

## 9.5: Overcoming Barriers to Success

### Learning Objectives

- Identify how to overcome barriers to success in getting an appointment.

When Milton Hershey first opened his candy store in Philadelphia, he had to shut down after six years because he never made enough sales to get the business off the ground. After closing in Philadelphia, he moved to Chicago, then to New Orleans, then to New York, each time failing and starting over again. In fact, it took ten years of rejection and failure before Hershey's business succeeded. You already know how the story ended for Hershey (now a \$5 billion company), but now you also know that the Hershey Chocolate Company wasn't an overnight success; the business only took off thanks to one salesman's persistence in the face of failure. Evan Carmichael, "His Secret Recipe: How Hershey Achieved Success," video, EvanCarmichael.com.



Rejection is a reality that all sales professionals have to deal with occasionally, no matter how experienced or skilled they are; it comes with the territory. Prospects will sometimes hang up on you or refuse to see you, and others will listen to your sales approach and then tell you that they aren't interested in what you have to offer. However, if you approach your sales call with confidence and refuse to take rejection personally, then the possibility of rejection doesn't have to be a barrier to your success. Do you believe in the value of the solution you are selling? Are you doing your best to ensure that your customer gets what he needs and wants? Then you have every reason to be confident. Recognize that it is the *fear* of failure, more than anything else, that creates a barrier between a salesperson and a successful sale.

### Overcoming Your Reluctance

Successful selling is all about mastering your attitude, and this is especially true when it comes to facing rejection. Sales coach and author Phil Glosserman puts it this way: "The only person who can reject *you* as a salesperson is yourself." Phil Glosserman, "The Fear of Rejection," video, *Selling Power*, March 16, 2010. There are all kinds of reasons why a prospect might give you a "no thanks" response, very few of which have to do with you personally. Your prospect might simply be unwilling or unable to make a purchase at the moment, he might be facing pressures at work that prevent him from giving you his full attention, or he might just be having a bad day. Instead of focusing on the way *you* feel ("What if he turns me down?"), Glosserman suggests focusing on the way your prospect feels ("How can I help him get what he wants out of this interaction?"). If you imagine how your customer feels before and during your interaction, you will often find that you forget to feel anxious. Phil Glosserman, "The Fear of Rejection," video, *Selling Power*, March 16, 2010.

In addition to mastering your attitude, here are a few empowering and practical things you can do to help build confidence (and get a higher rate of yes responses) going into a sales approach:

- Be intentional about the language you use when you approach your prospect; don't use apologetic language or language that conveys uncertainty. For instance, rather than saying "*If* you decide to make an appointment," try a phrasing that conveys greater certainty: "*When* you make an appointment..." or "After we've set up your appointment..." Laura Laaman, "Assumptions, Sales Practice Help Fight Fear of Rejection," *Pittsburgh Business Times*, February 18, 2005, <http://www.bizjournals.com/pittsburgh/stories/2005/02/21/smallb2.html> (accessed August 3, 2009).

- Before going in to your sales call, practice with some role-plays. Even if it feels artificial at first, keep at it, and take the task seriously. If you practice various selling scenarios enough times with a role-playing partner, you will learn what a confident approach sounds like, and you will feel more prepared to handle the real situation. Laura Laaman, “Assumptions, Sales Practice Help Fight Fear of Rejection,” *Pittsburgh Business Times*, February 18, 2005, <http://www.bizjournals.com/pittsburgh/stories/2005/02/21/smallb2.html> (accessed August 3, 2009).
- Don’t procrastinate. “The longer you procrastinate about something, the larger it becomes in your mind,” BNET Reference Publications, “Facing the Fear of Rejection—Emotional Problem that Can be Devastating to the Success of Sales Representatives. So don’t put off a sales call because of nerves. Facing your fears is the best way to overcome them.
- Make difficult calls when you have the most energy. This is usually the start of the business day. Morning sales calls can also be a good time to reach busy prospects before the business day gets into full swing.
- Before going into the call, visualize a successful outcome. Phil Glosserman says to “imagine what you *want* to feel” during the sales call; think of a situation in your life that made you feel that way and put yourself into that frame of mind. Phil Glosserman, “The Fear of Rejection,” March 16, 2010.

## Getting Past the Gatekeepers

So what do you do if you’ve prepared your opening statement and done your research, but when you make your phone call, it isn’t your prospect who picks up the phone; instead, it’s her assistant, who wants to know who you are, why you are calling, and why you think your prospect should want to talk to you anyway? This is a likely scenario in B2B sales when your prospects are busy executives who don’t have the time to handle every call that comes through their office. If you want to see your prospect, you may have to go through the **gatekeeper** first. His title might be secretary, assistant, administrative assistant, or executive assistant, but his role will be the same: keeping unwanted distractions from interrupting his boss’s busy schedule. Salespeople often think of gatekeepers as road blocks—something standing in the way of getting to see the prospect—but if a salesperson treats gatekeepers as obstacles to be overcome, not only is he unlikely to get past them, but he is also missing out on the opportunity to collaborate with people who can be valuable assets to his sale. Michael A. Boylan, *The Power to Get In* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1998), 125. Gatekeepers are human beings (not obstacles) whose jobs are important to the successful running of their organizations. Think of them as part of the selling relationship and treat them with the courtesy and respect with which you would treat your prospect. Lori Richardson, an experienced salesperson and sales trainer, says, “I like to think of a gatekeeper as someone to get to know—a potential new coach into connecting me with my ultimate contact beyond the virtual *gate*.” Lori Richardson, “Dealing with Gatekeepers,” *Sales Coach Blog*, AllBusiness, April 19, 2005. Gatekeepers are an integral part of the selling relationship for a number of reasons:

- They often have valuable knowledge about the internal workings of an organization, including where the power centers are and how decisions get made.
- They are familiar with their boss’s schedule (sometimes even more than their boss is).
- They have a significant say in who gets in to see their boss and in how communications get passed on.
- They can determine how outsiders are represented to their boss. They often influence the first impression because they might tell your prospect *about* you before you actually make contact with the prospect. Michael A. Boylan, *The Power to Get In* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1998), 124.

Put yourself in the gatekeeper’s shoes for a minute. You have been answering the phone all day, responding to people who don’t often treat you with much respect, and you get another call:

<b>Salesperson:</b>	Hello, this is Camille Martin. Is Maria Gonzalez in her office right now?
<b>Assistant:</b>	Yes, she’s here, but she’s busy at the moment. Can I ask what you’re calling about?
<b>Salesperson:</b>	I’d like to schedule a meeting to see her. When would be a good time to call back?
<b>Assistant:</b>	I’m sorry, but Ms. Gonzalez doesn’t take unsolicited calls.

Notice that the caller didn’t give the name of her organization or the purpose of her call, even when the gatekeeper asked for more information. She was abrupt with the gatekeeper, so the gatekeeper was abrupt in return. When talking to gatekeepers, give them

the information they ask for when they want it. Michael A. Boylan, *The Power to Get In* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1998), 126. Remember that it's the gatekeeper's job to find out whether your call is worth his boss's time, so if you tell him the purpose of your call, you are helping him to see that your call may be valuable.

Learn the gatekeeper's name and be friendly. Business writer Susan Ward suggests starting off the conversation by asking "I wonder if you could help me?" as a way to show respect and demonstrate that you see the gatekeeper as part of your selling relationship. Susan Ward, "Cold Calling Tips," About.com, <http://sbinfocanada.about.com/cs/marketing/a/coldcall.htm> (accessed May 16, 2010). If you do this, you won't need to get past the gatekeeper; he can often tell you everything you need to know—the name of the right person to talk to or the best time to contact your prospect—or even schedule a meeting for you before you ever interact with your prospect. Finally, when the gatekeeper does give you helpful information, remember to thank her. For extra helpful gatekeepers, you might even consider sending a note or small thank-you gift.

Now review the approach shown above using a referral as a way to work with the gatekeeper as an ally, rather than view her as a barrier:

<b>You:</b>	Good morning. My name is Camille Martin and I'm calling from Preston and Preston; we're a full-service digital photography studio here in Cleveland. I'm following up on a conversation that Jason Kendrick, our company's CEO had with Maria Gonzalez. I understand she is looking for a partner in the digital photography area. May I speak with her?
<b>Assistant:</b>	Let me check and see if she is available. Can you give me your name and company again?
<b>You:</b>	Thank you. I appreciate your help. I'm Camille Martin from Preston and Preston. What's your name?

## Key Takeaways

- Attitude, especially fear of rejection, can be a barrier to success in approaching your prospect.
- Some ways to build confidence and overcome your reluctance include focusing on using language that conveys certainty during the approach, practicing the approach through role-play, making calls at the time of day when you have the most energy, and visualizing a successful outcome.
- In B2B sales you may need to get past **gatekeepers** before you meet your prospect.
- **Gatekeepers** can be your allies if you treat them as part of the selling relationship.

### ? Exercise 9.5.1

1. Think of a time when you succeeded at something you had been reluctant to do. What techniques did you use to help you achieve your goal?
2. Imagine that you are a sales rep for a logistics company and you want to get an appointment with the COO of a hardware manufacturer. You've heard that he can be very difficult to deal with, so you are concerned about calling on him, but he is a large prospect for you. Identify three things that you would do to overcome your reluctance and make the call.
3. Put yourself in the shoes of an executive assistant at a large corporation. It has been a busy morning, and just after lunchtime a salesperson calls and asks to see your boss. Name three things the salesperson could do or say that would make you more willing to help him.
4. Assume you are a sales rep for a firm that sells accounting software that can reduce invoice processing time by 15 percent. You want to get a meeting with the chief financial officer of a prospective company, but you need to go through the secretary to get to the CFO. Which approach would you use with this gatekeeper? Which approach would you use with the CFO? Why would you use each of these approaches?

This page titled [9.5: Overcoming Barriers to Success](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Anonymous](#).