

This newsletter was written by Debra Feldman, who has contributed to TENG newsletters in the past. She provides executive job searching services and you will find her brief profile at the end of this article. In this contribution, she provides advice on how to deal with corporate gatekeepers.

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Their Gatekeeper, Your New Ally

Correct technique and good manners turn interactions with corporate gatekeepers from frustrating to fruitful. Gatekeepers are not meanies; they are their boss's designated agents charged with limiting unnecessary, potentially wasteful interruptions and unexpected interference that may negatively impact the boss's workflow or productivity. Any unsolicited, meaning uninvited, inquiry requires screening. If you don't know the boss, then you have to show the gatekeeper it is okay to give you an appointment, schedule a meeting, provide an email address, switch you to voice mail, etc.

The gatekeeper uses criteria developed to evaluate requests. If you pass the test, you are referred to the boss. If not, you are turned away. The value proposition you initially present to the gatekeeper has to satisfy predetermined needs *or* be intriguing enough to captivate her attention allowing you the opportunity to elaborate on your interest and justify your request as an exception.

Here are 6 ways you can increase your personal odds that gatekeepers will grant you access. Start with the premise that the gatekeeper is not an enemy but, like yourself, is a professional trying her best to fulfill her assignment, keep the boss happy and get her reward for a job well done.

1. **Offer a low risk, high reward situation.** Do your homework. Plan your presentation so it is clear, compelling and engaging. Pique the gatekeeper's curiosity. Be ready to address the gatekeeper by name, to inquire if she has a few moments for your call and how her day has been. Listen. Do not charge forward just because you didn't get voice mail. If she hesitates, sounds busy or is juggling other lines, offer to call back, even before you leave your name. Do ask if there is a more convenient time to call back.
2. **Convince the gatekeeper that there is no reason not to offer you an appointment.** The gatekeeper is balancing two competing choices: granting too much access to the wrong applicants and being too stringent thereby excluding individuals that the boss would want to meet. Her job depends on how well she interprets the screening criteria. If the gatekeeper believes it would be more detrimental to keep you out than to let you in, you have won!
3. **The more interaction you have, the more invested the gatekeeper becomes in a relationship that contributes to a desire to help you and be a part of your success.** Speak respectfully, be polite. Make small talk. Ingratiate yourself and it is more likely that your proposal will sound attractive. Be likable and you'll get

more attention and be able to more clearly communicate your value, engage in a dialogue and have the chance to explain more about your business.

4. **Follow the gatekeeper's instructions, cooperate and be pleasant.** Not only do you have to have a high quality concept, but your personality has to be a fit. If she asks you to email a request, do it and send it out within 24 hours or less before you are forgotten. Don't be argumentative. Smile as you speak—it will come through in your voice. Your demeanor tells her that you are not going to cause trouble. If you are not cooperative (ie. difficult to manage) she may conclude that you are not worthy of the boss's time and sabotage your request. Be patient and helpful. This gatekeeper may be *your* new boss's administrator or even your own right hand someday!
5. **Gatekeepers can become your personal liaison warming up the boss on your behalf and facilitating the impossible.** If you can win the gatekeeper's support, she can become your ally advocating for you, squeezing an appointment for you into a booked calendar, talking you up to the boss, giving you hints to help your meeting be more positive. If your encounter with the gatekeeper is negative, reconsider your goal. If the boss condones unprofessional behavior, do you really want to move forward with this?
6. **Timing is critical.** If you don't succeed, try, try, again. Make your own luck. Don't be discouraged if your first approach isn't wholeheartedly embraced. Re-group and after an appropriate interval, attempt another connection revising your presentation, enhancing your value proposition and using better timing. Persistence and creativity pays off. Follow up is key to making progress.

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