

Getting Past the Gatekeeper

When you are trying to reach a busy decision-maker, it's often useful to recruit someone else to help you connect. The receptionist, secretary, or assistant fields phone calls for the boss all the time. Crumble the gatekeeper blockade by appealing to this person's helpful nature. They know how to help you connect and they will if you treat them respectfully, speak with sincerity, and ask them nicely. Here are some helpful hints to get you through the gatekeeper blockade.



- *Always know whom you are calling.* Whenever possible know the name of the person you want to speak to before you call. Use company operators to find out names and accurate spelling for follow-up. Ask the receptionist for the direct phone number to the person you most want to speak to.
- *Phone before or after normal working hours.* An effective way of getting around secretaries and assistants is to call before 9 a.m. or after 5 p.m. Most gatekeepers work nine to five, and an early or late call usually catches the boss answering their own phone.
- *Never tell the gatekeeper the call is personal.* You'll get connected, but the person on the other end resents your invasion when they discover it is not personal. Always be honest about your reason for calling.
- *Speak to someone else.* If your contact is always busy or unavailable, ask to speak to their replacement or to an assistant. Failing that, simply ask when the person is more likely to be available.
- *Try and try again.* Always maintain control of your calls and take responsibility for subsequent calls. Say you will call again and make it an option, rather than a request, for the prospect to call you back. You want to be prepared with your script when you connect.
- *Ask for specifics.* When asked "Can I help you?" rather than saying "no," say, "Yes, perhaps you can. I am calling because I have some ideas about how your company could solve the problem of ... and I suspect (insert a name or job title) would be the best person to talk to about it. Would you agree?" If you get an affirmative answer, say "thanks" and ask to be connected immediately. If not, then ask who would be the more likely person to connect with. Should the best person be unavailable, ask when would be a better time for you to call and speak to them directly.
- *Make friends with the gatekeeper.* No matter what, make friends with the gatekeeper. Call them by name, speak positively even when you are not getting what you want. When treated with respect, they will begin to care about you and suggest something to help you make the connection you desire. Always be very polite when speaking to the gatekeeper, as that person has lots of clout with the boss. If they like you they can be a great help, but if they don't, they can destroy your chances of ever being considered a candidate for work.