

How to Get Access to the Decision Maker

By [Steve Kraner](#) on Jun-06-2007 | [How to Sell Value](#)

Challenge:

Well I know it's easier to start at the top and work down but I have 2 or 3 situations where companies contacted us about our software. And now I'm dealing with most likely the non decision maker "researcher" who reports back to their boss who in turn may report to someone else.

Now that I'm in this boat, I'm looking for suggestions on how to get referred to the correct decision makers.... I think I heard that there is even a good way to get low-level prospect to suggest it....

Thanks in advance for the advice.

Regards,
—Tim

Solution:

Tim, why do you want to get to others? If you close deals by working through the 'researcher' then just work with them. I have to guess at your answer to that question—but if it's a problem working through the person who calls in, it's typically because:

- They can't give you all the information you need to offer a quality solution.
- It's time consuming and ineffective when they have to run back and forth between you and the others in the process.
- They can't do as good a job as you can when it comes to asking the right questions and fielding the concerns of the others in the process.

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To overcome these problems:

1. I assume you have a structured questioning process for discovering, exploring and evaluating the buyer's motivation—the underlying reason for dissatisfaction with the status quo. A solid, consultative 'pain' step, prior to a request for access to others, gives you more latitude to ask for what you need to help them. I won't attempt to teach the entire sales process here—but sequence is key and that's why a good sales process emphasizes the proper sequence of events that lead to the optimum outcome for you and the buyer.
2. As part of that process, ask questions that are obviously legitimate, but which a gatekeeper may not be able to answer. This often results in the caller suggesting that you need to speak to others. You might even ask, "Who might know that answer?"—and— "Is it out of the question for you and I to somehow get on the phone with (the others)." Note: Asking in this negative way tends to increase your odds.
3. Part of that process should also take into consideration issues like:
 - A. "Who else is impacted by this (pain, fear, gain)?"
 - B. "How do you suggest they be involved in this evaluation process?"
 - C. If they fail to name someone who you suspect is part of the process—then you might say, "In every situation where we have a project like this, the CFO has always been involved. Are you sure your CFO won't need to take a look at this?"
 - D. If you feel you aren't getting access to decision makers, and you find that you are losing deals because you don't have access, then you may politely press the point. "I've got a lot of experience working on these projects and I have a sense of what VP's of Marketing tend to want. Are you sure it doesn't make sense for me

to help you field her questions directly?" If they tell you no, see #E and #F below.

E. Don't spill your candy in the lobby. The caller may want information, quotes, etc. I suggest you gracefully hold back on giving them what they want. Don't squander your leverage. If you want more access, ask for it BEFORE you give them all of what they want. If you give it all away before you ask for something you want, you have squandered your leverage.

F. Promote "The Researcher" to "CEO." Most 'researchers' are territorial. They protect their turf and refuse entry into executive's offices. They take their job seriously and often feel they can be the hero by bringing the exec's the solution. Most will work with you to get you to the others if you've done what I suggested above. Some will not. If you can't get in front of the real decision maker, you can improve your chances by treating the researcher as if he was the final decision maker.

1. Hand them the psychological baton of power and then test their commitment to your solution. "I know no one there is going to even see our solution unless you think it's the right one. If you were making the decision, without any other input, would you select the solution we've discussed? And, by the way, I'm O.K. hearing 'no' if you don't think we're the best solution." The researcher has to be convinced himself before you can ask him to carry the ball for you.

2. If he is supportive, then prepare him to run the ball for you. "I'm aware that you need to get others on board with this before it's final. Since you'll have to make the final presentation to (the others), may I ask you a few questions about what they may want out of this solution, what their concerns might be, and offer you a few tools I've found that are useful in talking to (CFO's, VP's of Sales, etc.)?" This is a process of rehearsing them through the sales call they are going to make for you.

G. None of these TACTICS will work if they seem manipulative or wrong in any way. Your belief system has to support the use of any tactic. It is not wrong of you to want to have direct communication with the key stakeholders in the process—it's in both your best interest AND theirs. My doctor won't let me self-prescribe. It would be malpractice if he did. A competent physician always does the right examination, lab tests and x-rays to properly diagnose, only then will he/she prescribe a course of treatment. Your philosophy must be the same.

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