

GETTING TO VITO™

the Very Important Top Officer

10 Steps to VITO's Office

ANTHONY PARINELLO

vito | SELLING



JOHN WILEY & SONS, INC.

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In Memory of
My brother Al:
The leader of the band

VITO | SELLING

A personal message from Tony Parinello:

In 1995 I created a new lexicon for salespeople in America called *Selling to VITO, the Very Important Top Officer*. Times change, and so do the challenges we salespeople face.

The book you now hold in your hands is the flagship of an epic new series that will totally embody the spirit of VITO selling for the 21st century. From this point on, you will be offered best-practices education and coaching in every aspect of Very Important Top Officer selling imaginable, from prospecting to building unshakably loyal customers. This all-new series of VITO selling will provide you with online downloads, virtual seminars, and personal coaching, all tightly focused on one single goal: getting to the top and staying there.

Welcome to the new generation—welcome to VITO selling.

Visit www.vitoselling.com or call 800-777-VITO.

Have a stellar day!

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Tony". The signature is stylized with a long, sweeping horizontal line above the name and a large, elegant loop at the end.

Tony

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Please accept my deepest gratitude.

PREFACE

March 2004

As the speaker stepped on to the stage the audience of more than 1,000 stood and began to applaud. A standing ovation *before* a single word was spoken. I had only seen this happen once before, and that was in Fort Lauderdale in 1992. My brother Al and I watched as Og Mandino took the stage. As the audience stood and began their clapping my brother said to me: “Bro, that will be you someday.” My brother always had a way of making me feel just a little bit bigger, a little bit brighter, and a little bit more successful than I knew I was. Og and my brother Al were always an inspiration for me. Time catches up, though; it always does. Og Mandino passed away a few years later, and so did my brother. I never forgot the lessons that both of them taught me . . . and the opportunities they continue to guide me to.

Think big, act big, and big results will happen.

Now, as I stepped up to the podium and looked out at the audience standing and clapping, I choked up. I could swear that I saw Og and Al in the audience! What a moment. What had I done to deserve such respect from this group of individuals? What moved this audience of more than 1,000 academics, business leaders, and sales professionals to honor me with a standing ovation before I said a single word? I was humbled.

I have spent my entire adult professional life perfecting a particu-

lar skill. I say *perfecting* because I have been constantly changing it. Like anything else in this universe, it's either growing or it's dying. I prefer to grow, and I know you do too. That's why you picked up this book. In the chapters that follow, you will be reading about tactics and methods that I have personally created. I haven't copied, shadowed, hacked, or taken one idea from any other source. What follows is original Tony. If you want to take what you read in the chapters of this book and put it to work in your sales career, you'll need to show a little faith, you'll need to trust me, and you'll need to forget all about the past. Here's why.

I have personally taught over 1,500,000 salespeople my VITO tactics. And it never ceases to amaze me how people will automatically predict their *future* on the basis of what happened in the *past*. The past is the wrong information to look at! In the past, you were a different person. You weren't as smart as you are today. You weren't as old as you are today. The circumstances around you were not the same as they are today. Yesterday is old, virtually irrelevant information! Today—and specifically what you decide to *believe* today—has a *much* greater impact on where you end up than anything that you might have experienced *before* today.

So how does that relate to getting to VITO *today*? Selling today in *this* economy requires new beliefs, new ideas, and new techniques. And that's exactly what you're going to find in this book. What worked yesterday or didn't work yesterday has nothing to do with it. I am going to give you real-world, thought-leading ideas that can revolutionize your selling power and your future in sales. You and I can predict your future success by deciding to believe that what you learn in this book *can* work. Then *you* must consciously believe it *will* work.

This book will help you formulate your new beliefs and give you the tactics to support your efforts to get to the top of your mountain, to stand at the peak of your own success. The only favor I ask of you is that once you're standing at the top you turn and reach out to someone and make them feel a little bit bigger, a little bit brighter, and a little bit more successful than they might be thinking that they are.

Thank you for your trust in me.

A kind word from a fellow salesperson . . .

WOW! Your tactics really work! I've been calling on a particular "Seemore" in a high value account for no less than F-I-V-E YEARS! Never has she responded to any of my previous 12 letters or umpteen voicemails.

So, I followed all of your steps for gathering critical VITO information, formulated the correspondence "wave" following your instructions to the "T." Then, at the appointed time I called and found out that VITO was on vacation so, then I left a voice mail message just like you said. Then, one week later I faxed a message just like you said. Then, the most unusual thing that's ever happened to me happened. VITO called *me* to set an appointment.

Pinch me, I must be dreaming.

I know you get stories like this all the time, but who doesn't like to get a pat on the back? I just wanted to say thank you, Tony.

Here's to OUR greater success,

Gary Bollinger-Smith
Seattle Wa.

IMPORTANT NOTE:

THE CONTENTS OF THIS BOOK COULD CHANGE YOUR LIFE.

DON'T SKIP THIS PART

THE CAST OF CHARACTERS

I thought about calling this part of the book the Introduction, but I figured that if I did that, you might not read it. That would be a problem, because this is the part of the book where you learn about all the key people in the great and rewarding drama that you're holding in your hands: *Getting to VITO*.

MEET VITO

VITO is the Very Important Top Officer—the person with the ultimate veto power. VITO is the real “approver” of your sale.

This book will show you how to sell today and in the years to come. This book will be automatically updated as the selling environment changes. How? Not by just-in-time printing but by inviting you to go to a special Web site, www.gettingtovito.com, where you'll find current, up-to-date information for free, as well as additional materials available for a fee.

LET'S GET FOCUSED

Getting to VITO focuses on the most important step of all in your sales work: getting to the person who has veto power over the decision to buy from you. Within this book, you will find powerful, proven tactics that really do result in getting to VITO. If you do what I say, you will increase the average size of your sale, and you'll make the sale in less time. There are many other benefits that will unfold in the chapters that follow. Take advantage of all of them.

MEET SEEMORE

“Seemore” is the person in almost every account you want to sell your stuff to who always wants to *see more* of everything: you, meetings, presentations, demonstrations, site visits, lunches, donuts with little sprinkly things on top . . . you name it. Getting to VITO isn't about getting around Seemore or toasting Seemore to a crisp. Get-

ting to VITO isn't about forgetting Seemore exists. Getting to VITO is all about putting VITO first in *all* of your attempts to sell . . . and putting Seemore second.

MEET TOMMIE

"Tommie" is VITO's personal assistant. Tommie is closer to VITO than almost anyone at VITO Inc. Tommies are playing a more important role than ever before in corporate America. These trusted advisors really do know who's who . . . and who's doing what to whom. You'll do your sales career a big favor if you simply *treat Tommie like VITO*. You'll learn all about this too.

AND THE MOST IMPORTANT PLAYER OF ALL . . .

Then, of course, there's you, the salesperson. You'll soon find out that there are plenty of tactics and new ideas for you to deploy. I want to let you know that you will not be the first to use what you will read about here. Over the past 15 years or so I've trained hundreds of thousands of salespeople to do what you're about to learn how to do. Some of the biggest companies in America pay me a lot of money to train their people how to do what I'm about to teach you. There's only one reason to do that: This system has been tested, and it works.

AND THEN THERE'S ME . . .

I am totally passionate about and committed to the topic of VITO. I've focused on this topic in my books, in numerous articles, and in my audio programs and training seminars. What you're about to read is the culmination of all of these assets and the experience that I've gathered by personally approaching VITO and by learning from the experiences of my distinguished (and, yes, now wealthy) alumni.

My thought for you is that you should take what you are about to learn and *use it*.

Enjoy the journey!

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Tony", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending from the end of the signature.

Anthony Parinello

Part One

VITO SELLING: THE NEW GENERATION

1

SETTING THE STAGE

VITO Principle #1: Everything changes.

Who is VITO?

VITO is the Very Important Top Officer—the man or woman who sits at the top of every single one of your target groups of prospects and customers who has the ultimate authority to make your sale materialize or disappear.

If VITO doesn't want to buy your stuff, the sale *is not* going to happen, no matter how many purchasing peons, interns, or technical experts say it's a great idea. Ever had a “sure thing” sale evaporate mysteriously? Five will get you ten that VITO, whom you never met, happened to mention to someone that what you were offering didn't seem like a great idea. Whoosh. You went from the hot new thing to radioactive in 10 seconds.

If VITO does want to buy your stuff, then the sale *is* going to happen, no matter how many senior VPs, entrenched suppliers, or relatives of the current vendor think it's a dumb idea to buy from you.

You want VITO on your side. This book is about *getting* VITO on your side.

• • •

I've spent a good many years writing articles and books, creating audio programs, building e-learning lessons, and teaching and coaching salespeople how to get appointments with VITO—the person who has the ultimate veto power. And over the years, like everything else in this universe, the process has changed.

Why? VITO has changed. Levels of authority continue to migrate upward within the enterprise. The tougher regulatory and legal environment of the last few years has made VITO more cautious. When people at the top exercise caution, they typically delegate and empower others in an effort to mitigate risk.

So I'll share with you, right now, the big lesson I've learned about VITO since I wrote my first book. It is this: Contrary to popular opinion (and my own assessment in the early 1990s), today's VITOs aren't really risk takers.

Actually, by the time VITO approves a decision—either through empowerment, delegation, or (gasp!) taking direction from individuals lower down and higher up in the executive ranks of VITO Inc.—the “risk” has typically become nonexistent. The decision turns into a well-informed strategic choice, one that puts *someone else's* neck on the line. (Or, better yet, a bunch of someone else's'.)

I realize that there are dangers in any generalization, and I know that what I've just described is not the way *all* VITOs operate these days. But it is an increasingly common pattern in today's business environment, and it seems likely to me—given some of the challenges faced by a number of visible “hard-charging” executives who really were serious risk takers—to remain a common pattern in years to come.

DON'T KILL THE MESSENGER!

You're not going to like the facts of selling life that you're about to read. Just remember that I am on your side, and when you get to the end of this chapter I will still be on your side.

Ready? Here are six things you need to acknowledge about your selling career.

1. Right now, your sales cycle is, in all likelihood, about 50% longer than it can and should be.

2. You've been lied to repeatedly by the decision makers you've been dealing with for lo these many years. They've told you that they have the authority to say No to the vendors they deal with. They really don't have this power.
3. You've been selling to individuals who don't like to be sold to.
4. You've been annoying the hell out of them in the process.
5. Whether you realize it now or not, every VITO has a VITO.
6. If you want to sell to a VITO, you have to think like a VITO.

Let's look at each of these in depth.

THING YOU NEED TO ACKNOWLEDGE ABOUT YOUR SELLING CAREER #1:

Your Sales Cycle Is 50% Longer than It Should Be.

I know, I know. The threadbare phrase "time is money" has been beaten into your skull for years. But is that any reason to ignore it?

The cost of a person-to-person "sales call" continues to rise in too many of today's sales organizations. Many sales managers still insist on getting salespeople to focus on "activity"—and not on results. In startling numbers, lines of business executives (like VPs of sales) are watching their ROS (return on sales) dwindle.

And guess what?

While all of this is happening, you and your contemporaries are, in all likelihood, using tactics that are actually lengthening rather than shortening your sales cycle! That means you're making these already lousy numbers *worse*, not better!

Dubious? Don't be. In the pages that follow, you'll learn what the (all-too-common) problems are and how to turn them around.

THING YOU NEED TO ACKNOWLEDGE ABOUT YOUR SELLING CAREER #2:

You've Been Lied to: Decision Makers Really Cannot Say No.

There are, by my count, five important players in each and every account that you and I sell to. For now, I want to focus on the role of just one of these players: the Decision Maker, or DM.

Fact Number One

The DMs' job is to say Yes. They have to. It's in their job description.

They have a need to fill, a job to do, and they need the help of "business partners" to do it. Keep in mind, then, that whenever you get what sounds like a No from a DM, *that means that they have said Yes to someone else*, like your competition. I know that's not cool, but that's the way it is.

Fact Number Two

In the not-so-distant past (like, say, within the last 12 to 24 months) a few players changed their roles in your prospects' and customers' organization. You most likely didn't notice this, mainly because your prospects and customers didn't want you to know anything about it.

But it happened. DMs grew in numbers. They are now sprinkled all over the enterprise. And they tend to act out a role in our sales process that looks a lot more important than it really is.

DMs did at one time actually possess the "signature authority" for some pretty substantial numbers. Example: I sell to large Fortune 500 organizations. The VP of sales is typically the person who signs my agreement when I get a "yes" answer. In days past, the VP of sales had decision authority for upwards of \$250,000. Today, that same VP in that same Fortune 500 account has a \$2,500 authority level.

Look at it again. *Was*: a quarter of a million bucks. *Is*: twenty-five hundred bucks.

DMs are not about to tell us about this (very important!) trend. So, then, who is making the *real* decision?

Consider the following situation.

Imaginary Case Study

Ms. VITO Importanta, the CEO of VITO, Inc., wants to capture the Pacific Rim opportunity for her line of wireless products. She's done her own research, and she's confident that her vision and mission will take the competition by surprise and win the market share that she needs to attract round two of investors. Her most trusted line-of-business executive, who has proven his ability to get things done

ahead of time and under budget, is her chief operations officer (COO), Mr. Joe Kickass.

Mr. Kickass is empowered, during a simple one-on-one meeting with Ms. Importanta, to find all of the necessary channels to make this push across the Pacific Ocean a reality. The COO will take all of the *tactical* steps to make this happen. Ms. Importanta ends her directive with these words: “Kickass, once you’ve decided on the right suppliers, pass them by me *before* you sign anything.”

What just took place? Ms. Importanta *kept* her veto power . . . and turned over the *risk* to Mr. K.

So here’s what the situation looks like to the *typical* salesperson: Mr. K is the Decision Maker. The buck stops right on his desk. The typical salesperson thinks, “If Kickass says ‘No,’ I’m out of the game. If Kickass says ‘Yes,’ I just hit pay dirt.”

Wrong on both counts!

If you think that the formal Decision Maker (Joe Kickass) is *the* person who is approving your sale, I have news for you. The numbers show different. The numbers also show that you’re going to be surprised during your discussions with Mr. Kickass *after* he says “yes” to you, and most of the time you are not going to be pleasantly surprised.

A recent poll of my *Selling to VITO* alumni indicates that more often than not when a DM says “you’re in the running and everything is looking good,” *your sale is still very much in jeopardy*. A whopping 30% of the time the sale is denied. Even if you look at the world with that famous cup-half-full perspective, that means you’re only getting seven out of ten deals, when you thought you had ten out of ten. Ouch!

Who’s Who Continues to Change

The business landscape has changed since I wrote *Selling to VITO*, and so have the players and their roles. Here’s the lineup (from the bottom up) as it appears today, in the twenty-first century:

- Recommenders
- Influencers
- Decision Makers

- Approvers
- Board members

Note: In cases where you're selling to an enterprise that does not currently have any board members, not to worry . . . your job just got a little easier.

Empowerment in today's business world works like this:

Board members advise and empower Approvers to overaccomplish each and every one of their goals, plans, *and* objectives, especially year-end shareholder distributions.

Approvers empower Decision Makers by telling them to sign on the dotted line . . . *after* reporting to the Approver as to what their preferences are.

Decision Makers empower Influencers by telling them to make the selection and report to the DM as to what their preferences are. *But notice this:* Influencers invariably interpret, and advertise, this job of theirs as "making the decision," which is not the case.

Influencers empower Recommenders by asking them to be on a committee to make recommendations, which (as you probably already know) may or may not be considered, or even noticed, by the Influencer.

Recommenders empower nobody . . . *unless* they happen to occupy one of the other roles at the same time. It is a complex but unavoidable fact of business life in the twenty-first century that people sometimes play two, three, four, or all five of the roles outlined here at the same time!

Note: It's common in smaller organizations to have one individual playing multiple roles. Keep in mind that lower-level players don't normally play the role of a higher-placed individual, although they would have you think otherwise.

THING YOU NEED TO ACKNOWLEDGE ABOUT YOUR SELLING CAREER #3:

You've Been Selling to Individuals Who Don't Like to Be Sold To.

Consider the case of a salesperson selling human resources (HR) outsourcing. She calls on the head of the HR department. Let's listen in on the call:

IMA GOGETTER, SALESPERSON: “Ms. Skepticala, our organization can reduce your department’s direct cost and size by 75% while at the same time guaranteeing compliance with all of the state and federal regulations. Furthermore, our outsourcing team will manage and maintain your department’s current workload without the unintentional inefficiencies you’re currently experiencing.”

MS. REELA SKEPTICALA, HEAD OF HUMAN RESOURCES: “Hmmm. Send me some information and I’ll get back to you.”

If Ms. Skepticala embraces this “solution,” she will be out of a job! Skip this kind of exchange. Follow these three simple rules.

Rule Number One: *Don’t waste your time trying to sell to anyone who makes less money than you do.*

Rule Number Two: *Never ask anyone who makes less money than you do to sell for you.*

Rule Number Three: *Make your first call to the same titles your own CEO would call.*

THING YOU NEED TO ACKNOWLEDGE ABOUT YOUR SELLING CAREER #4:

*You’ve Been Annoying the Hell Out of the People You’ve
Been Trying to Sell To.*

If you violate rules one and two, previously outlined, you won’t just be wasting your own time. You will be building *enemies* within the organization you are trying to sell to.

Don’t do it.

THING YOU NEED TO ACKNOWLEDGE ABOUT YOUR SELLING CAREER #5:

Every VITO Has a VITO.

I am going to get into this topic in much greater depth in the pages that follow, but let me make the point here briefly to underline its importance. Every VITO has a VITO.

VITOs take direction from those individuals who are higher up in

the “food chain”. While I was writing my *Wall Street Journal* best-selling book *Think and Sell Like a CEO* I interviewed over one hundred VITOs. To prepare for this daunting task and to make editing the material as manageable as possible, I created a form with 15 different questions that I would be asking each CEO, president, and owner that I would be interviewing. Everyone that I interviewed had different answers to each question . . . with the exception of two questions. Both of these questions were answered in exactly the same way by each VITO I interviewed.

The first question was:

Who has the power to interrupt you from your busy day and stop whatever you’re doing so that you take their call?

Here’s the answer that *always* came back:

One of my board members.

Food for thought, yes?

Now, let’s look at the second question.

THING YOU NEED TO ACKNOWLEDGE ABOUT YOUR SELLING CAREER #6:

If You Want to Sell to VITO, You Have to Think Like VITO.

Here’s the second question that was answered in precisely the same way by every one of the more than 100 VITOs I interviewed:

What’s the single most important aspect of your operation that is critical to your overall success?

Here’s the answer that *always* came back:

Following a plan and a process

I discovered that the most successful VITOS made sure their companies had processes for *everything!* Finance, manufacturing, marketing, customer service, and yes, even sales. If it mattered to the organization, the most successful top bananas had figured out a way to turn it into a process. Interesting, yes?