

SALES EXCELLENCE

SALES EXCELLENCE EXPLORES THE BEST PRACTICES ON IMPROVING SALES EFFECTIVENESS BY IDENTIFYING INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS

SALLY G & THE KEYS TO THE KINGDOM

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SALLY GATEKEEPER

Her name is Sally G., **Ms. Sally** to you. You better get to know her, and on a first name basis as well, because believe it or not, she holds the keys to your kingdom. Her full name is Sally Gatekeeper. You may or may not be familiar with her, but chances are that she isn't going to be sweet-talked. And a special word of caution, don't call her "**Honey**" or "**Dear**" or "**Sweetheart**" - that'll get you nowhere soon.

You need to be professional and respect her for who she is because she is "**THE GATEKEEPER,**" and you better get to know her and learn **how** to work with her. Now you might think I am just trying to be humorous, and trust me when I say I am no comedian, but I have come across Ms. Sally G. hundreds of times in my selling career. She can make you or break (and also brake) you, so you better learn **how** to work effectively with her because she truly does hold your "**Keys to the Kingdom.**" You must always remember and never take this for granted: gatekeepers can easily say **No**, but they can never say **Yes**, so unless you figure out how to interact with and involve her, your chances of trying to get in to see the decision-maker will be greatly decreased.

The **Head Honcho**, the main decision-maker, the person you want to talk to, has entrusted her to screen all the unwanted calls he/she doesn't want to take, especially yours. If executives, the ones you are targeting, saw every sales person who wanted to see them, they would have little time for anything else. So Ms. Sally G has a key role; it's her job to keep the boss from wasting time and he trusts her to do just that. Because you have no idea of what kind of manager this person is, you have no way of understanding what the dynamics are.

The good news is that it is also her responsibility in the screening process to let those people through who can benefit the boss and the company. Sometimes it may even pay to give her part of the presentation to convince her of the benefits (more on that later). But regardless, you need to be professional, courteous, polite, and considerate. It is easy to get frustrated when you come across the really aggressive gatekeepers, especially the ones whom you can't get past. It's easy to tell them by their demeanor. They are the kind that "eat sales people for lunch." The good news is that you can learn how to make them work for you.

In the sales process there is no **Automatic Executive Door Opener**, so you must learn the techniques necessary to earn the right to get an appointment. If you are not seen as someone who can add value, you don't deserve to get an appointment anyway!

There are two approaches to what I call **Gatekeeper Dynamics**. You can work with and through her or work around her. Be careful if you need to or chose to work around her as you risk alienating her, and the potential injured ego of a Sally G. could put a nail in your coffin.

You have to be prepared because she is going to ask you, "Can I tell Mr. Smith what your call is about?" If she has been around awhile, she will recognize that yours is not a familiar voice. Her radar system automatically goes up and she immediately puts up that stealth defense system for incoming telemarketing calls. You could be a casualty of that war.

What happens next is critical and what you tell her is what she is going to tell Mr. HH. But here is something you must understand: what you tell her is **NOT** going to get translated with the same meaning, enthusiasm, or emphasis you would do it in and the end result is the message will be diluted and deciphered. Preparation is key and quickness on your feet is necessary.

WORKING WITH AND THROUGH SALLY GATEKEEPER

Different situations will apply here depending on whether or not you know who the contact is. If you don't know, you will obviously ask for the person who would make (blank) type of decision or to whom would you send information regarding (blank).

If you do know the contact person's name, as soon as you get a live person on the phone, immediately ask to speak to that person acting as though you have known them for life. Sometimes this does work and without having to jump through any hoops you get patched right through. This probably happens 40% of the time.

The other 60% of the time you must attempt to work with Ms. Sally G as your ally. Focus on doing the following four things in your interactions with Sally:

1. Obtain her/his name and position immediately
2. Establish credibility quickly
3. Build and develop a relationship over time
4. Ask for their help (people love to help so play this card)

CONTROL THE CONVERSATION

I always want the conversation to be in my control, not hers. If I answer her question she has control and I don't. So by asking her a question, it puts the control back in my court.

So I ask the question, "May I ask with whom I am speaking?" to regain control of the communication. I ask that because I want and need to know who they are because I want to begin to use their name ASAP to work in my favor. Why? Because the odds are that I will talk to this person again.

This helps me move to establish a rapport as early on in the conversation as I can. When the next time comes and I get that person on the phone I can use their name as soon as I recognize their voice. This again helps the credibility and the relationship because I remembered their name.

You might think this is not terribly important, but in the long run it will pay you dividends. It gets me one step closer to developing a rapport with Ms. Sally G and one step closer to Mr. HH.

So let's assume I do know who the decision maker is, but I have never spoken to them and this is my first time trying to get through. I approach this gatekeeper from a confidence level that conveys an impression I am someone of importance and that Mr. HH is expecting my call. Sometimes this works and I am put right through. Sometimes it doesn't and the gate remains closed and I have to take a step back.

Next I always ask for help if I don't know who the decision maker is. I don't overplay that card but I sure know where and when to play it. As a general rule, people love to help and if I can tap into that human motivation it works to my advantage.

The downside is that I have to rely on Ms. Sally G to deliver my message to Mr. HH and if he tells her to tell me that he is not interested at this time, you are *dead in the water*.

This is cold calling at its worst -- all that work and you didn't even get an audience. This is not meant to deter you from making cold calls; cold calling is essential, but warm calling makes for a higher payoff.

GOING AROUND SALLY GATEKEEPER:

When I have been unsuccessful for whatever reason using the front door approach, I have gone around and used the backdoor approach. This works well also and I try not to use it, but if I have been stone-walled I will use every trick in the book to get in. It may not be the Gatekeeper's fault

either. It may be a situation where the decision maker is always busy and the Gatekeeper has tried to put me through but the dynamics of their boss's schedule keeps, or something else, keeps putting you off. So here are a couple of ways you can go about getting through.

1. If you don't know who the decision maker is, you can ask whom you can send information to versus whom you can speak with. This approach takes all the pressure off if you have not mastered being comfortable using the phone. You can also use this as a fallback approach if you get stonewalled or the person is not in or cannot speak with you. This way you have the contact's name and can send an article of interest or begin to use one of the strategies from the **Matrix of Opportunities**.
2. Ask to speak with one of the salespeople. Then ask that individual who the decision makers are. Salespeople are sympathetic with other salespeople and understand their plight. Perhaps you can create a networking opportunity that works for both of you and swap leads. If it helps, tell old war stories about dealing with Gatekeepers. Make a connection; it's in your best interest. Maybe you can even get the salesperson to introduce you or recommend you as an internal contact. You can also use this opportunity to find out more about their business, more about the decision maker your trying to reach and more about the challenges of the company. This will leave you in a much better position because you now have insider information (so to speak) and a leg up on your competitors.
3. Call after or before business hours or during lunch. I have used this successfully many times. The Gatekeeper is not usually there and if the decision maker is in, he or she will usually answer his/her own phone. When you call after hours you gain some advantage. One individual was always unavailable to talk to me when I would call in. When I reached him after hours, he recognized my name (persistence), apologized for not taking the time to speak with me and set an appointment right on the spot. When you take the time to call late it shows the prospect you will go the extra mile and can help you leverage your relationship.

You now have some insight into the philosophy and strategies to dealing with Sally G. Work with her, treat her with respect, create an ally and she will help you accomplish your objective.