

# The Gatekeeper – Friend or Foe?

*In our last tip, we provided some ideas on to how establish an aggressive and targeted prospecting effort in order to cultivate new business. Having put into place some of these ideas, you should now have a wealth of knowledge about the prospects and their organizations, have your calls planned out, your desk cleared off, the door shut but . . . you haven't even picked up the phone yet. The question now is how to get through the gatekeeper (while still obtaining all of the needed information from him or her)?*

Since the time that we were young children, everyone was told not to speak to strangers, so as a prospector the key is . . . Don't Be a Stranger!

- Approach prospecting calls as maintenance calls. Do not sound like a 'cold call' but rather be warm, familiar and casual in your tone and delivery.
- Make the gatekeeper comfortable in sharing information by conveying the knowledge that you have obtained through your planning and research.
- Solicit their help. Create 'buy in.' Make an indirect request for 'information only.' (In a hushed tone ask, "Wondering if *you* could share with me who coordinates your travel?" – Gatekeepers love to divulge 'secrets!')
- Make connections, strike an accord or tie yourself and the hotel into the organization by referencing past interactions or experiences and conveying relationships, if they exist. (Maybe their CEO is on the board of the March of Dimes whose charitable event was recently held at your hotel.)
- If you are fortunate enough to have obtained the prospect's name, ask for him or her by their first name, even asking to speak with "Bill" rather than "William." If you do not have their name, utilize your previous research to simply 'throw out' a name ("Is it 'Jane Smith' who plans your annual meeting?").
- Make assumptions ("Is he/she the Office Manager?" "Is her email address firstname.lastname@url.com?") Nine times out of ten, if you are wrong, the gatekeeper will be the first one to point that out, correct you and inadvertently provide you with the needed contact information!
- Whenever possible, simply avoid the gatekeeper altogether! However, this *does not* mean to simply go through the automated names' directory. Obtain direct lines from email signatures, press releases and RESEARCH!

Always attempt to reach and talk to a live person who just may turn out to be a wealth of information about the organization's hotel needs. Be able to provide enough information to effectively qualify this potential prospect, even if you just end up speaking with your new *friend* . . . the gatekeeper!

Stay tuned . . . next time we'll provide you with tips on how to 'script' your call!