



The Waiting Game

By Jeffrey Davidson

If you are a busy producer, sooner or later you may find yourself cooling your heels in a prospect's waiting room. How you react to this potentially frustrating experience is one indicator of how good a salesperson you really are.

Will you sit and stew—the picture of resentment? Or will you retain your composure and turn an

apparent inconvenience to your advantage? The skillful professional knows that if you keep your wits about you, you can learn a lot in the reception area to help you deliver a successful sales presentation.

For example, it makes good sense to read the subscription labels on any magazines you may find in the reception area. They are likely to be addressed to a high-

ranking executive. If there are several different magazines with subscription labels, each bearing the same person's name, the name probably belongs to the top executive officer.

The type of magazine displayed also reveals something about the business. If *Psychology Today* or some kind of international magazine is displayed, the firm most likely takes a global,

intellectual or, perhaps, philosophical approach to business, and possibly certain coveted achievements and milestones already have been reached.

If *Forbe's*, *Fortune* or similar publications are displayed, the business probably has achieved a fair degree of success and is trying to project an image of at least a moderate level of sophistication. If *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Business Week* or *U.S. News and World Report* are in the reception area, they generally are for the perusal of visitors and do not necessarily reflect the backgrounds and interests of the firm or its officers.

The same applies if *Life*, *People*, *Sports Illustrated* or any regional publications are displayed.

Be certain to read any available literature about the business. If you can't read it before meeting with your prospect, read it afterward. Always try to obtain literature on the business and information about the prospect before the sales call so you can make a better presentation.

Be aware of any trade association plaques that may appear in the reception area. Older, established firms usually belong to at least one trade association and display any plaques proudly. A plaque may bear the date the firm joined the association, which will help you determine how long it has been in business. The plaque also may contain the name of an individual or member who represents the company.

Telling source

Depending on the type of plaques displayed, one may learn other valuable information about the firm. For example, you may find that the company belongs to the local Chamber of Commerce, the Better Business Bureau or other local civic associations. Such a discovery would facilitate

gathering follow-up information.

Are employees shielded from the reception area, or can you see around the corner and observe the hustle and bustle of busy workers? Businesses that have a high regard for their employees and are trying to convey a high-class image often will shield employees from view.

The opposite is also true. A business that has somewhat lower regard for its employees or does not feel they need visual protection will not place a shield or barrier between the reception area and the inner offices of the company.

Assuming the items on the receptionist's desk are within view, do you see a typewriter nearby? If so, it may indicate that the business receives a relatively low volume of telephone calls. If the receptionist has no typewriter and a full switchboard, you may rest assured that the volume of telephone calls is at a higher level. This may provide other clues as to the nature of the firm's business and how it is handled.

What is the age of the receptionist? Generally speaking, an older, mature receptionist may reflect management's desire to maintain an image of a well-established, reputable, traditional business.

Remember also to be friendly when dealing with the receptionist. After all, the receptionist is your passport to future communication with your prospect. It will be helpful if you can extend a personal greeting over the telephone and on subsequent visits to the company.

But do not be too friendly. This kind of action usually gets back to the business's officers and will not help you sell your product in the long run. In fact, it will probably do you harm.

While you are waiting for your appointment, do not pry the receptionist for details about the person you are going to see. Again, this has a way of getting

back to the person and is not considered reception-area etiquette.

One way to stand out from the scores of people that enter the receptionist's office every week is to check the wear on the carpeting. If you observe signs of wear around particular seats, or a seat itself shows wear, sit someplace else. When the person you are waiting to see arrives to greet you, you will be sitting in a chair that is not utilized as often as others.

If you have a number of seats to choose from, do not pick the seat next to the outside entrance. Select the seat that has been used least by others, based on carpeting wear, and is furthest from the door. Or choose the seat that best enables you to face the direction from which your prospect will be approaching. In this small way, you will stand out from the crowd.

The right image

Feel free to work on assignments or do other paperwork if you have to sit for more than a few minutes. This indicates that you are a busy person who efficiently uses the minutes and sections of time that become available each day. Do not sit there idly, hands folded, looking like you are resting. You do not want to leave the impression that you are content just to be seated and not all that interested in making a sale.

Ideally, the information in your possession about a company should be gathered long before you ever make a sales call. It pays, however, to keep your eyes and ears open in the reception area. Look for clues. Your observations may help you develop a sixth sense about the way a company operates. **PA**

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