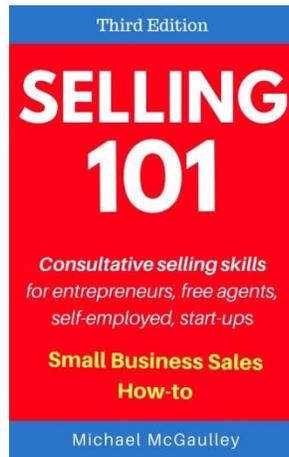


Here is your sample of **SELLING 101:**  
**Consultative Selling Skills**

**Table of Contents and Chapter 4**



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**ASIN:** B003UNKZAO

**ISBN-13:** 978-0976840664

Published by Champlain House Media. 101 – P 1.1 21418

<http://salestrainingsource.com/>

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## **SAMPLE CHAPTER: SELLING 101**

### **Chapter 4: Getting Past the Decision Maker's Screen**

People with the kind of positive decision making authority you need if you are to make the sale--- that is, who have Authority, Need, and Dollars --- tend to be busy people with many responsibilities. To minimize interruptions, they often set up various types of "Screens" around themselves. (We'll honor these Screens with capital letters here!)

Screens may extend from the security guard at the gate, to the telephone receptionist, to the executive secretary who guards the door to the DM's office. The Screen's function is to minimize distractions so the Decision Maker can focus on what is truly significant to the well-being of the organization.

That means that the Screen will open for you if, and only if, you communicate, through your words and professionalism, that you have the potential of bringing something of significant value to the

organization. That is, if you present a sound business purpose for seeing the Decision Maker.

How can you get that sense of significance across before the Screen's mind clicks shut? We'll examine some techniques in this chapter. But first we need to address the important question of . . .

### ***Whether to "Cold Call" or Work by Appointment***

It's easy enough to "cold-call" (that is, drop in at Decision Makers' offices in the hope of slipping in at convenient intervals). But sales people who rely on cold-calling waste a lot of productive time waiting in reception rooms, and driving to meetings that never take place because the DM couldn't fit them in.

You have only so many good hours in a business day: is the best use of those hours waiting for other people's meetings to end so you can have a few minutes to make your presentation?

Investing the time to phone ahead for your appointments pays off in several ways:

- It projects to the DM a business-like respect for the value of time, both your own and that of the Dm.
- By making a fixed appointment, you set up an environment that permits some control over the proceeding, free from phone calls and interruptions.
- It allows you to better prepare for the meeting, since you know for sure who you will be meeting, you can take the time to do a little more research in advance.
- In some situations, you have no real choice other than to work by appointments, since executives with real decision making power often can be seen only by appointment.

### ***Getting through (or around) the screen***

Whether you choose to cold-call or to phone ahead for appointments, you still need to get past the Screen so you can talk directly to the Decision Maker. Here are some methods to get you started, useful both in phoning and cold-calling in person.

#### **1. Whenever possible, make your contact through referrals or other kinds of "pre-introductions."**

If you are calling this DM at the suggestion of another of your clients or of a mutual friend, make that clear at the very start, both to the Screen, and later to the DM: *"I'm calling at the suggestion of Peter Wenders of GMR Industries."*

If you already know the Decision Maker from another context, mention this to the Screen, but be careful how you word it. You

don't want the Decision Maker to come to the phone -- or to avoid you -- because he thinks you're setting up a tournament at the country club, or asking for a donation to the college alumni fund.

Flag that other context as a door-opener in the Screen's mind, but then quickly move on to your present business purpose. Here's a good model to follow:

- *"At the Rotary luncheon the other day, I was talking with Ms. Tompkins. I later came upon an idea that I realized might be helpful to her work here. I'd like to set a time to drop by and explain it to her. I wonder if you can help me arrange a time, please?"*
- *Or, "Mr. Parsons dropped by our booth at the NATL show, and asked me to get in touch with him to arrange a meeting to explore some possibilities he saw there. I have the information ready now. Do you think Wednesday morning or Thursday afternoon would be more convenient for him?"*

## **2. Make the Screen your ally.**

When you phone an organization, listen closely to the name of the person who answers. It may be someone you met earlier when you were on the premises researching the organization as a potential client. If the name is familiar, remind them of your previous conversation:

- *"Mrs. Johnson, this is Jack Thomas of Computers for Business. You may remember me from my visit to your office last week." (Pause a moment to give thinking time.) "We spoke at that time about how your organization handles inventory. Since then, I've had a chance to give some more thought to what we discussed. I have some ideas that I think Mr. Rabin will find of interest. Perhaps you could schedule an appointment for me with him. It should take about 20 minutes at most. I'm available both Tuesday morning and Wednesday afternoon. Would either of these times be convenient for him to meet?"*

If the questions you asked during that earlier conversation were well-focused, perhaps suggesting problem areas for which you might offer a solution, then you may have intrigued the Screen, raising the thought that perhaps you have the potential of solving a problem with which they are familiar.

For example, if one of your questions was, "Do you have crunch periods during the month when you're very overloaded?" the DM's secretary may assume that you have a remedy available, and hence will be eager to put you through to the boss.

### 3. "Pre-sell" the Screen. But speak only in broad concepts. Do not become drawn into the details.

In persuading the Screen to put you through to the DM, you'll obviously need to talk some about your business purpose for calling. But beware of saying too much.

Granted, this puts you on the horns of a dilemma. If you are too vague, you will not get the appointment. But, conversely, the more you talk of the specifics of what you are offering, the more reasons you'll give the Screen for keeping you out: "You work with computers, you say? Well, there's no point in your seeing Mr. Chase, as we already have our own in-house computer expert."

Keep in mind the basic principle: You can't *make* the sale over the phone, but you *can lose* it on the phone.

Therefore, when you're on the phone, speak in overall conceptual terms of what your product or service WILL DO FOR the organization, not of what it IS, nor of its technical features.

Thus if your consulting focus is on introducing computer systems for increasing productivity, do not say "computers." Instead, speak of "methods for increasing productivity," or "techniques for developing more efficient work-flows."

In explaining to the Screen, focus your communication beyond what your product or service IS in order to speak of what it CAN DO FOR the purchaser. For example, if your specialty is training in telephone marketing, you could say,

- *"We've been able to help organizations extend their marketing reach to smaller customer accounts, and those in hard-to-reach places. As a result, we typically help our clients increase sales by 15 to 20%."*

Notice in this example that there is no mention at all of "telephone," and no mention of "training." But since you're offering the prospect of increasing sales by 20%, how could a Screen reasonably turn you away?

Here are some models you can adapt:

- *"I'd like to speak to Mr. Dobson about some methods that may be able to increase your organization's productivity by ten-percent or more, as we have with other firms."*
- *Or, "I'm a design consultant, and I'd like to propose some suggested designs for Ms. White to consider for your next series of advertisements."*

- *Or, "I represent a consulting firm that specializes in financial management. We've worked with a number of organizations like yours, and I believe that we may be able to help you. I do need to speak with Ms. Jensen to find out what your present needs are, and in what directions you'll be moving in the next couple of years."*

#### **4. Ask questions the Screen won't be able to answer.**

The way to get through the Screen is to communicate that you have a sound business reason for talking to the DM -- one that will help the DM or the organization work better.

Thus if the Screen is putting you on the defensive with questions, switch from defense to attack by asking your own questions, as in this dialogue:

Screen: "And what is it you want to talk to Mr. Builder about?"

Sales person: "Mr. Builder **is** the construction engineer on the PDM Center, isn't he?"

Screen: "Yes, of course. But why do you need to talk to him?"

Sales person: "I'm calling to determine whether the PDM Center is being built in accord with the NEPA Standards on hydro-thalassic transfaxions."

Screen: "I have no idea. For that you'll have to talk to Mr. Builder. Hold, please."

With a little ingenuity you can come up with a repertoire of unanswerable questions like these. The questions should be relevant to the reason for your call to the DM, but a little more technical or detailed than a receptionist or secretary would be willing to address.

#### **5. If necessary, call when the Screen is away.**

If you find that you just can't break through the Screen, try phoning before or after normal business hours, or even over the lunch hour: Key Decision Makers are typically at their desks earlier, or later, or both, to take advantage of the quiet time when the office is empty.

In off hours, Decision Makers often answer their own phones. If you do get the DM on the line, be particularly brief and to-the-point, respecting that she is in the office at this time precisely in order to avoid interruptions.

### ***Watching for the Screen's "buying signals"***

Be attuned for the subtle clues that indicate that the Screen is relaxing the barrier. When you sense this opening, don't hesitate. Use the momentum that you've built up, and move on to ask for what you want, which is, ultimately, to meet with the DM.

In some organizations, the Screen is authorized to set up the appointment, and can write you onto the calendar without your needing to speak to the DM at this point.

That's ideal, as it means you don't have to make your case again to the DM over the phone. If you sense this may be the case, work on the assumption, and suggest to the Screen a pair of alternative times from which to choose:

"I'm free to meet Mr. Bolger next Tuesday afternoon. Or would Thursday morning be better?"

Just what these buying signals consist of will depend a lot on the individual's own mannerisms. Here are some to watch for; in time you will develop a sixth-sense for when the mood has changed.

- **Change in phone manner.** The Screen may be less formal, less curt, or may become more informal and relaxed.
- **Questions may be buying signals.** Watch for the switch from questions about the product (which are basically looking for reasons to say No), to questions that relate to practical things like where you are located, or when you can come in.
- **Some statements may be indirect buying signals.** A Screen who says, "Mr. Watkins is out of town all this week," is, consciously or not, telling you that you've won, and it's now just a matter of settling on a mutually-convenient time. If so, stop making your case, and say something to the effect, "Fine. I'll be in your area next Tuesday and Thursday. Which would be better?"
- Sometimes **the level of interest** in what you are selling is a buying signal. Listen for subtle clues. If you're selling, for example, productivity improvement software for the office, the Screen might probe for reasons to say No. But the Screen might also be wanting to know more because he is very eager for a way of easing his own workload. Often, the difference will be perceptible in voice tone, energy, and enthusiasm -- perhaps even in the kinds of questions. If the questions are somewhat technical, that may be a clue that they have already begun looking for something like you offer.

### ***When you encounter voice-mail***

It's increasingly likely that you will encounter voice-mail or answering machines when you call the Decision Makers in both small organizations and large. Think through in advance just how you will respond.

Will you leave a message, or keep trying to reach the DM directly? If you leave your name, then it is in the DM's hands to respond, and you lose control. If the DM doesn't return your call, then it gets awkward: does that mean no interest, or just too busy? But sometimes leaving your name and number is the only way. Besides, if the DM does call you back, that puts you in a good position, as it shows some level of interest.

As a rule, I try several times, not leaving my name, hoping to finally get the DM at the desk. If the pattern becomes clear that I'm not likely to catch the person, then I do go ahead leave my name and number, figuring that this way there is at least a chance of getting to the DM.

But don't "wing" your messages. Decide just what message you want to leave, then boil it down so it gets quickly to the point. Rehearse your message until you can say it confidently and with a smile in your voice.

Then, before leaving your first message on a prospect's voice-mail, call your own and leave the same message. Then go back and revise and rehearse it again until it is right.

Whether to identify your company, or reason for calling, is something for you to work out, with experience. If the DM thinks you are a potential buyer of his services, she will be more likely to return the call than if she knows you are selling to her. On the other hand, a busy DM may not bother returning calls that lack information. Definitely do not try to make the sale, or even describe your product, over voice mail. Just say who you are, maybe your company, and your phone number. If you are out a lot, you could suggest ideal times to call.

### ***Summary***

Cold-calling -- that is, arriving cold at the prospect's office -- is usually not a productive way of using your time.

In most situations, it will be worth the investment of effort to set up at least a few definite sales appointments each day. (If you have spare time around scheduled appointments, you can use that for cold-calling.)

When you phone for an appointment, you may find that the person who actually has Authority, Need and Dollars is surrounded by a "secretarial Screen" who makes it hard to get through and ask for an appointment.

To get through the Screen, convince them that you are bringing the organization something of significant value. Methods for accomplishing this include:

1. Use referrals from satisfied clients who have recommended you to this organization and this decision maker.
2. Make the Screen your ally by outlining in conceptual terms how you may be able to help the organization.
3. "Pre-sell" the screen. But speak only in broad concepts. Do not become drawn into the details. You can only lose the sale over the phone, but cannot make the sale.

If possible, get the Screen to put you on the Decision Maker's calendar without your having to talk to him at this time.

If the Screen continues to block you, try more creative methods of getting through to the DM.

4. If necessary, ask questions you expect the Screen won't be able to answer.
5. Call when the Screen is away, perhaps before or after the normal working hours, in hopes of catching the Decision Maker directly.

***Concluding note: on playing the percentages***

When you call the Screen, and at every other point in the selling process, you risk hearing "No." Nobody likes to hear No, not even long-time professional sales people.

But you need to look at the noes you hear in perspective:

Selling is a percentage game. It would be unrealistic to expect that every attempt would result in a sale. But there are sales out there waiting to be discovered. Success in selling is, to a large extent, getting through the No's to find the Yes responses.

"No" is useful feedback, from which you can build a sale. The key is to probe that No, so you know precisely what it means here and now, in this specific situation, coming from this unique individual. Very often, once you know that, you can overcome it using methods we'll examine later in this book.

End of this sample chapter from Selling 101. I hope it's helpful, and fits your needs.

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