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# Slaying The Gatekeepers: How To Get To The Top To Make The Sale

by SAM MANFER

“Go No Further.” That might as well be the sign implied, perceived or implanted in most people’s minds when it comes to dealing with gatekeepers. Yet, if left in place, these blockers can kill your chances of making the sale because they control where and how your message moves upward.

It’s amazing how people stick with gatekeepers until they are about to lose the deal. Then, they come up with all sorts of creative ideas to charge upwards. Here are several ways to move these dragons out of the way.

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## Always Put Together a Penetration Strategy

Once a prospect gives you a genuine hit — real interest — stop and map the territory. Recruit a team early because you cannot go this alone for long. Determine who’s impacted and who’s powerful. The focus must be that the powerful will be interviewed by someone on the team. Assign responsibilities and completion dates specifying who will get to see whom. Discuss how

gatekeepers will be handled before they get in the way.

The bigger the deal, the higher it goes and the more blocks you’ll encounter. So brainstorm before you dig in, and never believe in rubber stamps or “It’s a technical sale” — no matter what you hear.

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## Have a Penetration Attitude

Most people block themselves for fear of alienating someone. Get over it. Unless that someone says, “Do not go around me,” there is no reason to think you shouldn’t. Besides, how can you propose intelligently or quote price without knowing directly what all the impacted and senior people want?

Preparation is the best way to get an attitude. Role-play with a partner. Dry run in a mirror until

you can ask the questions without laughing. Structure what you’ll ask and how you’ll address issues.

Practice confronting the gatekeeper. Suck it in and say, “It seems you are concerned about me speaking with others. Please tell me what’s bothering you.” Say it confidently, with conviction. Then silence. Let him tell you. Don’t argue or try to justify. Just acknowledge and take his issue to the team for help.

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## Show the Gatekeeper How to Win with You

If you don't give the gatekeeper what she wants, there is absolutely no reason to let you get higher. This is tricky and complex. Her win involves two parts: hers and her boss's. Since a gatekeeper is always a subordinate, she wants (1) what she wants, and more important (2) what she perceives her boss wants — even if the perception is incorrect.

For example, the gatekeeper wants ease of use and thinks the boss wants low price, but in reality the boss wants reliable service. So you will have to at least give the allusion of low price as well as ease of use before she'll let you pass.

Now, what the gatekeeper feels is easy to use or how low the price should be are not written in the specs. The spec is black-and-white and she feels in living color. So to understand her criteria to

win, you have to ask her, and then probe for specifics about what she means by ease of use.

The first time you meet someone (anyone) is the best time to learn. They know you don't know them, so they are willing to talk up a storm. So don't waste this opportunity with a presentation about your company. Use this first encounter to learn what she wants and observe her style.

Once you know what will soothe the dragon, try to postpone your presentation until you've had time to build a colorful case showing her you can deliver her desires better than any alternative. The way you deliver is just as critical. So practice matching your chemistry to hers.

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## Relieve the Fears, Risks and Perceived Losses

The reason people block is the fear of losing something. They

may fear losing status, respect, credibility with bosses, a nasty comment, money, more stress, etc.

It could be anything, and assuming to know is very risky — you will probably assume wrong. Therefore, ask the gatekeeper to explain any concerns or risks he may have with this purchase, the procedure, or its outcome. Again, don't argue. Take this to the team and decide how to relieve those fears with something substantial — a tour, testimonials, guarantees, etc.

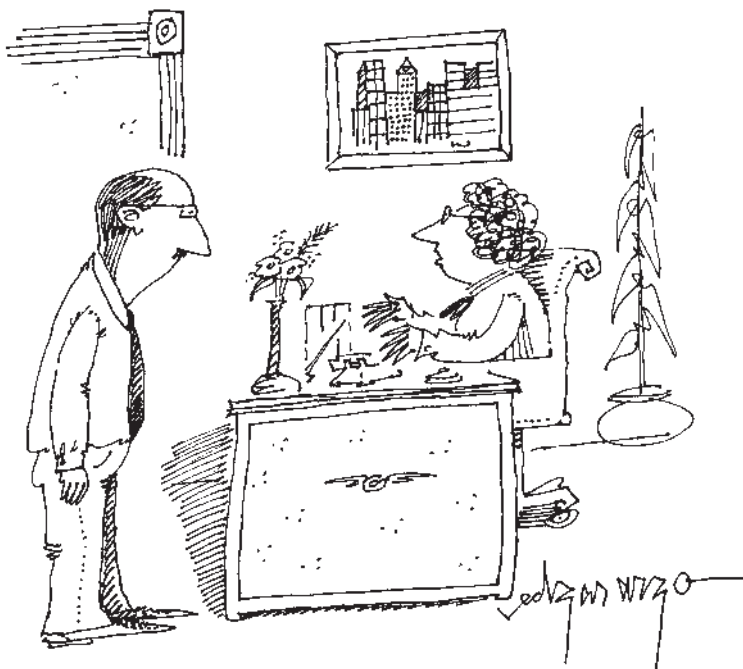
Most people assume gatekeepers fear losing control. A more common reason is the fear of getting stuck with your stuff and not liking it. However the biggest fear is the boss' impression. Subordinates do not want to disappoint their boss, so they become extra cautious and extra demanding.

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## Gatekeepers Never Make the Final Decision — Drill This Into Your Head

Determine signing authorities to see who has to eventually approve your level of expenditure. Anything above \$50,000 gets the attention of the CEO, president, GM, — the profit and loss manager. This person will eventually decide — even if it is simply a subtle nod.

Here is a myth buster. CFOs never give final approval unless it is directly related to accounting. Anything involving other functions of the company, even if they report through the CFO, i.e., IT or HR, will be approved by the P/L leader. Like any other gatekeeper, CFOs can kill a deal. On the other hand, while they can only advise to move forward, they can't approve it.



*"The boss is in a great mood, and I'm not about to let you go in there and ruin it."*

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## Build a Network of Contacts

Never hit head-on or try to go straight up. If a house said "Pit-Bull Guarded," you'd use another entry. Approach from the flanks. You know people that know people. Ask your associates, other vendors, etc. for help. You have to reach out because these helpers will not chase after you asking if they can be of assistance.

You must penetrate like a virus. Grab hold wherever. Then go out and up and out again. Win over as many as possible and keep asking for information and introductions. Everybody has a boss, so focus on getting introduced.

Go around the gatekeeper only when you have a lot of support in

high places. Otherwise the gatekeeper may not like it and easily eliminate you.

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## Keep Asking "What Happens if the Competition Gets to the Top and I Don't?"

Gatekeepers can be anyone — administrative assistants, functional subordinates, purchasing people — anyone except the leader. They can let you pass, hold you off or kick you out, which are all-important considerations in your pursuit. Like price, they are part of the landscape and must be handled. Start with the gatekeepers in mind because the dragons will eventually rise up. Tame them early and watch your closing ratio soar. □

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR:



*Sam Manfer is a sales consultant and author with more than a decade of experience.*

*Author of the book, Take Me to Your Leaders, he helps*

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