

## Are You Selling to the Very Important Top Officers?

A Conversation with Tony Parinello, co-author of *Five Minutes with VITO*

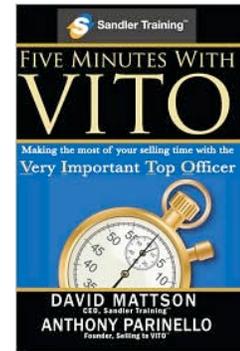


Recently I had a chance to interview one of my highly respected colleagues, Tony Parinello. He's the author of *Selling to VITO*, a sales classic since 1995. He's also the co-author along with David Mattson of the newly released book, *Five Minutes with VITO*. Both books are excellent companions to *Selling to Big Companies*.

**Jill Konrath: Let's start out with a quick definition Tony. Who is this "VITO" that you want salespeople to call on?**

Tony: First of all, selling to VITO has got nothing to do with trying to convince an Italian to do something that they maybe don't want to do, nor is it about selling to the mob. But it has everything to do with reaching out to the VITO - Very Important Top Officer, or the person with the ultimate veto power.

It's reaching out to the people that salespeople typically and generally don't reach out to. It's especially important today because of the business climate we are in. All decisions are rolling up to these VITOs who have the last nod on your sale, the last yes or no. What VITO wants, VITO gets. They have the ultimate veto – or should I say, VITO power.



**Jill: That is a very clever use of language! What positions or job titles do these VITOs hold? I don't see that title on any organization chart.**



Tony: VITOs usually have titles like president, CEO, owner, chairman of the board. VITO is the person at the very very top of the org chart who owns the responsibility for the revenue, for controlling and containing, making things run smoothly and ensuring compliance.

They're the person at the end of the day that most everything rolls up to. They have to report to the shareholders, the analysts or the person who at the top of the telephone pole. That's the VITO.

**Jill: Do you think that every seller should be selling or calling on the VITOs?**

Tony: This has always been a question from way back when I wrote the first VITO book in 1994. Jeez, you know, people worry about if VITO will take their call, if he or she is actually going to speak to a salesperson and what they're going to say to VITO.

But let me give you an example. Let's take a copier – you know they're calling them multi-functional devices these days because a copier does more than just copy, but lets just say you sell copiers, okay.

Well, it is pretty clear to me that a CEO, president or owner of any size company is probably not going to want to talk to you about copiers or multifunctional devices. So this is what I want you to do if you sell copiers – or anything actually – before you even think about calling a VITO or not.

Picture your very best account – ones who love you. Now think about what would happen if something mysterious happened tonight that caused every multifunctional device or whatever you've sold this account to disappear. So tomorrow morning everyone shows up for work and there aren't any copiers there.

Here's the question you need to think about: *What's going to happen to the company's top, middle or bottom line as a direct result of not having the product, service or solution that you sold to them?*

If you can answer that question and you can roll it up to top, middle and bottom line performance results – then you have the topics that VITOs love to talk about. So, that is the easiest way to see if it makes sense to reach out to a VITO.

**Jill: So if VITO would have a conniption if every copy machine were gone because they couldn't ...**

Tony: Put out sales literature. Or print out stuff for the manufacturing product development meeting. The important thing to understand is if it rolls up to top line performance, revenue generation and the efficiencies and the effectiveness of revenue-generating employees and mission-critical employees. Start to think like a VITO when it comes to the disappearing act and you'll come up with a host – an absolute host of ideas – and dialoging to have with the VITO.

**Jill: So you're saying that really I am selling all the things that would happen if that copier disappeared.**

Tony: It's like thinking of every salesperson in the world as an insurance salesperson, because basically we sell insurance or assurance. We assure the VITO that the production lines will continue to run so they can satisfy the demand that the economy has put on them, so they can continue to be competitive in the marketplace, and so they contain expenses.

At the end of the day, remember that VITO – more than anyone – must win. When the scoreboard shows the score, the VITO, the very important top officer, the person who is sitting at the top of the organization, wants to keep his or her job and grow the company. So, they have to win. Preoccupy yourself with the question, "How can I help VITO win?"

**Jill: Then that gives you the messaging you need to contact VITO.**

Tony: Well you know the messaging is an interesting thing, Jill. I want you to think for a moment about the language you use when you reach out to your prospects and customers in the course of a typical day. Are you typically calling on people who stand on linoleum?

I call that Linoleum Ville when you're talking to a character that I choose to call Seymour, the person who always wants to see more. They always want to see more presentations and demonstrations and analysis and regurgitation of analysis.

If you're spending most of your time yapping with the Seymours of the world down in Linoleum Ville, you're going to have to do a little research in the VITopedia to come up with words and phrases that VITOs care about. It's a different language. So if you show up on VITO's doorstep

speaking that Seymour language, they're going to hang up on you. They are going to shunt you down to Linoleum Ville quicker than you can blink your eye.

**Jill: That's right. They don't care about copies per minute or first copy out time, or the variable reduction capabilities.**

Tony: Jill, that is exactly right. Not only don't they care about it, but they don't understand it. Now picture this: The president of a Fortune 1000 company or the owner of a medium-sized company. This person has a couple of real fears when it comes to dealing with salespeople.

The first fear they have is that the salesperson is going to waste their time. The second fear is that the salesperson is going to try to engage them in a conversation that they don't know anything about. And that challenges their ego, power, control and authority. You don't want to go there with a VITO.

So you know we do this. We get a VITO on the phone and we think, "Oh my god, today is my lucky day. VITO picked up the phone unprotected." That happens more often than you can imagine. But if I start my conversation off by saying, "Are you interested in a multi functional device that prints this and staples that and sorts this?" they say, "Come on. I don't have time for this!"

If you do this, you've triggered both of their fears – wasting time and wanting to talk about topics and subjects and stuff that VITO just doesn't understand or doesn't care about. The game is over.

**Jill: So what do you do?**

Tony: We need to change our vocabulary. That is the first thing we need to do and that is what we spend a lot of time in the *Five Minutes with VITO* book and every VITO book I have created since 1994. It's getting salespeople to realize that VITOs don't understand the techno babble, industry jargon and buzz that salespeople spew out of their mouths most of the time.

It just amazes me as many years as I have been doing this, that it always seems to be the year of VITO. You know the year of getting to VITO is now so important with what's happening in the economy.

Well, guess what – VITOs haven't changed much over the years. They all have similar concerns and similar problems. There are only four results that VITOs look for everyday when they go to work. If you can dial into any one of them, you win.

**Jill: And the four results that VITOs are looking for are ...?**

Tony: Here is the first one. Think about it now before you pick up the phone to call a VITO or write a letter to a VITO or send an email to a VITO or show up in their lobby. Think about how VITO's organization creates revenue.

Do they develop their own products? Do they purchase products and put their label on it to ship it out the door and make a margin? Or, are they value added resellers? Do they have a direct sales force, or an indirect sales force?

When you know how VITOs in this industry create revenue, then you have to ask yourself how your product, service or solution can help VITO increase the margin or increase the revenue? If the answer is no, then lets go to the second result.

The second result that every VITO in the world wants to create is greater efficiency and effectiveness of their revenue-generating employees, their mission-critical employees and their mission critical processes. So before you reach out to a VITO, ask yourself: Can what I sell can it help VITO do any of these?

So let's look at a hospital for example. So who is a revenue-generating employee at a hospital?

**Jill: A doctor.**

Tony: Exactly. So do I have something in my bag of tricks here that will help doctors work smarter rather than harder or diagnose faster rather than slower? That's the kind of questions you need to be asking. That's the second result – increased efficiencies and effectiveness,

The third result is reduction or containment of expenses. Can the product that you sell help VITO contain or reduce expenses? Or can it help them move from a variable unpredictable cost environment to a very predictable cost environment?

And finally, result number four is to do the first three and help VITO stay out of jail. Or be compliant - you know if they are industry compliance or regulations.

Now here's the secret: It's taking two or more of the results that you can deliver and balancing the equation. All that means is that if I have an idea – either proven or suspected – that I can increase VITO's revenue stream AND I also have an idea on how to cut some expenses at the same time, then I'm a magician.

**Jill: That's a double whammy!**

Tony: Absolutely. If you could increase revenue while you cut expenses, guess what happens: VITO's margins go up and you have made VITO a hero by the end of the quarter. So, time is always important to VITO.

Having a balanced gain equation says you take one or more of the results that you either suspect you can deliver or you know you can deliver, then put the common elements of time in it and there is your messaging right there.

Keep the techno babble totally out of it. That's poison to a VITO. Those are features and functions of what you sell and I always tell salespeople – don't use f words with a VITO.

**Jill: F words?**

Tony: F words, features, functions, those are f words. If you use one of them, the conversation is done.

**Jill: I totally agree. What other mistakes do you see people make when selling to the VITO.**

Tony: They don't acknowledge VITO's gatekeeper – the private assistant of a president, CEO or owner. Forget about those stupid ridiculous tactics you've learned about how to get through, past, over, under or around the gatekeeper. They don't work.

So here is the next secret. Let's say you reach out to VITO and their private assistant picks up the phone. Just treat the private assistant as if they were VITO, but just don't call them VITO.

Whatever you were going to say to VITO, say to that person. Because guess what - when VITO is not there, they are running the company. They are keeping things in check. They're a matched set with VITO, so whatever you'd say to VITO, you say to VITO's private assistant.

Salespeople do stupid things. When they're calling VITO and his private assistant picks up the phone and says, "Ms. Importante's office. May I help you?" – the first thing the salesperson says is, "Is Ms. Importante in?"

The gatekeeper is going to say no - even if VITO is sitting right there looking straight at here. The gatekeeper is going to say no.

**Jill: That is right.**

Tony: Now some sales books say that if you get three no's in a row, you're on your way to a sale.

**Jill: You feel like I do on that, I hate no.**

Tony: It doesn't make sense.

**Jill: The goal is to eliminate the no's, not to transform them.**

Tony: Exactly. Not even to invite them. Inviting a now is crazy. Salespeople need to stop the madness. It's like hitting your head against the wall. Does that feel good? No!

And don't say, "Can I leave a message?" That's a second no. Or don't ask, "Will VITO be back later this week?" Now you're on your third no and you're toast.

**Jill: Yeah, three strikes and you are totally out. You're not one step closer to a yes. You're totally out.**

Tony: So if the gatekeeper picks up the phone - call them Tommie's – you would say something like this, "Tommie, what do you think of this idea? We've helped five other CEOs in your industry to increase revenues while at the same time control their expenses. Is this something that you and Ms. Importante want to accomplish between now and end of this month?"

**Jill: That sounds like something she would be interested in.**

Tony: There you go. And here's the thing. Tommie says you do, you do. It's so simple. Just follow Tommie's lead, because if you make sense to Tommie she knows what to do.

**Jill: So should a salesperson ask Tommie what the next step is?**

Tony: The smart VITO seller knows what the next step is. The smart VITO seller knows that if they had VITO on the line, VITO would probably say to them – and let's again use copiers – "You know, this makes sense. I want you to talk to my CFO or I want you to talk to my COO. And the smart VITO seller knows the names of the people – the CFO or COO before they even pick up the phone.

If Tommie doesn't know who to send you to, you can say, "Well how about sending me to Mr. Jones, your COO." It's better to invite the shunt you want rather than settle for who they send you too.

**Jill: Okay that is good.**

Tony: It is not rocket science. If it was, I never would have been able to reach mastery at it.

**Jill: You are funny. Okay, I have some other questions for you. Your book is called *Five Minutes with VITO*. Why five minutes?**

Tony: It's really not about five minutes with VITO. It's about a lifetime with VITO. But it is what you do in those first thirty seconds, in that first dialogue with VITO.

You know how to get there, what to do once you there. It's a coauthored book and it's an exciting book, We took the appointment-getting strengths of VITO and married them with the sales process that Sandler has been teaching since the early sixties. By *Five Minutes with VITO* is really about the beginning of the relationship with the person who is ultimately going to say yes or no.

**Jill: So when you say five minutes, you're talking figuratively or are you talking a five minute phone conversation or five minute meeting?**

Tony: Well, it is more of a figuratively. You know five minutes with VITO is really all you need. Actually, when it comes right down to it, the VITOs of the world know in the first minute if they're going to invite you in or not. It's just that salespeople are not smart enough to ask the questions, "Does this make sense? Do you want to take the next step? What you looking for in a business relationship? How do you measure one business relationship over another?"

These are the harder questions that you can ask a VITO in that first five minutes that you would never think of asking anybody else. Could you imagine going down to the facilities manager you know out in the trailer in the parking lot and asking them on the first sales call if they are going to do business with you?

**Jill: No.**

Tony: No way! They want you to jump through all the hoops. They want to see a demo. They want a 90-day free trial. There's no end to it. So these are not the kinds of questions you ask anybody but VITO.

**Jill: Great. In *Five Minutes with VITO*, you describe a five-wave approach. Can you talk about the five waves?**

Tony: There are lots of ways to get to VITO, but you don't want to stalk them of course! Let's take an example. Say I created a special letter that VITO will read. I know because I've studied their reading habits and what turns them on and what turns them off.

So the letter is the first wave. The next step is to pick up the phone and call. Well you can do that, but you can also send something in advance your call. You can send a letter, then you can send an email, then you can send a fax, then you can call.

Or you can send the letter, make the call, leave a voicemail, leave another voicemail send a fax, so in this five wave approach. I teach salespeople how to appeal to VITO's insights on how they make their decisions, what they read, what they won't read, what they will highlight, what they wont highlight.

I've done a lot of research to put this together over the years and the research has not been something you do in the laboratory somewhere. It's field proven. When we do the wave there are number of choices, because salespeople love choices. The salesperson can mix and match it to their selling style, to the industries they call on and all that other kind of stuff.

**Jill: So you leave some flexibility in there for the salesperson to be who they are and to do it the way that they most comfortable.**

Tony: Yeah, and if they are not that creative they can follow the path that I have created for them which generally speaking is a special correspondence that you send in the first class mail and then you pick up the phone and make contact. When you do that twenty percent of the time VITOs are going to pick up their own phone unprotected, totally unprotected.

**Jill: Really, that is impressive.**

Tony: Yeah and I can tell you this, half of the eighty percent you are going to get their private assistant Tommie and we already know that you talk to Tommie – just like VITO. The half of the 80%, you're going to get voicemail. All you have to say is what you would have said if VITO had answered the phone:

"Ms. Importante, if you were in your office to talk my call today at 9.30 this is what you would have heard."

**Jill: That makes it easy.**

Tony: Then you tell them what you were going to say – remember back to the balanced gain equation. Say that, and then add, "Ms. Importante, this topic could be important to both of us. That's why you are going to hear from me again this afternoon at 2.30. Talk to you soon."

**Jill: So you are setting up the next call right then and there.**

Tony: Of course. Everything you do in VITO's world, you must take responsibility. You are the salesperson. You never say, "If you want to get a hold of me, you can reach me at ... Come on, nobody is calling you." VITOs want to see that you are that determined.

**Jill: It earns their respect.**

Tony: Amen.

**Jill: Since your first book came out in 1994 which was fourteen years ago, what kind of changes have you seen in the market place that have altered your thinking.**

Tony: Everything changes. That's why we do this thing called Club VITO every week. We do a live internet broadcast called Club VITO because everything is changing all the time. Back in 1994 when the VITO movement started, a VP of sales in the telecom industry probably had a quarter of million dollar signature level of authority. Today it is probably 250 dollars.

Everything has rolled up, everything! The person you sold to last year who was able to say okay is not the person who is going to say okay this year. It can't be, so every month, every day things change. And salespeople, listen to this – you are smarter today that you were today yesterday. You are more experienced. You are a little bit older, but you are wiser. Take advantage of your wisdom and your experience. Plug it into your sales process and show up as being the best you, you can be.

**Jill: That is great advice.**

Tony: Well you know what Jill, it's all good if you take it and make it yours. If you just listen to it and are saying, "Yeah, yeah, yeah. That was fun but I've heard all this stuff before" then you're falling behind. Or if you say, "We used to do something like that before" – then why did you stop? Or this one. I love this one: "We did something like that once before and it didn't work."

**Jill: Too often people just "try" it. They don't work on it. It takes a while to get good at something new.**

Tony: Amen.

**Jill: Right, so if people would like to read your new book, *Five Minutes with VITO* where should they go, Tony?**

Tony: Well it is at a number of different places. It's at airport bookstores, all major bookstores, and on Amazon.com. You can also go to FiveMinuteswithVITO.com or 5MinuteswithVITO.com. Amazon probably has the best price.

**Jill: Yes, they always do. And, it's a good book and it has great insights.** It's fun to see that you are combining your expertise with the Sandler's group's expertise too. I think they have a good program.

Tony: They have a great program. When I looked out into the space of sales training, I looked for the best person to partner with and there is no doubt in my mind after all the years I have been selling, all the training programs I have seen, Sandler's has the best in my opinion. That's why it is a co-authored book. It is the first co-authored, book I have ever written and you know it just was an exciting thing to do.

**Jill: Thank you so much for sharing your wisdom and expertise with me today. Tony, it has been my pleasure.**

Tony: Jill, thank you and to all you sellers – get out there and sell something!

Jill: Great words to end with. Thanks once more, Tony, author of *Five Minutes with VITO*.



Jill Konrath, author of *Selling to Big Companies*, helps sellers crack into corporate accounts, speed up their sales cycle and win big contracts.

She's a frequent speaker at annual sales meetings and association events. For more info, contact 651-429-1922.