



Boost Sales by Turning Gatekeepers into Allies

By Anthony Parinello, author of *Getting to VITO, the Very Important Top Officer*.

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(San Diego, June 28, 2006) **SAD BUT TRUE** — everything you've ever been taught about dealing with gatekeepers is probably wrong. Follow these eight steps and you'll earn more quality conversations with key people in the organizations you're selling to ... and you'll also earn higher commission checks.

Strategy #1: Don't lie or make a misleading statement in response to the gatekeeper's questions. Ever. (There goes about 80% of most "expert advice" you've read or heard about dealing with gatekeepers!)

Strategy #2: Recognize that there are two very different kinds of gatekeeper within the target organization: the executive assistant gatekeeper and the receptionist gatekeeper. Mistaking the one for the other will leave you dead in the water, so don't do it. Strategies #3-7 below will help you get on the right side of the executive assistant gatekeeper; Strategy #8 will improve your interactions with the receptionist gatekeeper.

Strategy #3: Accept that, once you've reached the executive assistant gatekeeper, you have, for all intents and purposes, reached the executive. Treat this gatekeeper as though he or she were the executive. That means: No sarcasm. No attitude. No cryptic remarks. And no demanding to be put through to the boss. No exceptions!

Strategy #4: Know your outcome before you make the call. You want one of three things to happen when you speak to an executive assistant gatekeeper.

- Build equal business stature and business rapport with the executive assistant gatekeeper. (Not too bad.)
- Show that you appreciate and acknowledge his or her position of power. (This is better.)
- Be granted referral to or a phone or in-person appointment with the right person in the organization. (This is the best outcome.)

Strategy #5: The moment you hear the executive assistant gatekeeper's name (as in "This is Tommie – how can I help you?") – write it down. Sounds simple, I know, but if you make a lot of calls you will find that it is all too easy to overlook this incredibly important step. Without this person's name, you are flying blind.

Strategy #6: As soon as you possibly can, volunteer exactly why you are calling without evasion or doubletalk. (There goes the *rest* of the stuff you learned about dealing with gatekeepers!) Here's an example of how your dialogue with the executive assistant gatekeeper might begin:

You: Tommie, this is Will Prosper with CoolCo --- thanks for taking my call. We've never spoken before, but would you be willing to give me your opinion on an idea that (65 of the Fortune 100) find valuable? (Or: ... on an idea that 25 other manufacturers here in San Diego find valuable?) (Or ... on an idea that [Important Person Whose Name Tommie May Recognize] finds valuable?)

Get the picture? Because this person self-identifies as just as important as his or her boss, you should be asking for opinions and insights ... not issuing orders! Here's the principle you'll see play out: Every time you treat the executive assistant gatekeeper as a senior executive, you'll find out more about the priorities and strategies of the executive you're trying to reach!

Strategy #7: Ask for help on what should happen next. Say something like this:

You: Who else in your organization would be interested in this topic? We typically work with the VP of Sales – should I be talking to Milt Bigshot?

Now stop talking and see what comes back! If you've done your job properly, Tommie will point you toward the right person in the organization. This is a golden referral! Use Tommie's name when you call! Or perhaps Tommie will even help you set up some face time with Milt Bigshot. Let Tommie call the shots ... you'll be glad you did!

Strategy #8: When dealing with receptionist gatekeepers (a whole different species), be just as scrupulous about telling the truth. But compress your message even more than you would for the executive assistant gatekeeper -- and always, repeat, always, conclude what you say with the words "Thank you." For instance:

Receptionist Gatekeeper: Good morning, Jackson Supplies – how may I direct your call?

You: Would you please connect me with Milt Bigshot? It's Will Prosper. Thank you!

Most of the time, if you say this with unshakeable confidence, this will get you through. Sometimes you will hear this:

Receptionist Gatekeeper: What's this concerning?

You: An idea that Mr. Bigshot can use that can provide revenue gains while cutting expenses, which we've accomplished for another CEO. Would you please connect me? Thank you!

I realize it takes a little practice to build that final upbeat "Thank you!" into all of your interactions with receptionist gatekeepers ... but once you do, I think you will find that the vast majority of your calls sail through this first barrier with absolutely no problem.

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