

Make Gatekeepers Your Allies to Reach B2B Decision-Makers

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You've done your homework. You've studied a company. You've identified some of the key pain points experienced in the industry and determined how your product or service offers a viable solution.

You've even identified the key decision-maker you need to talk with to present your ideas.

You have your message, and you make your call... That's when your initial strategy goes up in smoke. Your decision-maker's assistant answers and seems reluctant to pass you through to the boss.

The decision-maker's gatekeeper has just shut you down.

When gatekeepers block you from talking with decision-makers, don't get mad. Don't even blame the gatekeepers. They're just doing their job. What you need is a better strategy... one that turns a potentially adversarial relationship into an alliance. Enlist the gatekeepers' assistance to help you sell the decision-makers.

Here are a few techniques you can use.

1. Be Confident and Don't Sound Like a Salesperson

When the gatekeeper takes your call, speak slowly, with assurance, as if you expected the gatekeeper to pick up. Ask for the decision-maker by their first name, as though you have an existing relationship.

If challenged about the purpose of your call, don't blatantly lie. That will only come back to bite you. Instead, use a calm voice to sound serious and important. Make a gatekeeper feel that in withholding your call, they're depriving the boss, and even the company, of valuable information. That's not a responsibility most gatekeepers want to take on.

Never read from a script. Scripts don't engage decision-makers or gatekeepers.

Don't come on as aggressive or bossy. Don't try to bully your way in. All you'll do is turn a gatekeeper into your enemy.

It's time to bring out the honey. Be prepared for the fact that you may not get past the gatekeeper on your first call. You're going to need to be persistent. And this is where you need to be strategic. If you just keep calling with the same request to speak with your prospective decision-maker, the gatekeeper will get into the habit of saying, "Sorry...no."

Instead, turn the tables and start calling with the intent of speaking with the gatekeeper.

2. Take Time to Acknowledge Gatekeepers and Show Them Respect

Gatekeepers are not anonymous souls on the other end of the phone. They're

human ... with feelings. They have good days and bad days, just like you. Treat them accordingly.

You can stand out by being one of the few callers who takes the time to acknowledge the gatekeepers. Ask about their day. Say something nice. Share a joke. Make them feel as though they matter to you ... because they do. They're the ones with the power to grant you access to your prospects or block you from now until the cows come home.

Take the time to get to know the gatekeepers by their first name. Keep their names in your account files. Address them by name. It's a form of respect and flattery. You'll quickly build rapport with many gatekeepers.

3. Leverage Your Time Talking with Gatekeepers

Once you're on a first-name basis, begin recruiting an ally in your quest to help the gatekeeper's company with a solution.

The first step is to gather as much useful information as possible. Engage the gatekeepers in a business-related conversation. You're not trying to sell the gatekeepers but to learn more about the company and the pain points that you suspect exist.

Use open-ended questions that invite the gatekeepers to volunteer information. You'll be surprised at just how much they know about the company's concerns, issues and needs. Interview them. Encourage them to speak freely. Ask your question, then sit back and listen carefully.

4. Strategize with the Gatekeepers

As you begin to build rapport with the gatekeepers, continue to enlist them in your quest to reach your decision-maker. Accept that the boss is busy and can't take your call right now. Ask if there's a better approach. Can you arrange for a convenient time to call? Perhaps you can get on your prospect's calendar?

Again, ask your question, and then let the gatekeeper suggest a solution. If necessary, ask about email or the possibility of sending over a Calendar invite.

5. Try Alternate Tactics with Difficult Gatekeepers

Of course, these tactics will not work with every gatekeeper. Some more seasoned admins and executive assistants may have experienced these techniques before. A few may even have been warned never to put a sales call through.

So when you can't build a relationship with the gatekeepers, take it in stride. Don't get angry or sound frustrated or desperate. Hold your temper and find an alternate path.

For example, if building rapport doesn't work, ask a technical question that the gatekeeper can't answer. Or offer a technical reason for needing to speak with your prospect—one that the gatekeeper doesn't feel authorized to block.

Another tactic is to try calling during off-hours. Many gatekeepers work nine to five. However, executives may use early mornings or after hours to catch up on calls, emails and paperwork. Even if your prospect doesn't answer your call, you may get through to voicemail. So be sure to have a series of compelling messages prepared. By the third or fourth voicemail, you may receive a call back directly from your prospect.

Or you could try another gatekeeper. Ask for accounts receivable; calls into this department are rarely filtered. Once you connect with accounts receivable, ask them to direct your call to the decision-maker you want to reach. You may get a direct connection or voicemail.

6. Use LinkedIn Like a Pro

If all else fails, try social media. Most executives have a LinkedIn account. If the decision-maker accepts you into their network, play it smart. Don't go into your sales spiel five minutes after your request is accepted.

Take time to read up on the person, including any posts they may have written. Be a consummate professional. Engage and get an interesting discussion going. After you have some credibility and trust and demonstrate that you know what you're talking about and understand the decision-maker's concerns, then turn the conversation to one of the company's pain points.

If you want to reach the boss, stop seeing the gatekeepers as your adversaries. Instead, turn them into allies and enlist their help to reach your prospect.

Call us at +1 813-320-0500 (US) or +39 06 978446 60 (EMEA), or contact us online for help with reaching out to decision-makers.

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