category implies you did something wrong — and even then, it is fixable.

##### Reframe 2 — The Expected Outcome Frame:

"Every 'no' is one dial closer to the 2.3% that books."

A "no" is not a rejection of you. It is a rejection of timing, fit, or circumstance. With a 2.3% success rate, 49 rejections are mathematically required to produce one meeting. Your job is to collect them efficiently.

#### Reframe 3 — The Scientist Frame:

"I'm not here to sell. I'm here to discover if they have a problem I can help with."

Treat each call as a data collection experiment. Detach from the outcome; attach to the process. Curiosity sounds different on the phone than desperation — and prospects can hear the difference.

#### Reframe 4 — The Filter Frame:

"They weren't my prospect. The faster I filter them out, the faster I find my 'yes'."

A fast "no" saves you time. Every unqualified prospect who declines is one less dead-end conversation. The "no" is the system working, not failing.

#### Reframe 5 — The Context Frame:

"That person is having a bad day. It has nothing to do with me."

You do not control how people interpret your message, how they respond, or what happened to them five minutes before you called. As Josh Braun puts it: *"You're for some people, but you're not for everyone."*

#### Reframe 6 — The Effort Frame:

"I need to have 15 quality conversations today, not book 3 meetings."

Focus on inputs you control, not outputs you do not. Quality conversations are an input. Meetings booked are an output. When you anchor to inputs, motivation becomes internally generated rather than externally dependent.

#### Detach From the Outcome

Josh Braun's mantra changes what comes out of your mouth because it changes what you think before you dial: *"I'm for some people, but I'm not for everyone. My job is to discover if the person has a problem I could potentially help with, not to sell everyone."* Read this before every call block until you believe it.

### 3.4 Growth Mindset for Cold Calling

Psychologist Carol Dweck's research at Stanford demonstrates that people operate with one of two mindsets — and the difference in cold calling performance is stark.

Fixed Mindset	Growth Mindset
"You either have it or you don't"	"No matter how good you are, you can always improve"
Views rejection as judgment of self-worth	Views rejection as data and feedback
Avoids challenging prospects for fear of failure	Takes on tough targets knowing failure is the path
Takes feedback personally; ignores advice	Views criticism as a positive learning experience
Considers objections dead ends	Welcomes objections as learning opportunities
Dismisses new approaches; sticks to "what works"	Experiments, tracks results, refines approach

The fixed mindset rep gets ten rejections in a row and thinks, *"I'm terrible at this. Maybe sales isn't for me."* The growth mindset rep thinks, *"I'm collecting data. Let me analyze what's working and adjust."* Same circumstances. Different brain. Different results.

80% of senior US executives believe employees with a growth mindset deliver tangible business benefits, including revenue growth. The mindset is not soft. It is strategic.

### The Penny Jar Method

This old-school technique still works because it gamifies the exact activity the law of averages requires:

1. Place a jar on your desk.
2. Every time you get a "no" — after a meaningful conversation or a gatekeeper block — put a penny in the jar.
3. As the jar fills, the visual is proof of effort and proof you did not quit.
4. Set weekly targets: 50 pennies, 100 pennies. Make the collection of "no's" the game.

Each penny is progress. Steli Efti: *"Some calls will go poorly no matter what, so you toss in a penny, reevaluate your efforts, and move on to the next call."*

## 3.5 Pre-Call Block Routine

Top SDRs do not wait to feel motivated. They use routines to trigger a **psychological state change** — moving from "normal mode" to "dialing mode." The brain responds to conditioned stimuli: when X happens, your brain knows it is time to perform.

### The 30-Minute Ritual

Time	Activity	Purpose
T-30 min	Review call list, check triggers	Review funding news, LinkedIn posts, hiring announcements, industry events
T-20 min	Deep-dive top 10-15 accounts	Build context for personalized openers; identify conversation hooks
T-10 min	Physical preparation	Stand up, stretch, box breathing (4-4-4-4); get blood flowing
T-5 min	State-change ritual	Coffee + specific song/playlist; same stimulus every time to condition the brain
T-2 min	Vocal warm-up	Call a friend or family member; hum; practice opening lines aloud
T-0	First dial of the block	No hesitation. Momentum beats motivation.

Research-backed calls achieve **202% higher conversion rates** than generic outreach, and 76% of top performers always research prospects before calling. The thirty minutes of preparation is not overhead — it is leverage. The first ten accounts you deep-dive are your highest-probability targets; personalized openers built on real triggers outperform generic scripts by a factor of ten.

The state-change ritual is critical. When you use the same stimulus — same coffee, same playlist, same physical sequence — before every call block, you condition your brain to associate that stimulus with performance mode. Over two to three weeks, the ritual alone will trigger focus. This is classical conditioning applied to sales performance.

Between the ritual and the first dial, there is one rule: **no hesitation**. The gap between deciding to call and actually dialing is where call reluctance lives. Close the gap to zero. The first dial is always the hardest. Everything after is momentum.

## Key Actions

1. **Before your next call block:** Complete one full box breathing cycle (4-4-4-4) right now. Time it. It takes twenty seconds.
2. **This week:** Set up a penny jar. Set a target for pennies collected. Track "no's" as progress.
3. **Before tomorrow's calls:** Write the six reframes on a sticky note. Read them aloud before dialing.
4. **This week:** Run the 30-minute pre-call routine for five consecutive call blocks. Note the difference in your first-dial speed and vocal tone.

## 4. The 5-Step Cold Call Framework (PERQ-C)

Every great cold call follows the same hidden architecture. Whether it lasts ninety seconds or six minutes, the anatomy is identical. PERQ-C — **Permission** → **Explain** → **Relevance** → **Qualify** → **Close** — gives you that skeleton and the flexibility to adapt it on the fly. Skip a step and the call collapses. Rush a step and you sound like every other rep dialing for dollars. Master each step in sequence, and you transform from an interruption into a conversation worth having.

This framework is not a script. It is a decision tree. The two annotated dialogues at the end of this chapter show the same framework producing radically different conversations — one smooth, one obstacle-strewn — because the prospect, not the rep, dictates the path.

### 4.1 PERQ-C Framework

Step	Name	Duration	What You Are Doing	What the Prospect Is Doing
P	Permission Opener	~15 sec	Acknowledging the interruption; asking for 30 seconds	Deciding whether to hang up or hear you out
E	Explain Reason	~10 sec	Stating why you are calling (their problem, not your product)	Pattern-matching: "Is this relevant to me?"
R	Relevance Question	~30 sec	Posing a pain-based question that invites engagement	Answering honestly (the first real data you get)
Q	Qualifying Discovery	60–90 sec	Asking 2–4 targeted questions; surfacing one priority pain	Talking 80% of the time; feeling understood
C	Close / Calendar Ask	~15 sec	Bridging their pain to a meeting; offering specific times	Choosing Tuesday or Thursday — not whether to meet

**Total target runtime:** 2:30 to 3:30 for a clean call; up to 5:00 when objections surface. Gong data shows successful cold calls average **5:50** versus **3:14** for failed calls. The extra time comes from the prospect talking, not from you monologuing.

## PERQ-C FLOW DIAGRAM

```
=====
[P] PERMISSION OPENER [E] EXPLAIN REASON
~15 sec ~10 sec
"Do you have 30 seconds?" "The reason I'm calling is..."
| |
+-----+-----+
|
[R] RELEVANCE QUESTION
~30 sec
"Most VPs I talk to are dealing
with either [A] or [B]. Which
resonates more?"
|
(If engagement)
|
[Q] QUALIFYING DISCOVERY
60-90 sec
Rep asks 2-4 targeted questions.
Prospect talks 80% of the time.
ONE pain point is isolated and
amplified with implication questions.
|
(Bridge to close)
|
[C] CLOSE / CALENDAR ASK
~15 sec
"Based on what you shared about
[pain], it sounds like a conversation
could be valuable. How does
Thursday at 10 AM look?"
|
[SEND INVITE WHILE ON CALL]
```

### 4.1.1 P = Permission Opener (15 sec)

The Permission Opener has one job: reset the prospect's mental state from "who is this and why are they bothering me?" to "okay, thirty seconds."

**Example:** "Hey [Name], it's [Your Name] from [Company]. I know I'm calling you out of the blue — do you have 30 seconds for me to tell you why I called, and if I miss the mark I'll hang up on myself?"

Permission-based openers convert at **11.18%** — among the highest in Gong's dataset. Acknowledging the interruption signals self-awareness; offering an easy exit lowers defensive walls. Alternatives include the honesty play — "I'll be totally honest, this is a cold call" — or the pattern interrupt — "How've you been?" which achieves **10.01%** success by scrambling autopilot.

**Critical rules:** Never ask "Did I catch you at a bad time?" — it has a **0.9%** success rate. Keep it under 15 seconds. Use the "late-night FM DJ voice" — calm, slow, confident.

### 4.1.2 E = Explain Reason (10 sec)

Answer the prospect's silent question — "Why should I keep listening?" — in ten seconds. Most reps kill the call here by talking about themselves.

**The formula:** State a trigger (shows research) + a problem hypothesis (names their pain). Example: "The reason for my call — I noticed [Company] just expanded to three new markets, and a lot of CROs we work with find their sales cycle length doubles during international rollout."

Reps who state their reason early are **2.1x more likely** to book meetings. Never say "I wanted to introduce myself". Their problem first, your product never. One sentence. Then stop.

### 4.1.3 R = Relevance Question (30 sec)

Turn a monologue into a dialogue. Get the prospect talking — once they speak, they are psychologically invested.

**The Menu of Pains:** "Most CROs I talk to are dealing with either inaccurate forecasting across regions, or reps spending more time on admin than selling. Which resonates more?" Offering 2–3 pain points makes it easy to react against rather than generating an

answer from scratch. If they say "Neither," pivot: "Fair enough — what's the bigger headache on your plate?"

End every reason statement with a question. Never monologue past your proof statement.

#### 4.1.4 Q = Qualifying Discovery (60–90 sec)

Discovery on a cold call is not a discovery call. The average prospect monologue in successful cold calls is just **3.5 seconds**. Your goal: isolate **one pain point** urgent enough to justify a 15-minute meeting.

Use **Problem** questions to surface specific pain ("How much time are your reps losing to tool-switching?") and **Implication** questions to amplify consequences ("What happens if that gap is still there at the next board meeting?"). Talk 20%, listen 80%. Ask **2–4 questions maximum** — more signals interrogation. Build each question on their previous answer. Then bridge to the close.

#### 4.1.5 C = Close / Calendar Ask (15 sec)

Connect their stated pain to a logical next step. The best closes feel like a formality because the prospect has already agreed they have a problem worth solving.

**The bridge:** "You mentioned [pain in their exact words]. That's exactly what we help with. [Peer] had the same challenge and [result]. How does [day] at [time] look?"

**Alternative closes:** The assumptive close ("Thursday afternoon or Friday morning — what works better?"); the ibuprofen close ("Not sure if we're the right fit — worth 15 minutes to see together?"); the interest-based CTA ("Would it make sense to grab a few minutes to review your options?") which outperforms time-request CTAs by **2.5x**.

**Critical rules:** Offer specific days and times. **Pause 4+ seconds after the ask** — if you cannot handle silence, you will talk yourself out of the meeting. **Send the calendar invite while still on the phone** — no-shows drop when the invite lands in real time.

## 4.2 Full Annotated Dialogues

### 4.2.1 Dialogue 1: The 3-Minute Clean Call

*Scenario: SDR at a RevOps platform calls a VP of Sales at a mid-market SaaS company that just doubled its SDR team. Research: 12 new SDR listings posted in the past month; the VP shared a LinkedIn post about "growing pains."*

**SDR:** "Hey Jordan, it's Alex from RevOps Co. I know I'm calling out of the blue — do you have 30 seconds for me to tell you why I called, and if I miss the mark I'll hang up on myself?"

**Jordan:** "Uh, sure, I guess. Make it quick though — I'm between meetings."

[P — Permission granted. Self-aware opener lowers Jordan's guard.]

**SDR:** "Appreciate it. I know as a VP of Sales at ScaleUp, you've got a lot on your plate — I noticed your team is expanding fast. The reason for my call: a lot of VPs we work with who are doubling their SDR teams find their forecasting accuracy drops off a cliff during the ramp phase."

[E — Trigger (hiring surge) + problem hypothesis (forecasting during ramp). No product mention. ~10 seconds.]

**SDR:** "Most VPs I talk to are dealing with either bad data in the CRM, or reps spending more time on admin than selling. Which is hitting you harder?"

**Jordan:** "The admin thing, definitely. My new reps are on five different tools. By the time they prospect, half the day is gone."

[R — Menu of pains worked. Jordan chose "admin/tool time." Engagement confirmed.]

**SDR:** "Five tools — painful. How much time are they losing to context-switching daily?"

**Jordan:** "Honestly? Probably two to three hours. It's insane. And the forecasts are garbage because the data never makes it into Salesforce cleanly."

[Q — Quantified pain: 2–3 hours/day. Jordan volunteered a second pain (forecasting) unprompted. High intent.]

**SDR:** "And when the board sees those forecasts, how does that land?"

**Jordan:** "Not well. Last quarter we missed by 15% and I got tough questions."

[Q — Implication question amplified pain from operational to strategic (board confidence).]

**SDR:** "That's exactly why I called. We helped CloudSync consolidate their SDR stack and go from 60% to 85% forecast accuracy in one quarter. Their reps got back three hours a week. How does Thursday at 10 AM look for a 15-minute call?"

**Jordan:** "Yeah, Thursday works. Send me an invite."

[C — Bridge connected exact words to peer outcome. Specific close landed.]

**SDR:** "Sending it now — can you confirm you got it?"

**Jordan:** "Got it. I'll accept it."

[Invite sent and accepted while on call. No-show risk minimized.]

**Total call time: 2 minutes 47 seconds.**

#### 4.2.2 Dialogue 2: The 5-Minute Call with Objections

Scenario: Same SDR, same product. Different prospect — a skeptical enterprise CRO who has heard this pitch before. Multiple objections surface.

**SDR:** "Hey Dana, it's Alex from RevOps Co. I know I'm calling you out of the blue — do you have 30 seconds for me to tell you why I called, and if I miss the mark I'll hang up on myself?"

**Dana:** "I'm really busy. Make it fast."

[P — Permission granted grudgingly. Immediate time-pressure objection. Skepticism signals.]

**SDR:** "Absolutely — tight. I noticed Enterprise Corp just opened three regional offices. The reason I'm calling: a lot of CROs find sales operations break down when they scale that fast."

**Dana:** "Okay, and? We already have tools for that."

[E — Clean reason, but Dana interrupts with "already have a solution." Common with senior buyers. Framework adapts.]

**SDR:** "Totally — most companies already have something. Out of curiosity, are you happy with forecasting across all three regions, or is that still a work in progress?"

[R — Pivots to direct relevance question respecting seniority. Acknowledges existing tools, avoids argument.]

**Dana:** "Forecasting is always a work in progress. But I'm not looking to rip and replace anything."

[Dana confirms pain exists but raises "not looking to change" — reflexive defense, not a hard no. 80% of objections are reflexive.]

**SDR:** "Fair enough — not suggesting rip and replace. When reps update the CRM across three offices, how much time are they losing to manual data entry and tool-switching?"

**Dana:** "More than I'd like to admit. My ops team says 40% of their time is non-selling activities."

[Q — Problem question landed. Quantified metric: 40% non-selling time. Gold for the bridge.]

**SDR:** "Forty percent — significant. What would getting even half that time back mean for revenue?"

**Dana:** "Huge. But I've looked at three vendors in your space and they all promised the same thing."

[Implication worked ("huge"). Dana raises "competitor fatigue" — a request for differentiation, not rejection.]

**SDR:** "I appreciate that. Our difference: we guarantee forecast accuracy improvement in 90 days or we work for free. Most CROs find that de-risks it. That said, I'm not sure we're even a fit — my AE does a 15-minute diagnostic before any demo. Worth doing the diagnostic, or should I not take up your time?"

[C — Bridge uses "40%" number. Guarantee differentiates without feature comparison. Negative reverse gives control.]

**Dana:** "The guarantee is interesting. But I'm not making decisions until Q2."

[Timing objection. Dana is interested but pushing to the future.]

**SDR:** "Totally understand — Q2 is decision time. A lot of CROs run the diagnostic now so they have data ready for Q2 planning. That way you're not starting from scratch in April. Tuesday at 2 PM or Wednesday at 10 AM?"

**Dana:** "Wednesday at 10. But I'm bringing my VP of Sales Ops."

[Reframed timing into urgency. Alternative close. Multi-threading happened organically — Dana volunteered the VP.]

**SDR:** "Even better. I'll include both of you and add the 90-day guarantee one-pager. You should see it now."

**Dana:** "Got it. Wednesday then."

[Invite sent and confirmed. Multi-threaded. Three objections, one meeting.]

**Total call time: 4 minutes 52 seconds.**

## 4.3 Timing and Pacing

### 4.3.1 The 43:57 Ratio, 140–160 WPM, and the Power of Silence

Gong's analysis of **300 million cold calls** shows successful calls feature reps talking ~55% of the time, not the 43% often cited (that ratio applies to scheduled discovery calls, not cold calls). The key is stage awareness:

Call Stage	Rep Talk	Rep Listen	Purpose
Opening (P)	30%	70%	Permission, context setting
Pitch (E + R)	60%	40%	Educate, prove relevance
Discovery (Q)	20%	80%	Uncover pain, build urgency
Objection Handling	20%	80%	Understand, empathize, redirect
Close (C)	50%	50%	Confirm commitment

During discovery, the prospect should do 80% of the talking. If your Q phase is still 60% you, you are pitching, not qualifying.

**Words per minute:** The optimal persuasive pace is **140–160 WPM**. Below 130 sounds unnatural; above 170 signals nervousness. Slow to 120–140 during discovery. Every word should be intentional.

**The power of silence:** After your close, count to **four seconds** before speaking. Most reps fail here — they cannot handle silence and talk themselves out of a "yes." Chris Voss notes: "If you can't handle the silence for 5 or 10 seconds and you start talking again, you've lost all power in the sales encounter". The silence is a vacuum the prospect fills with a decision.

**Key benchmarks:**

Metric	Top Performers	Average Reps
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