

Getting Past Bertha: The Rules of Gatekeeper Engagement In Sales

We all know who Bertha is.

She's the ever-present Gatekeeper... the evil lord of the Decision-Maker's precious appointment book, telephone, and front door. She eats unsuspecting sales reps for breakfast. She's been around the block, and knows what you're up to. You're a Salesperson, and as far as she's concerned, you're the enemy. She's made up her mind; her boss' office is the end zone, and she's the entire Steelers front line.

When Bertha asks, "***What is this regarding?***", we all know where she's going. She wants to get to the bottom of why you want to waste her boss' time, and if she doesn't get a satisfactory answer, you're getting flushed like last night's Taco Bell.

*As a professional sales rep, it's critical that you answer Bertha quickly and confidently. One hesitation – just one hint that leads her to believe you're tentative, nervous, or don't know your stuff – and you're toast. So **Rule #1** of getting past Bertha is: **Be Ready For Bertha**. Don't count on your last-minute, off-the-cuff wit to pull you through; you must be prepared for questions like "What's This Regarding?" and answer them with confidence.*

(NOTE: Want to know my best responses to the question, "What's This Regarding?" Just E-mail me at bill@The800PoundGorilla.com with the words "BERTHA" in the subject line, and I'll send 'em right to you.)

Rule #2 is: Play Her Game. This is her turf. In order for you to win, she has to believe that SHE'S in control. You won't beat Bertha; your best bet is to win her over, which leads us to:

Rule #3: Treat Bertha Like She's The Decision-Maker. You don't know how much the Decision-Maker counts on Bertha to help him or her decide what to do. Many bosses ask their assistants what they think about certain vendors or product lines. They often ask their assistants questions like: "What'd you think of that person that just walked out the door?" Most every Bertha has an opinion, and even though they may not take their advice, they listen to their responses, and it does influence the Decision-Makers' thinking.

One of the other things to consider is that Bertha may actually be a better prospect for what you're selling than the Decision-Maker... in which case you're better off getting to know her in the first place.

In many of the sales training programs I conduct, I'll ask one or more of the executive assistants that work at their own company to come into our class. I conduct a brief interview with them, Oprah-style, and ask them what sorts of things impress them from the many salespeople that call them in their role as gatekeeper for their boss. I'll also ask them to tell the group what really gets them angry, and tell a story or two about someone that really blew it with them on the phone, and will now NEVER get through to the boss, no matter what. We've heard some pretty amazing stories!

I also ask them, "What single piece of advice would you give to your sales reps here in the room when they're dealing with gatekeepers like you?" Here are the four boiled-down responses that are most common:

- Recognize them as someone with a brain, not as something to "get past" in order to achieve their objective.
- Speak to them as a human being.
- Don't lie to them. (They eventually find out, and it's not pretty!)
- Give them respect and courtesy.

As I teach in every sales training program I conduct with teams across the nation: Sales is a game – play to win!



- Bill Guertin is CEO (Chief Enthusiasm Officer) of ***The 800-Pound Gorilla***, a dynamic sales training and consulting company whose list of blue-chip clients includes the ticket sales departments of dozens of teams from the NBA, NFL, NHL, Major League Baseball, and Major League Soccer. He is the author of the Gold Medal-award-winning book [*Reality Sells*](#), and his second book, [*The 800-Pound Gorilla of Sales: How to Dominate Your Market*](#), will be published this fall by John Wiley & Sons. Subscribe to his Sports Ticket Sales Newsletter at www.The800PoundGorilla.com, or follow Bill on Twitter at www.twitter.com/800poundgorilla.