



HOW TO FOLLOW UP WITH SOMEONE WHO'S IGNORING YOU

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Being ignored by someone who asked you for information is one of the most frustrating and, frankly, humiliating things we can face as professionals.

So if you're being 'ghosted', here's what to do...

1. SEEK TO UNDERSTAND (AND THEN BE UNDERSTOOD)

The thing about avoiding a ghosting is that, ideally, it begins well before you make that follow-up contact. It begins at the meeting itself.

I may be showing my age here but I'm a fan of Steven Covey's habit of "[seeking first to understand before being understood](#)". This applies to any meeting with potential clients, where you should be getting to understand them, their needs, and how you could potentially fit in.

Ask questions about their situation, the scenarios they're contemplating, and how they make decisions, so that you can understand the relative impact and importance your advice would have in the scheme of things. That way, you both have both context for any future engagement.

2. MAKE CONCRETE PLANS

Be bold. When the potential client says you can contact them, be upfront and ask when and how. Sometimes, you may have to be even more upfront and say: "We've talked about X. What's the best way for us to follow through?".

Don't force them into anything but just make sure you have something concrete. Small agreements now pave the way for better follow-up flow.

I always tell people to keep in mind the advice of lawyer and author Mark Maraia. He says there are always two questions you should ask when finishing every meeting: "what do you think the next step should be?" and "where do we go from here?"

3. BE HELPFUL

If you do go through to voicemail, be prepared. Don't just ask them to call back. Be precise about why you're getting in touch.

Better still, email them and offer them something of value. For example, let them know you have something specific that can help them based on your previous interaction. This could mean sharing some research findings, a case study or a decent article.

4. PREPARE FOR A CONVERSATION

There's nothing worse than being chased down and then, when you finally do call the person back, they have nothing to say. If you are reaching out to someone, at least prepare for what you want to say to them.

A tip from the professional selling skills experts is to imagine having three conversations. Think about your objective for each of these (what you want to learn or share) and come up with three questions you'd like to ask.

That said, don't jump straight in. Most relationships are built on trust so, when they do call, slow down the conversation and let both parties suss each other out.

That way you'll prevent any conversation from becoming an interrogation. Show you have thought about the relevance of what you do, and be genuine about the outcome.

5. PERSIST (BUT DON'T BE A PEST)

If you don't get a response, you will need to contact them again. But you should probably leave it a week before doing so. We don't want to come across as pushy or salesy, sharp-elbowed type.

And think about a combination of follow-up communications. An email first and then a text or call to stand out in an over-crowded inbox and disentangle yourself from gatekeepers such as email 'rules' that automatically relegate yours to a "read later" folder, or an enthusiastic assistant screening all correspondence. (Another tip: ask if their assistant should be cc'd in Step 2 so they're in the know from the get go).

In terms of when to follow up again after that second email, I found [this great advice from Rebecca Zucker writing for the Harvard Business Review](#):

"As a general rule, a week after your initial email is a good time to reach out again as a first follow up. Unless its time-sensitive each successive follow up should be spaced a bit further apart adding another week's time in between until you've followed up three times. There could be an additional fourth 'hail mary' attempt depending on the situation."

It's hard to argue with that!

6. (ABC) ALWAYS BE CLOSING

But I really do believe in the importance of ABC but not the [Glengarry Glen Ross](#) style (warning: lots of expletives in Mamet's Pulitzer Prize winning script).

What it means here is that once you've had your three strikes, send the person a quick note that lets them know you'll ease back on the follow up. Something along the lines of:

“I appreciate you’re busy so perhaps it’s best I don’t bother you any further about [insert project]. I value the conversations we’ve had and do look forward to staying in touch. I hope to see you at”

That way, you’ve closed the loop but you haven’t closed the door. Besides, they might feel a bit awkward or embarrassed that they haven’t been in a position to respond (especially if they weren’t aware of their gatekeeper’s assiduous efforts).

7. CHIN UP, CHINA*

Don’t let one follow-up fail reduce your confidence. You’re seeding the future here. Most relationships are built over the long term and when decent clients go quiet it’s not necessarily a sign they don’t want to ever hear from you. It’s often just that there’s something more important going on in their world.

Stay strong and keep your chin up. You’re probably still in the game, even if it doesn’t feel like it.

* For my North American readers that’s short for ‘china plate’ or rhyming slang for ‘mate’.

AND FINALLY, A PLEA TO PROFESSIONAL SERVICES BUYERS...

Your lawyers, accountants, advisers and consultants may seem tough but, guess what? They’re humans too. They know you have choices and competing demands so be upfront if things don’t pan out.

To quote the sales guru Zig Ziglar “A clear rejection is better than a fake promise”. For everyone.

So please don’t ghost professionals after you’ve asked them for a pitch or to scope some work. Many of the best professionals are perfectionists - that’s what makes them so good at their jobs. They pride themselves on their expertise and problem-solving skills and having people go cold on them for no reason can be disheartening.

WANT MORE?

If you’d like to know more about how to win business from potential clients, [get in touch](#).

REFERENCES & FURTHER READING

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