

Tips for Getting an Appointment With a Busy Person

BY BOB REISS

It is important to have a good state of mind when attempting to get appointments with busy, important people.

First, do not take rejection (non-answering of your calls and correspondence) personally. Your target may literally get 50 plus requests a day for an appointment. This is in addition to their regular extreme workload. Your challenge is to cut through this clutter. Stay upbeat. Never get angry. Follow up, be persistent, be creative. Be patient. Be confident. Be energetic. Smile. (Yes, you can sense a smile on the phone or through the written word.) Don't let fear of failure stop you from pursuing these hard-to-get appointments. A failure to secure the appointment can be a learning experience for your next attempt. Keep in mind the person you are trying to get an appointment with needs, wants, and even craves new ideas and innovative products and opportunities. You just have to get their attention for the opportunity to demonstrate you are the one to satisfy one of their needs.

The following is a random list of specific tips that may be helpful to you:

- Write a short, concise, not longer than one-page letter.

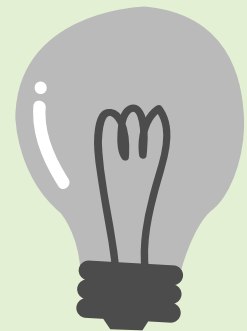
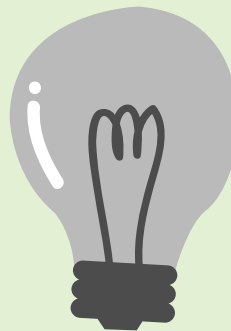


The shorter, the better. Describe yourself or your company and why you are credible. State how the recipient of your letter will benefit from meeting with you. Don't exaggerate. Don't assume you'll never get a reply.

- Send a follow-up letter if no response. Think of sending via mail, fax, email, FedEx, Priority Mail.
- Email is a primary communication tool for many people. An advantage it offers is that the recipient usually reads it himself or herself and, thus, the gatekeeper is bypassed. When sending email, give thought to your subject line. It will be short and needs to grab the reader's attention. State a benefit for the reader from meeting you, your service or product. A good subject line can prevent a delete.

- Networking can be the most effective way to get an appointment with that busy, important person. Find a friend or business acquaintance of your target whom you know and who will vouch for you. You almost certainly will get the target to take your call (which is a major part of the battle.) Always keep your network referrer abreast of the outcome of their introduction. Always call or send a thank-you note.

- When you don't know whom to contact in a company you want to conduct business with, writing to the president can be effective. Often, they will push the letter down to the proper person or immediate subordinates for handling. This person will often give you an appointment or contact you. They always follow up on their president's



request as they are not sure if you are friendly with him or her. Sometimes the president will send you back your letter with a handwritten note on it to contact so and so in their company. You can then call that person and say the president of the company suggested you call them. They will take your call.

- Phone for appointment. Many times you will have to get by the secretary or assistant. Try to start building a relationship with these gatekeepers. They may have more influence than you think. Try to find out a target's cell phone number.

- Do your homework before attempting to get an appointment. Knowledge is power. Learn about the company (annual report, internet, other vendors, trade magazines, etc.) the individual, the industry. This knowledge can help shape your approach, presentation and ideas. It also will impress your target. People want to conduct business with smart people and with those who are prepared.

- In your initial phone conversation for an appointment, state concisely who you are and the purpose of the call. Try to listen carefully. You want to pick up problems the target has. Be ready with some key questions to get them talking. Solving problems gets you appointments and sales.

- When you get your target on the phone, says Howard Hansen, a top insurance salesman, a good opening line might be: "Am I calling you at a bad time?" If the person says, yes, he or she will suggest a better time. They will be more receptive to you then, appreciate your consideration, and the gatekeeper will more likely put the second call through, as you will say, "Mr. ___ asked me to call him today." If your target says no, this is a good time to talk, they will be more receptive to you as they will appreciate your concern for their needs, and they will invite you to continue. Remember, trying to persuade somebody when they are occupied with something else is stacking the deck against yourself.

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- For those people who have their calls screened, try calling before and after regular work hours, when your target is more likely to answer.
- If you are always sent to voice mail and get no replies, then think of leaving long but polite messages. Do this every day. The person may get annoyed, but will eventually tire of hearing your message to the end to be able to clear, and/or start to admire your persistence and call back.
- Use humor as much as possible. Bookstores sell cartoon faxes for common circumstances such as someone not returning a phone call or answering a letter. Get a newspaper headline made up with the target's name. (For sources type in *newspaper headlines* on google. A great source for this is www.yourownfrontpage.com. Look at the site carefully. This works, and your creativity can flourish.) Send a letter or note in a unique package. (A package in a package in a package in a package, etc.) Send a chart with boxes to indicate the reason your letters or calls are not answered. They should be a mix of funny and serious (never nasty). Include a stamped self-addressed letter. You do not need to be a joke teller to exhibit humor.
- In attempting to cultivate a positive relationship with secretaries (gatekeepers), think of sending or giving them inexpensive humorous gifts like a head of lettuce, radishes, chocolate covered nuts, with a funny note. Corn often works.
- Hire a sales rep, if appropriate, to set up the appointment. This applies to reps that know and conduct business with the buyer. (This is for cases where a buyer is the person with whom you want an appointment.)
- Hand-written faxes can be effective with certain people as they feel comfortable scribbling a quick answer rather than writing or dictating a letter.
- Show up without an appointment, stating you were in the building. You will at least come person-to-person with the secretary or receptionist.
- When leaving a phone message, offer your phone number for a return call and say if you don't receive a return call, you will call next Tuesday at 2 p.m. This lets the recipient know you will call back. Hopefully, they will tell their secretary to take the call and put it through.
- If you sell a product that could possibly be sold in a gift store, make a deal to have a display of it in the gift store of the hotel where your targeted person stays during conventions, trade shows, etc. To do so, you can guarantee the sale to the store or offer it free of charge. You, of course, would have to research the dates your person will be there.
- If you do get through on the phone and your person says he just does not have time to see you as he or she will be traveling the next two months, then ask to have an appointment with them in one of the cities they will be visiting. Or offer to meet them at the airport and fly on the same plane or offer to drive them to the airport. They should be impressed by your determination and creativity.
- If the person you want to see has set buying hours to see new vendors, make your call on a horrible weather day. This will mean there will be few people that day and possibly impress your person with your fortitude in coming to see him or her in such terrible weather.
- If your prospect lives in another city, call and say you plan to be in their city in two weeks for, say, two days, and you would appreciate an appointment during your stay there.
- Old-fashioned politeness can go a long way in achieving your objectives. Follow up thank-you notes and

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a simple use of the words, “Please” and “Thank you” are effective.

- If you finally win your hard-earned appointment and your target cancels (and sometimes doesn’t even let you know), don’t get angry. Look at it as an opportunity. Immediately and cheerfully set up a new appointment. In most cases your target is aware of the inconvenience they caused you and will be more receptive and prone to give you a chance by buying into your idea or product. The cause of the cancellation could be an emergency, their boss calling them, or even forgetfulness in a hectic schedule. If cancellations reoccur and the target doesn’t apologize, then you have a good reason to go over their head to their superior.

- Try some out of the box approaches to get noticed. Think about stretching your comfort zone. Here are some examples:

- Buy an inexpensive watch (Wal-Mart around \$6.) Cover 15 minutes of the face with a label and send the watch sans box to your target, asking for 15 minutes of their time. Recipient will usually take notice. They face a dilemma. They don’t know the cost of the watch. They probably can’t keep it. It’s a pain to return it. Maybe, they will be intrigued by your creativity and give you your appointment.

- Send your target a live lottery ticket with a note that their odds of receiving value are greater hiring or seeing you than winning with this lottery ticket. However, you wish them well with the ticket. Human nature says he won’t throw away a chance to win the lottery. As he or she follows the ticket, they will think of you — what’s

to lose? There should be no embarrassment trying these and other innovative but offbeat approaches. Brainstorm other oddball approaches.

- When you do get your appointment, immediately send a short follow-up note or email confirming it. (Sometimes executives who make appointments forget to tell their secretary who then may schedule another one for the same time slot.)

- A good line when calling for an appointment is to ask your prospect for six minutes of their time. The request and oddball number are intriguing and take little of their time. Rik Talley, Logo’s vice president of sales, has been using this for years with great success.

- Be persistent. Keep following up until you succeed. Many people test for persistency.

MANA welcomes your comments on this article. Write to us at mana@manaonline.org.

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