

Tactics for approaching contacts



What is their role?

Entry Level

- **Be direct and specific with your request**
Make sure you're really clear with what you want from them, and provide as much guidance for them to help you as possible. They might not have as much experience as someone more senior in knowing what to do without more direct instruction, so make sure you help them, to help you.
- **Share the right info**
While everyone is busy, they may have a little more time than someone more senior. This doesn't mean you should write an essay – but you can share more information (always making sure it's relevant) as they'll be more likely to take the time to read it.
- **Don't be afraid to follow up**
Don't take it personally if you don't get an immediate response. It might just be that your email has got lost in the sea of other emails in their inbox. If you don't hear back, follow up. And remember, they will probably be able to relate to and empathise with your persistence. They probably had to make similar approaches recently.

Mid Level

- **An open worthy subject**
Make sure you're really clear with what you want from them, and provide as much guidance for them to help you as possible. They might not have as much experience as someone more senior in knowing what to do without more direct instruction, so make sure you help them, to help you.
- **Quick and clear**
Be as concise as possible but make sure you include enough relevant information for them to make a decision about the next step – you don't want them coming back to ask you for more.
- **Persistence pays off**
It's not a personal insult (or a bad sign) if you don't get an immediate response – people are busy, no matter what their role. A polite follow up can go a long way (in other words, don't give up).

What is their role? - continued

Higher Level

- **Stand out subject**
Think creatively and cleverly about the subject of your message to make sure it gets opened. Remember, you're probably competing with hundreds of other emails. Think about what would make someone busy and important want to open your email.
- **Time is of the essence**
Keeping it concise is really important for someone senior, as they will probably scan the email quickly and then decide whether they want to engage or not. Don't give them any reason to miss out the important bits. You can always let them know that you can share more information with them if they want.
- **Don't pester them**
They're probably concerned with important matters and may be under lots of pressure, so the last thing you want to do is become an annoyance. Not only could that result in them not responding, but if they hear of you again, they might think negatively of you which could affect future opportunities. Don't give up if they don't respond, but think carefully about how frequently you contact them.
- **Pass it on**
At a senior level, diaries and inboxes can sometimes be managed by an assistant, so don't be surprised if it's someone else who gets back to you.

Unsure

- **Look beyond the title**
It can sometimes be hard to work out someone's seniority from their job title, but a bit of research and looking at wider factors (such as responsibilities) could help give you a steer as well as provide you with useful information to reference in your email. If you're still unsure, follow the tips for contacting someone at a senior level.

How do you know them?

Direct contact

- **Use your knowledge wisely**
Since you've met this person before, make sure you apply what you know about them to what you're contacting them about – how do they like to be talked to? Do you know what they're interested in? When did you see them last? Ask yourself these questions (and more) then use the answers to feed into how you're contacting them.
- **The personal touch**
Don't be scared to add a personal reference (just don't harp on about it). If you know they went on a trip last weekend then ask how it was, if you saw them at a BBQ a few weeks ago tell them how lovely it was to see them.
- **Don't ramble**
Don't assume that because you know them they've got all the time in the world. Reference your relationship, but don't forget you're contacting them for a reason in a professional capacity.

Indirect contact

- **What's the connection**
The first point you need to cover is how you're connected and who you are – in that order. This can be done in one swift sentence, but is essential for getting past the 'who are you?' barrier.
- **Get to the point**
Once you're over the 'who' hurdle, summarise why you are contacting them and what you want.
- **Show off your research skills**
A good way to stand out with indirect contacts is to show knowledge about and be complimentary of their role or the company (in a non stalkerish way). Demonstrating awareness of a project, product, event or something similar will show you've done your research.
- **Everyone likes to feel needed**
Bring out the helpful side that everybody has and tell them just how much you'd appreciate their support. Mention your awareness of how valuable their time is and that anything they can do would be massively appreciated!

Unconnected contact

- **The 'who' hurdle**
Quite a big one if you have no connection to the person you're contacting, but not insurmountable. Start with who you are and summarise the reason that you're contacting them.
- **A reason to read on**
A good way to stand out with unconnected contacts is to show knowledge about them or their role in the company. Demonstrating awareness of a project, product, event or something similar will show you've done your research, and give them a reason to talk to you.
- **A reason to say yes**
Everyone likes to feel needed, so tap into their helpful side and tell them just how much you'd appreciate their support. You might also want to mention your awareness of how valuable their time is – they'll be more likely to respond if they feel that you are understanding of their situation.

What do you want?

To get career advice

- **Be clear**
You don't want their life story, but that's what you might get if you ask for general career advice. Think a little more about what area you're most interested in or concerned about – it could be advice on a role, an industry, to find out about their career journey or something else – and then be specific with your request. This will make it an easier request for them (they'll immediately get what you want) and more likely that you'll get something that's actually useful back.
- **Be personal**
You're asking them specifically for advice for a reason, so tell them what that reason is (a little flattery goes a long way).

To get information on a specific job role

- **Make sure you've done your research**
They'll hit 'delete' immediately if the information you're asking for is something that's already up on the company website.
- **Ask for the right person**
If you're not sure that you're contacting the right person, ask if they can let you know who the right person is.
- **The inside scoop**
If you know the person well enough (or if you're confident in the connection you have with them), this is your chance to get the scoop and ask if they have any advice for you on the role. This card could yield gold if played right....

What do you want? - continued

To get an introduction to someone else

- **What's your motivation?**
You need to tell them specifically why you're asking for the introduction – they won't introduce you unless they're confident it's a relevant link.
- **The right one**
Tell them why you're asking them specifically to make this introduction. There will be a reason, so make sure you make them feel important in the transaction – because they are.

To add them to your network

- **A little flattery goes a long way**
This is where it gets personal, no matter what your connection to them is. Make sure you mention why it is that they stood out, congratulate them on any recent achievements or awards (you could find this out from LinkedIn or a quick internet search), and make sure that they feel flattered.
- **What can you offer them?**
People will be more likely to connect with you if they can see there's something in it for them. So, if you can think of anything to mention that would be mutually beneficial, go for it.
- **What next**
Even if you're not looking for a meeting or specific advice, mention a 'what next' – this could be an event you might see them at, a chance to connect in the future – end your email with a potential for more.