

Growth Tools

Don't settle for 'Call me after the 1st'

Every December these words are heard way too often by salespeople: "Call me after the first."

Most salespeople say, "Sure, I will call you on such and such a day."

Don't. Do the right thing, and act like a professional salesperson.

Your job is to help the customer if you can, and sometimes that is doing something a little differently.



SALES

Hal Becker

As I have mentioned so many times before, the great salespeople do not talk. They ask questions to either find things out or to get their point across to the customer.

In the situation where the customer is trying to put you off, you need to find out the true picture here.

This can easily be accomplished with a few questions:

- Mr. or Ms. Customer, after the holidays, I will assume that you will get busy again and try to kick the new year off with a great start, is that correct?

- If we can meet for 10-12 minutes sometime before Jan. 1 and you find interest in our product or service, then you can call me at your convenience if this fits your needs, would that be OK?

- If this time of the year is a little slower, it might be a great time to meet for just a few minutes so you can think about our product or service. Would that work for you?

Questions are so powerful in any type of selling situation, whether it is to get the appointment, find a customer's level of satisfaction or even to close the customer on your company or products.

HAL BECKER is an author and trainer in sales and customer service.

| ENTREPRENEUR |

Doing what comes naturally

Debra's Natural Gourmet



W. MARC BERNISAU | BUSINESS JOURNAL

Community, breadth of product are staples of long-running retailer's strategy

BY SEAN MCFADDEN
JOURNAL STAFF

It is a lifestyle business whose growth has been as organic as some of the products it sells. And **Debra Stark** wouldn't have it any other way.

The founder and CEO of **Debra's Natural Gourmet**, a West Concord-based natural food store business, is content to have only one location. And Stark doesn't do too much in the way of advertising — instead using strong customer word of mouth and a monthly newsletter that includes nutritional advice as her chief marketing tools. Stark's store has flourished for 21 years and serves a loyal clientele. By Stark's count, between 400 and 500 customers pass through

its doors each day.

"Much of our business is from regular customers who live in the community ... we become a part of their lives," said the 63-year-old entrepreneur. "That family feel is part and parcel of who we are."

A tour of the 3,200-square-foot store does, in fact, offer ample evidence of one of Stark's most potent business strategies — that sense of community: Patrons sit at the front of the store drinking coffee. Shoppers exchange thoughts on the virtues of a particular product. And, more than once, customers warmly greet Stark and her staff by name.

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| LESSONS LEARNED |

How did you first decide that you were going to become an entrepreneur?



Scott Jones
WMHGB

When I left my position at a manufacturing facility to enter the construction industry, I did so with a clear plan to eventually take over this four-generation business. This year, we further refined the concept and launched a second company to deal exclusively with modular construction.



Penny Castagnozzi
Reading with TLC

The agency we worked through wanted uniformity. We had to branch off to develop our unique materials and methods that were finally teaching dyslexics to read.



Walter Hall
HouseSavvy

When I first completed my military duty, I returned to the area and worked with my father, helping him retire and close his agricultural machinery business. I learned lessons from him and his business experience. We later together opened a real estate agency and that would lead to other business ventures.

* **Next week's Lesson Learned:** What will be the biggest challenge facing small businesses in the new year? Send your answer in 25-30 words to cmahoney@bizjournals.com. Be sure to include a high-resolution headshot.