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The Pipe Is Life

Here is a brutal and undeniable truth: The number one reason for failure in sales is an empty pipeline, and the number one reason you have an empty pipeline is that you are not doing enough prospecting.¹

In sales, everything rests on putting qualified opportunities in your pipeline. Prospecting is the beginning and the end, alpha and omega. It is also the one activity that salespeople despise more than any other.

As a rule, we will do anything in our power to delay, procrastinate, or avoid it. But it doesn't matter how much you hate it; if you don't prospect, you will fail. That is a guaranteed truth.

In modern sales there are two types of prospecting: *fast* and *slow*.

¹See Jeb's book *Fanatical Prospecting: The Ultimate Guide to Opening Sales Conversations and Filling the Pipeline by Leveraging Social Selling, Telephone, Email, Text, and Cold Calling* (Wiley, 2015).

Fast

When you need to build your pipeline *right now*, nothing works better than outbound prospecting. This means taking direct and immediate action to interrupt, engage, and convert leads into qualified pipeline opportunities.

Fast prospecting is rejection-dense, which is why many salespeople shun it. On the other hand, it is incredibly effective for building pipe when done right.

Slow

Slow prospecting is a more nuanced approach. It is still outcome focused—putting qualified opportunities into the pipeline—but here we are playing the long game.

Slow prospecting techniques include inbound lead generation, leveraging your network for warm introductions, nurturing high-value prospects, and cultivating future opportunities. It is relatively rejection-free but requires faith that, by doing the right things consistently, in time you'll get a return on your investment.

Running Fast and Slow

Slow versus fast prospecting isn't a zero-sum game. One isn't better than the other. It's a winning combination.

Embracing this dual prospecting strategy is essential for success in today's noisy marketplace. You must put new opportunities into your pipeline *now* while cultivating future prospects for *later*. Fast prospecting solves the first problem, and slow prospecting the second.

When you're running fast and slow at the same time, you become a prospecting-lead-generating machine, and you can make a lot of money.

Building Pipeline Fast Doesn't Work When You Are Moving Slow

When your pipeline is thin or empty it's like not having enough oxygen to breath. Your highest priority is to fix the problem, *fast*.

Moving fast means interrupting people, engaging them, and converting them into qualified pipeline opportunities. You must dial the phone, knock on doors, send emails, text messages, video messages, and LinkedIn direct messages—even smoke signals if that's what it takes.

When you're a brand-new salesperson starting from square one, because you have no pipe and a short window to ramp up your sales, you cannot rely on LinkedIn alone.

From time to time however, we'll work with new sales reps who will challenge us on this premise. They'll claim that they've learned how to eliminate interrupting people and cold calling with a more powerful LinkedIn strategy that gets results faster.

So we challenge them. They can deploy their slow LinkedIn strategy for a week while Jeb will use a fast prospecting strategy. Here is a synopsis of one of our most recent challenges:

- **New rep:** At the end of the first day, the new rep proudly beamed that his LinkedIn connection requests had been accepted by 16 people and that he'd done a lot of liking, commenting, and sharing. "I made some great connections!"
- **Jeb:** That morning Jeb made 47 dials, had 12 conversations, made one small sale, and set a first-time appointment.

We repeated this exercise for four more days. At the end of the week:

- **New rep:** Added 29 new connections, followed many company pages, posted content, liked content, and

conducted lots of research. He'd made *zero* appointments, *zero* sales, added *zero* opportunities to the pipeline.

- **Jeb:** Set eight appointments for initial meetings, closed four more deals, and added three new opportunities to his pipeline.

Jeb used LinkedIn too, but strategically. He built targeted prospect lists, incorporated LinkedIn direct messaging into his multi-channel sequences, and researched prospects to craft more compelling messages. The key difference: Jeb integrated LinkedIn into his complete prospecting system rather than relying on it as his only approach.

The false promise the new rep had bought into was that he could use LinkedIn to build a full pipeline, with minimal effort and no rejection. It doesn't work that way. LinkedIn is not a prospecting panacea. It will not provide an endless stream of inbound leads with little effort.

It is, however, a key component of a complete prospecting system. From list building and direct outreach to lead generation and long-term cultivation of future opportunities, LinkedIn's panorama of features can be a crazy powerful weapon in your prospecting arsenal.