

So what exactly is a gatekeeper?

Well, they're that secretary, receptionist or other front line person whose job it is to **screen YOUR** call and to **stop** you from speaking to the decision maker.

Now you may have come to view these people as low level admin staff who do nothing more than waste your time. But the truth is, and if you're in B2B sales especially, you'd better not take these people for granted.

Just like the modern day buyer, the modern day gatekeeper is a sophisticated, highly trained, sales savvy professional.

In fact, the best gatekeeper screen is so sophisticated that most sales people have no idea that they're even being screened!

Yes, today's gatekeeper understands that every sales call that gets through to their superiors takes up precious time that they can ill afford to give up.

Now, the obvious gatekeeper screens are not the problem.

The problems start when a skilled gatekeeper has you calling over and over and over again, and they get you thinking that they're helping you and that you've just missed the decision maker----those are the screens that cost sales people tons of time, tons of money and have ended many a sales career.

So learning how to negotiate and get through these screens are very important.

However, learning how to get through them is one thing but first you need to identify when you're actually facing a screen!

Only then will you know what you need to do to get through because you'll need to change your approach each time.

So let's go through what you need to look out for in order to **identify** a good gatekeeper screen.

That's the key to success.

The first thing you need to do is to **PUT YOUR EGO IN YOUR POCKET!**

I'm really serious about this because one of the main reasons for not recognizing a screen is because the sales person doesn't want to **admit** that they're facing a situation they can't handle and that a person, they consider to be on a lower level, is in control.

You have to understand that when you're not getting through to the decision makers that it may not be down to your **bad luck! Instead**, it might be down to a **good** screen.

You also have to know and understand your numbers.

You have to rely on real data and not on your feelings. So you should be keeping detailed records on all of your activity whether that's in a CRM system, on a spreadsheet or a book.

Note down the number calls **attempted** compared to the number of decision makers that you get through to. You need to make individual notes to for each call.

For example, if the gatekeeper tells you that the decision maker just walked into a meeting, and you look back over your notes and see that they've told you this the last four times you called — then guess what?! Yes, your being played so you need to keep detailed records and know your numbers.

Next on the list is actually listening very carefully for the timing of the gatekeepers responses.

They will often give it away by what they say to you as to whether they are using a screen or not.

Here's an example:

Sales Person: "Is Mr. Bloggs available please?"
Gatekeeper: "No, he's not in at the moment. Who's calling? "This
Sales Person: is Lisa Brown from ABC"
Gatekeeper: "I'm sorry, Lisa, Mr. Bloggs is out, can I take a message?"

And now listen to this example:

Sales Person: "Is Mr Bloggs available?"
Gatekeeper: "Who's calling?"
Sales Person: "This is Lisa Brown from ABC"
Gatekeeper: "And what's your call in connection with Lisa?"
Sales Person: "I'd like to talk to him about our mailing lists"
Gatekeeper: "I'm sorry Lisa, Mr Bloggs is in a meeting at the moment, can I take a message for you?"

Those were two very different examples.

In the first example the gatekeeper says the decision maker is unavailable before they ask who's calling so this is probably not a screen.

However, in the second example, the gatekeeper **first** asks who was calling, and then what the call is about **before** telling the sales person anything.

It is very likely the second example is a screen. Does that make sense?

You need to listen for the timing of the gatekeepers questions and responses.

Do they come **before** or **after** they know who you are? And do they ask you some questions about the nature of the call too?

And finally, watch out for the long hold.

Yes, of course it could mean absolutely nothing and it could be that the gatekeeper is actually trying to locate the individual.

But it could also mean that the gatekeeper is pretending to look for the person when really they've got you on hold while they answer their next email.

Once again, check your call records. If this happens a lot at the same company — it's probably a screen.

So, in recognizing a good gatekeeper screen, remember:

First, put your ego away and accept the real possibility that you'll be screened

Second, know your numbers. Keep and refer to detailed call records.

Third, listen for the timing of the gatekeepers questions and responses and Fourth, watch for the long hold.