GETTING PAST THE GATEKEEPER

FOR BUSINESSES SELLING INTO THE CONSTRUCTION MARKET
GETTING PAST THE GATEKEEPER

In any cold-call scenario, the first hurdle sales representatives typically face is getting past the gatekeeper.

Gatekeepers hold your key to success by deciding whether or not you will be allowed to make contact with the decision-maker. Without gaining access to the decision-maker, there is no opportunity to make the sale. Gatekeepers can be your enemies or allies, depending on their view of you but also, importantly, how you view them.

It is imperative to understand that your initial approach to the gatekeeper has a big impact on winning them over – first impressions matter. Your challenge from the outset is to reframe: “See the gatekeeper not as an obstacle but as a catalyst in getting you in front of the decision maker.”

Research defines two time-tested approaches for getting past the gatekeeper. These are the authoritative approach, and the amiable approach. The approach you use is reliant on various factors, the most significant one being the gatekeeper’s response to your call. Your personality and personal style also make a substantial impact on your choice of approach, as well as your product or service and your company.

When it comes to getting past the gatekeeper, the **amiable approach** means you:
- Position yourself as an acquaintance
- Speak cordially
- Engage with the gatekeeper

In contrast the **authoritative approach** means you:
- Position yourself as the dominant party
- Speak assertively
- Do not divulge more information than absolutely necessary.

GATEKEEPER PROFILES

Amiable and Authoritative gatekeepers

For most of your cold-calls, we recommend that you use the amiable approach first - even if you are generally more assertive. Franklin D. Roosevelt said, “If you treat people right they will treat you right… ninety percent of the time”

Being nice is more likely to get you through to the decision-maker, as people generally are more inclined to help others if they perceive them as deserving. Moreover if the gatekeeper is helpful, why not leverage their insight? Begin your conversation cordially and according to their response, adjust your approach to be more amiable or authoritative. For that other ten percent of the time, it’s likely that you will need to use the authoritative approach with those particularly adamant gatekeepers. You can identify which approach to use by analysing the gatekeeper’s phone manner, and adjusting your style accordingly.

Use these gatekeeper profiles to help you identify which approach to use...

### AMIABLE GATEKEEPERS
- Relaxed and friendly tone of voice
- Asks identifying questions in a pleasant manner, such as “may I ask who is calling?”
- Actively tries to direct your call to the appropriate person

### AUTHORITATIVE GATEKEEPERS
- Short and sharp tone of voice
- Asks qualifying questions, such as “is he expecting your call?”
- Actively tries to block your contact to the decision-maker

Within the first few seconds of the conversation, use your judgement to gather whether the gatekeeper is friendly or straight to the point. This analysis will assist you in tailoring your call using the most effective approach, for that particular contact.

While you must always consider the gatekeeper’s response to your call, it is also important that you employ the approach that is in alignment with your own character, style and temperament. No one is entirely authoritative or amiable; hence we are all capable of utilising different elements of each approach that are more aligned with our personalities when a situation requires it. This means that to be authentic you first of all, need to have a good level of understanding of your own personality.

There are a few options to improve your self-awareness that can easily give some insight into your personality type: asking for feedback from friends and colleagues, reflecting on your most common behaviours and thoughts or taking a free personality test. Once you know yourself better, you can utilise this to your advantage. Regardless of whether your chosen style is authoritative or amiable, humans are very quick to sense a lack of confidence & authenticity… and this gives the gatekeeper...
the perfect opportunity to screen you out. We unconsciously show our emotions by the tone of our voice, our style of articulation and behaviour, so try to breathe deeply and stay calm and relaxed during the call. Each of these factors will influence the gatekeeper’s perception of you and with it their response to your request.

Use these approach-specific techniques to assist in getting you past the gatekeeper.

**AMIABLE**

*“Who am I speaking with?”* 
*“What time or day is best to call?”*

**FIRST-NAME BASIS**

Every time someone addresses you by your name, it validates your importance and strengthens your connection to that person. Accordingly, addressing the gatekeeper by their name acknowledges their identity and enhances their sense of self. Subsequently, the call may transform from that cool, professional exchange to a more warm and personal conversation. Turn the gatekeeper could be more open to assisting you, or even putting their name in their hands. Role-play with a colleague to practice in front of the mirror or with a colleague before picking up the phone.

**LEVERAGE THEIR INSIGHT**

Gatekeepers tend to know a lot of basic yet valuable information about the decision-maker and the company. However, no gatekeeper is likely to provide you with information or assistance unless you specifically ask for it. So, use your likable personality to ask simple, open-ended questions that will help you reach the decision-maker such as “what time or day is best to call?” By asking for the gatekeepers’ advice, you are demonstrating that you appreciate their knowledge and value their recommendations. This may open them up to providing you with that extra piece of information that helps you reach the decision-maker.

However, it’s important that you use this technique with caution – don’t put all the power in their hands. Role-play with a colleague to practice asking the right questions. Also, we don’t recommend asking the receptionist business questions such as how sales are going; those questions should be saved for your conversation with the decision-maker!

**TOP TIP!**

Your approach also influences what affect you consciously as well as subconsciously convey; such as charming the gatekeeper, instructing the gatekeeper or persuading the gatekeeper.

**AUTHORITATIVE**

**SOUND SENIOR**

If the gatekeeper believes you are important, they will handle your call differently as if you were the everyday salesperson. Give the impression that your call is significant during the first few seconds of the conversation, and the gatekeeper won’t ask too many questions for fear of offending or disrespecting you. If you speak with confidence and poise you radiate an air that communicates your importance, increasing your chance of being connected straight through to the decision maker. To perfect this technique, role-play with a colleague and practice your authoritative tone and dictions.

**USE EMBEDDED COMMANDS**

Research has found that embedded commands evade our cognition and subsequently avoid defiance. By covertly including certain commands into your interactions with gatekeepers, you might subconsciously persuade them to act in your favour. From our experience the two best commands for getting past the gatekeeper are “would you” and “thank you”. While “would you” sounds like a question, it is actually a command; you are instructing the gatekeeper to do something. Similarly “thank you” sounds like you are simply being polite, when in actuality you are informing the gatekeeper that the conversation is finished. Rather than questioning you further, the gatekeeper should then connect you through to the decision-maker. For example:

Salesperson: This is Sarah Jones, David Smith please.
Gatekeeper: What’s it regarding?
Salesperson: Would you tell David it’s about the apartments at Jacksons Landing, thank you.

The success of this technique relies on an authoritative, firm tone, so ensure you have mastered that first and foremost! Hone your use of embedded commands by practicing them in your everyday life.

If you’re getting stuck at the gatekeeper more often than not, challenge yourself and try the opposite approach to the one you are currently using. Just keep in mind that the most important aspect is to sound confident and authentic, so practice in front of the mirror or with a colleague before picking up the phone.

**TOP TIP!**

Often, salespeople tend to fall into the habit of fluffing up their calls by repeating questions asked by the gatekeeper back to them and using overly formal words. Gatekeepers pick up on this language very quickly, and use it to classify you as a typical salesperson. Aim to sound natural over the phone to maximum effect.
There are some techniques for getting past the gatekeeper that are applicable regardless of the approach you use. Integrate the following techniques into your daily cold-calling practice, and you should increase your connection rate to the decision-maker immediately.

**INTRODUCE YOUR BENEFIT**
When you're making cold-calls, you'll occasionally be lucky enough to be connected straight through. However if the decision-maker has their calls screened, you could be asked for your name, company and purpose of the call. Rather than introducing yourself through your product or service, introduce yourself using a benefit. For example, if you are selling contemporary playground equipment, say:

"I'm Jane Williams from Adventure Playgrounds Australia, and I'm calling about increasing the aesthetic appeal of the Sydney Hillside project."

You are much more likely to reach the decision-maker if the gatekeeper believes you can truly benefit them.

**BE SPECIFIC**
You should always have a particular reason to call the decision-maker. Do your research and check out what the design specifier is actively working on, so you can reference a project. Tools like BCI's LeadManager are perfectly equipped to provide you with such information.

If your request is not immediately actionable, it invites further questions from the gatekeeper which makes your job harder. Even if it's the wrong contact, it's likely you'll be put through to someone with authority who can transfer you to the relevant decision-maker.

**CALL DURING OFF HOURS**
Gatekeepers generally work standard business hours. Conversely, decision-makers tend to come into work early or stay later in the day. If you're having trouble bypassing a particularly tricky gatekeeper, try calling outside of standard business hours. You're likely to reach a different administrator who might be more helpful, or even bypass the gatekeeper altogether. Make sure you ask for your contact's direct number once you are connected, so you can call them there next time.

**BE POLITE**
It makes no sense to be rude or brash to the person who controls your contact with the decision-maker. If you treat them poorly, it's very likely they will not be willing to assist you. Keep in mind that they are simply doing their job, so be pleasant in your interactions and treat every gatekeeper with respect.

**NEVER PITCH TO THE GATEKEEPER**
This is the golden rule of cold-calling. If you pitch your product or service to the gatekeeper, you give them the role of the decision-maker. This will never help you close a deal, as gatekeepers do not have the necessary knowledge or authority to approve a sale. Moreover, they'll just be waiting to tell you that the company isn't interested, or that they will pass on your message. No matter how hard the decision-maker is to reach, always call back rather than pitching to the gatekeeper.

If you're still having trouble getting past the gatekeeper, why not enquire about attending an Effective Specification Selling course with BCI Academy. This course is specifically designed to help sales representatives in the building and construction industry reach key decision makers including architects, engineers, consultants and other design specifiers. Learn how to consistently get past the gatekeeper and connect with decision-makers in order to get specified, stay specified and become a trusted supplier.

Good luck in your future gatekeeper endeavours! We hope you will find our techniques useful. If you have some top tips you would like to share in regards to getting past the gatekeeper, please direct them to a.krups@bcimediagroup.com and enter a draw to win (PRIZE).
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