

## READY STEADY

Larry, thirties, is training Gretchen, twenties, to be an expert telemarketer for BNA America Credit Card. Gretchen is reluctant to follow the training because BNA's methods don't make complete sense to her. In addition, she doesn't want to be a nag, like the barrage of telemarketers she has to deal with day in and day out. However, Larry is persistent, for he knows the best way to go about things. He does, of course, have five years' experience as a refusal reverser. As the scene opens, Larry is beginning his training session.

### CHARACTERS

Larry: 30s, BNA Customer Service Telemarketing trainer

Gretchen: 20s, trainee

### SETTING

BNA phone cubical

### TIME

The present

LARRY: OK, Gretchen, my name is Larry, and I'll be training you today. We'll be using something called a CATI (*Pro-nounced caddie.*) system. Now, a CATI system is a fancy name for a —

GRETCHEN: Computer-assisted telephone interviewing system.

LARRY: Wow-wee! You've worked in customer service before, haven't you?

GRETCHEN: No.

LARRY: Well then you're extremely knowledgeable and well-read about customer service.

GRETCHEN: Well, it's on this paper you gave me.

LARRY: Oh. (*Laughs.*) I forgot that was written there. Silly me. Smart you for looking. OK, well, basically this baby is an

expensive computer that assists us in making our courtesy calls faster and more efficiently. Today, you can expect to be calling close to one hundred and twenty-four of our most reliable customers. Now, these are not cold calls. Not cold calls. We never do cold calls here at BNA. We don't believe in it. I assume you know what a cold call is?

GRETCHEN: Um . . . where they hang up on you?

LARRY: (*Laughs.*) No, that's a typical call. Let me explain in more detail. Basically, when you cold call, you are calling people who you don't know and who may not be interested in what you're selling. We, on the other hand, call only our very reliable customers — those individuals that have a BNA America credit card. We're calling tonight — as a courtesy — to see if they want our preferred partner's Ready Steady Clean Way System. We'll be giving them a *huge* discount. Any questions so far, Gretchen?

GRETCHEN: Uh . . . well, I . . .

LARRY: We have a script here that you will —

GRETCHEN: I, I don't understand something.

LARRY: OK. No problem. That's great! Not understanding is great! BNA believes in not understanding. There is no question too dumb for us.

GRETCHEN: I don't understand the difference between cold calling and what we're doing. I mean, the reliable people I call will be interested in the Ready Steady Clean Way System?

LARRY: Well, maybe, but not necessarily. That's why we're calling them.

GRETCHEN: Oh. But you said when you cold call, which we're *not* doing, you are calling people who may not be interested in what you're selling.

LARRY: Uh-huh. That's true. Very good definition of a cold call. Good.

GRETCHEN: So it's just a cold call of your current customers. Isn't it?



LARRY: *(Pause.)* That may be one way of looking at it. But we're offering them a *huge* discount. You see?

GRETCHEN: Uh-huh.

LARRY: And there is no charge for Ready Steady because it's through one of our preferred partners. It doesn't cost anything so what does it matter about their interest in it or not? There's no expense!

GRETCHEN: Ever?

LARRY: Well, no, not ever! For the first thirty days of course it's free and then . . . Listen, think of it this way, for our customers, it's like hearing about a great deal through a best friend. The friend's recommending it. You know how that is? I bet you recommend great deals to your best friend on CD players and DVDs and trendy clothes all the time. Don't you?

GRETCHEN: My best friend has been deaf since birth and lives in Berlin. Telecommunication is difficult.

LARRY: *(Beat.)* Well, then . . . that example isn't so good. Listen, I think you'll find that this floor-cleaning system sells itself with no trouble. I'd want to try it for free, wouldn't you?

GRETCHEN: We have carpets.

LARRY: Yes, but if you didn't . . . huh? Huh?

GRETCHEN: Well, I don't think so because I hang up when people call from my credit card trying to sell me stuff.

LARRY: Well, of course — duh! With stuff! I understand. I resent that too! But Ready Steady is *not* stuff. *(Laughs.)* It's something needed. Everybody has to clean their hardwood floors, right?

GRETCHEN: I guess. Unless they have carpets or a maid or live with their mother or something.

LARRY: Well, see? OK. Right. Then they can either purchase it for their mother or maid or be the stingy, money-pinching people they are. No problem either way. See?

GRETCHEN: Uh-huh.

LARRY: See, you just come to me with your questions, Gretch.

I do have answers. And just so you feel more relaxed, I have nearly a decade in the CS field — customer service. And five years as a BNA Advanced Account Manager. *(He smiles nodding at her.)* Five years.

GRETCHEN: That's nice.

LARRY: You betcha! Advanced Account Manager is the official title. But the more inside lingo is that I'm a refusal reverser. In fact, I'm one of their *top* refusal reversers. Do you know what that is?

GRETCHEN: A person who reverses refusals?

LARRY: You are good! I had a feeling about you. You're gonna be an RR someday too. But that doesn't happen overnight. It takes work and dedication. But oh is it amazing. Do you know, people will call wanting to refuse these offers and even sometimes cancel our credit card? In a matter of seconds, I have them begging to stay on and buy more. From no to yes in seconds. You just get that good.

GRETCHEN: But what if they have a lot of debt?

LARRY: Well . . . that's their problem, isn't it? Anyway, then they'll pay it monthly and establish good credit so they can buy a house some day. It's very U.S.A.

GRETCHEN: But due to the credit card's high interest rate, average customers pay four to five times more than the original price of the item. It can get people into a lifelong cycle of debt.

LARRY: *(Thinks. Shrugs.)* Again, their problem. Now, before we get into some mock phone calls, let me ask you if you feel you have a good sense of the Ready Steady features?

GRETCHEN: I guess.

LARRY: Ohhh. Now, now. That's not very enthusiastic. We're all about colorful voices here. Really having power behind your answers and a conviction to them. So let's try this again. Do you have a good sense of the product's assets, Gretchen?

GRETCHEN: *(Just louder.)* I guess!



LARRY: OK. *(Beat.)* We'll work on that. Now, let's start with the product. Why don't you tell me about it?

GRETCHEN: *(Reading from literature without emotion.)* It's a revolutionary dusting, polishing, and waxing system that recreates the radiant splendor and luster of your hardwood floors.

LARRY: OK, OK . . . OK. It, it lacked a little color. It was a little beige. You want to grab people and get them to feel the polishing of the floor. You don't want to be reading and let them think your dog just died or something.

GRETCHEN: She did.

LARRY: What?

GRETCHEN: Rhonda died this past Sunday.

LARRY: Your dog? I'm so sorry. I had no idea.

GRETCHEN: It's OK. She was old and gassy. She didn't have control of her bodily functions anymore.

LARRY: Oh. *(Beat.)* Let's let sleeping dogs . . . lie.

GRETCHEN: It was for the best, for all of us. Go ahead.

LARRY: Well, I, I just wanted you to add expression to your voice. Maybe let the words sound like what they are . . . let the "revolutionary" sound . . . like a revolution. Let the polishing sound, sound . . . polishy. Why don't you try it again?

GRETCHEN: *(Reading from literature, emphasizing words strangely.)* A revolutionary dusting, polishing, and waxing system that recreates the radiant splendor and luster of your hardwood floors.

LARRY: Hum. OK, OK. OK. Why don't we just have you say what the Ready Steady Clean Way System is in your own words? Sometimes that, that helps create foundation. So . . . what is the Ready Steady Clean Way System to you, Gretch?

GRETCHEN: It's um . . . it's like a mop.

LARRY: A mop. Uh-huh. And this mop . . . ?

GRETCHEN: It can be used for mopping . . . and sort of dusting and stuff and it's got a feature.

LARRY: A feature. Yes, yes . . . go on . . .

GRETCHEN: But that costs extra.

LARRY: No, no, let's —

GRETCHEN: But it's cool —

LARRY: Good, good, good —

GRETCHEN: Because then you don't need a stepladder. It can reach up high.

LARRY: Good, good! Go on . . .

GRETCHEN: Real, real high. Really hellishly, nosebleed-like —

LARRY: Oh-kay. Hold it there. I wouldn't advise words like hellishly or bleeding anything in any of the calls. They, they just don't go over well. OK? *(She nods.)* OK, let's, um, why don't we just dive right in and get all wet with a mock call. I'll be playing a reliable BNA customer. You read from the script on the computer screen and I'll push the computer buttons so you can see how it all works. OK?

GRETCHEN: OK.

LARRY: OK. First things first. You would push the dial button here. Then you'd hear . . . dialing. *(Doing imitation.)* Beep, beep, beep, beep, beep, beep, beep. *(Pretending to be a woman on the other end.)* Kennedy residence. Hello? *(He looks at Gretchen and points to the screen.)*

GRETCHEN: What? What do I push?

LARRY: *(Whispers.)* Read.

GRETCHEN: *(Very cardboard.)* Hello. May I speak to Ms. Blank?

LARRY: Kennedy. Yes, this is Ms. Kennedy.

GRETCHEN: How are you this morning, afternoon, or evening?

LARRY: *(Under his breath.)* You pick one. *(Answering.)* Well, I'm fine. How are you?

GRETCHEN: I'm good. Thank you. My name's blank and I'm glad to find you at home Ms. Blan — Kennedy because I have good news. I'm calling on a — for very special customers like you Ms. Blank — ooh. On behalf of your BNA



account to announce an astounding offer from one of your, I mean, one of *our* preferred partners.

LARRY: Uh-huh. That sounds great. What is it?

GRETCHEN: It's a (*Trying to have expression.*) revolutionary dusting, polishing, and waxing system that recreates the radiant splendor and luster of your hardwood floors.

LARRY: Well, what is that exactly? In your own words, dear?

GRETCHEN: Huh? Oh. It's, it's a, a, a mop — but one with this doohickey reach feature that's not that expensive.

LARRY: Wow! That sounds great! How do I get it?

GRETCHEN: All you have to do is say yes, right now, and you can have it for free. For thirty days you can use this system for free. I know you'll love the shine and luster it restores to your floors almost like magic.

LARRY: But what if I use it and don't like it, honey?

GRETCHEN: If you are not completely satisfied, no explanation necessary, just return Ready Steady and the entire cost of the system will be refunded to your card.

LARRY: How much is it, dear?

GRETCHEN: It's only thirty-nine ninety-five.

LARRY: Oh. That's way too expensive!

GRETCHEN: Oh. OK. Bye.

LARRY: No. No! (*Pointing to the screen.*) Read the screen. If *no* or *too expensive*, read the rebuttal. Let's try this again. "Oh. That's too expensive, dear!"

GRETCHEN: Well don't you worry, Mrs., uh, Kennedy because I'm so sure you'll love this system and I don't want you to have to clean without it, so I'll tell you what I'll do. I can divide the cost of the Ready Steady Clean Way System into four low, low payments of nine ninety-five per month.

LARRY: Oh, that's a little better, honey, but it still seems a tiny bit high.

GRETCHEN: Because you are such a good customer, and because we are so confident that you will love this system, we want to make this easy for you. We don't want you to struggle here at BNA. So . . . due to your excellent customer sta-

tus, we're going to offer you a fifteen percent discount. What do you think about that?

LARRY: Wow! You guys are great.

GRETCHEN: (*Breaking character.*) This doesn't seem very real. I would have hung up on myself.

LARRY: What do you mean? Of course it does.

GRETCHEN: I'm just saying this script on the screen here is too fakey.

LARRY: No, it's not. I wrote it myself. It's professional. It's won awards.

GRETCHEN: Well why don't I offer the discount right away? Try to be as up-front as I can? That's what *I* would want.

LARRY: Welll, you, you, you. And um-hmm like that's going to work. We only have seventy-some years in the business. But what do we know? Little Miss Telequeen knows it all.

GRETCHEN: Let me just try it on a call. If it doesn't work, fine, I'll do whatever you want.

LARRY: Fine. We're open to suggestions here at BNA . . . no matter how stupid.

GRETCHEN: You think I'm going to fall on my face, don't you?

LARRY: Me? No, no. OK . . . Just punch the dial — I'll do it. You read. (*Getting ready to punch the button.*) Ready? Here we go. (*He pushes. Makes dialing sound again.*) Beep, beep, beep, beep, beep, beep, beep, beep.

GRETCHEN: Hello? May I speak to Mrs. Handson? . . . You're Mrs. Handson? (*Sounding startled.*) Oh . . . Well, you didn't exactly sound like . . . Oh. A sex change? Well, well that's, that's —

LARRY: (*Whispers.*) Oh God, he's playing with you. Here comes the hang-up.

GRETCHEN: (*Still on phone.*) Great . . . Who am I? . . . Oh, I'm uh, uh —

LARRY: (*Whispering.*) Gretchen — Gretchen.

GRETCHEN: I'm Gretchen. I'm calling with your BNA account . . . It's, I'm uh, calling because we want to sell you this dust-mop thing.



LARRY: Dust-mop thing?

GRETCHEN: (*Looking at Larry.*) Huh? . . . Oh, oh I'm sorry. My training instructor is giving me a hard time about how I described —

LARRY: (*Waving his hands.*) No, no, no!

GRETCHEN: (*On the phone.*) Can you hear that? He's really uptight . . . So anyway . . . What? Hardwood floors? You do?! But it's really overpriced.

(*Larry ducking down, mouthing — "Are you crazy?!!"*)

GRETCHEN: But it does have this doohickey reach thing for hard-to-reach areas . . . You do? . . . Then you could really use that. Hey, everybody has hellishly high corners to clean, right? (*Larry hitting his head.*) Gives you a nosebleed up that high.

LARRY: (*Whispers.*) No bleeding. No blood.

GRETCHEN: It really restores the total luster to them — like brand new . . . Huh? Uh, well, it's uh . . . fifty-nine ninety-five. (*Larry squints, bracing himself.*) You will?! . . .

(*Larry jumps up and declares victory in several poses.*)

GRETCHEN: (*In phone.*) Great! (*Larry gives her a thumbs-up.*) And since you're such a valuable customer, Mrs. Handson, there's a few extra items some of our preferred partners are offering that I'd like to tell you about . . . Oh, now, just think of me as a best friend giving a recommendation — (*Larry kneels and kisses her hand as she continues.*)

## SPARE SOMETHIN'?

*Sammy, thirties, a drunk who always has a story to get some spare change, spots the well-dressed Lorna heading toward the train station and grasps the opportunity to hit her up for some money. His story today is simple — his car ran out of gas while he was here visiting his poor, sick mother in a run-down nursing home. Now, he has no gas to take his mother back to his home so that he can care for her. The problem with his story is that no one will stop long enough to hear it. It's been a rough morning for Sammy. Last night, he had to sleep on a steam grate in front of the library. And now, most of the early morning business people are ignoring his pleas for help. But Lorna's different. She takes an interest. Unfortunately, Sammy is in for a lot more than he bargains for when he realizes that Lorna is a mental patient at the nearby Rock Creek Facility.*

### CHARACTERS

Sammy: 30s, a drunk on the street

Lorna: 30s, a mental patient at the nearby Rock Creek Facility

### SETTING

Urban street near subway station

### TIME

The present

SAMMY: (*Quick wave good-bye to someone.*) God bless ya anyway. (*Seeing Lorna.*) Hey, ma'am, can I ask ya somethin'?

LORNA: That depends entirely on the something, doesn't it? I can't be expected to answer all questions at all times.

SAMMY: No, I wouldn't expect, I don't expect you to —

LORNA: If you asked me a geographic question — for instance,