



Getting Past the Gatekeeper By Andrea Sittig-Rolf

Receptionist: "ABC Company, how can I direct your call?"

Salesperson: "Hi, my name is Andrea Sittig-Rolf and I'm with Sittig Incorporated. I'd like to talk to your sales manager please."

Receptionist: "Can I tell him what this is regarding?"

Salesperson: "Sure. We are the developer and exclusive provider of a sales training program called The Blitz Experience® and I'd like to set up a time to meet with him to determine whether or not this program will be of benefit to ABC Company."

Receptionist: "Is he expecting your call?"

Salesperson: "Well, no, not exactly."

Receptionist: "Hold please."

Sales Manager's Voice-Mail: "Hi. I can't take your call right now so please leave a message and I'll call you back as soon as possible."

Sound familiar? Ever get the feeling the receptionist has been trained just to screen your calls and keep you away from connecting with your prospect at her company? Well, guess what, she has!

Conversations like the above are very common amongst sales teams. And, it may seem like there's nothing you can do about it. In truth, there are a few tricks you and your team can implement to mitigate this frustrating reality.

The receptionist can either make or break you in any organization. She holds the key to your success in terms of actually directing you to the person you want to talk to in her organization. I've said "her company" and "her organization" previously because as far as you are concerned, it is her company. (Or his company if you're dealing with a male receptionist.) The point is, that knowing this, there are a few things you can do.

First, engage the receptionist. Then, be genuine in your approach. Receptionists can smell a rat from hundreds of miles away, that's part of their training too.

Many times, just by logging on to a company website, you can find the name of the CEO or President of the company. Make note of this before making your call. Let's say the CEO of the company you're calling on is John Jones. Now, let's take a look at how the conversation with the receptionist should go:

Receptionist: "ABC Company, how can I direct your call?"

Salesperson: "Hi, my name is Andrea Sittig-Rolf and I'm with Sittig Incorporated. I'm hoping you can help me. I'm looking for the person in your organization who would make a decision regarding sales training. That wouldn't be John Jones, would it?"

Receptionist: "Oh no, that wouldn't be John Jones, that would be Bob Smith."

Salesperson: "Great! Can I speak to Bob, please?"

Receptionist: "Sure, I'll transfer you."

Salesperson: "Thank you."

Believe it or not, most of the time, this technique works and will get you to the person you need to talk to. The idea is that the receptionist doesn't want to bother John Jones, the CEO, with a cold call from a salesperson. It's almost a relief for her to be able to transfer you to Bob Smith, someone below John Jones on the org chart at the company.

Even if you are unable to speak to Bob Smith during this particular phone call, at least now you have the name of the person you need to talk to for the next time you call. Receptionists don't screen calls as much when you have the name of the person you want to talk to.

On another note, I know it seems obvious, but for goodness sake, say please and thank you! You would not believe the salespeople I've trained who don't even say please and thank you when dealing with receptionists, or anyone else for that matter. Simple courtesy goes a long way.

In the situation where you are talking to someone other than the receptionist who you realize is not the decision maker, and they tell you, "I'm not the one to talk to regarding your products or services." Do not say, "Oh, well who is?" Instead say, "Really? What is it you do?" and again, engage the person in conversation for a bit before asking who you should talk to instead.

Another tip is to ask for the sales department when the receptionist answers. Believe me; callers are not screened when calling on the sales department, for obvious reasons. Then, when you get a salesperson on the phone, say something like, "Hi. I'm not sure if you can help me, but I'm actually hoping to talk to your sales manager. Who would that be?" Salespeople are not trained to screen calls and we love to talk, so chances are you'll get plenty of information about the company you're calling on as well as the person you ultimately need to talk to.

Finally, when the receptionist answers, you can also try asking for the accounting department or accounts receivable department. You won't get screened by the receptionist from those departments and people in those departments aren't trained to screen calls, so chances are, they'll give you the information you need! But whatever you do, don't ask to be transferred to accounts payable...

ANDREA SITTIG-ROLF is also known as *The Blitz Master*. She is the creator of The Blitz Experience®, an activity-based sales training program that empowers salespeople to set appointments with qualified prospects the day of the training, resulting in a pipeline full of new opportunities at the end of the day. Contact your HP representative for details about using HP MDF to cover the investment of The Blitz Experience® for your sales team. Andrea Sittig-Rolf can be reached at 206-769-4886, or visit www.sittiginc.com for more information.