

The ACC

Most messages do not lose because they are wrong. They lose because they never become important.

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A message lands in our inbox with the opener, “Quick introduction...” We glance at it, register instantly that it has nothing to do with the deadline breathing down our neck, and move on without a second thought.



Delete.

The anterior cingulate cortex, the ACC, is the part of the brain that decides what deserves attention. It assigns significance, manages priority, and directs mental energy toward what matters. In selling, that creates a simple reality. Even a relevant message fails if the brain cannot find a reason to care.

The Problem

Buyers are not filtering for quality. They are filtering for importance. If our opener does not connect to a real priority, the ACC shifts attention away from us and toward something that carries more weight. We are not rejected. We are deprioritized.

Why It Happens

The ACC functions like an internal priority gate. Its role is to conserve cognitive resources and allocate focus to what aligns with known responsibilities, pressures, or goals. When a message arrives without context or a clear link to something the buyer already values, the ACC marks it as low significance. Attention goes elsewhere, even if the message itself is strong.

What We Need to Do

We need to make the importance obvious. That starts by anchoring early in something the buyer already cares about: a metric, a mandate, a shift in workload, or a pattern they are accountable for. When the ACC recognizes relevance to an existing priority, it elevates the message rather than pushing it aside.

Why It Works

The ACC responds to significance, not detail. Once the brain sees why a conversation matters, it opens the attention pathway and allows the rest of the message to be processed. This is how we earn the cognitive space for our insight, value, and differentiation to take hold.

Traps We Need to Avoid

We reduce significance when we:

- Open with generalities — *“Just wanted to reach out and connect.”*
- Bury the point beneath setup — *“I’ve followed your company for years and…”*
- Rely on personalization without relevance — *“Saw your post on leadership — great insights!”*
- Describe our world instead of theirs — *“We provide award-winning workflow optimization…”*
- Assume buyers will connect the dots on their own — *“We help improve accuracy and efficiency across teams.”*

If the brain cannot find the reason to care, it will not continue searching.

Breaking Through the ACC Gatekeeper

When an opener ties directly to something the buyer is accountable for, the ACC elevates the message with immediate significance:

- “Do you need more reps hunting instead of farming?”
- “Caleb from Procurement said the timeline landed on your desk.”
- “Mark Ellison said your Q4 target got tightened last week.”
- “Are you having too many conversations about lowering your price?”
- “Are you following up on deliveries more than you should?”

Each one connects to a real priority; something measurable, visible, and already on their plate. The goal is to ask a personalized question that promotes a response such as “Hell yes!”.

We lose more opportunities to low significance than to low value.

If we want to earn attention, we have to anchor to what already matters.

Let’s talk.

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