

What to do when prospects drag their feet

A prospect seems interested in working with you but then things start to drag. Maybe you've submitted a proposal, but get no response. Have they lost interest? Are they distracted? Are they silently saying "no"? You don't want to harass them and you don't want to walk away if it might still be a real opportunity. What can you do?

Aim at the right goal

Make your goal be the survival of the relationship. The relationship is probably more important than the proposal – if you don't do this work, you might do other work, or they might refer you to someone.

Focus on them

In thinking about them and communicating with them, emphasize their success rather than your proposal. Then everyone will feel good about your continuing attempts to communicate. You want them to feel (rightly) that you are pursuing the work because you believe working with you is the best approach for them.

You also can remind them at times that their problem remains unaddressed. Don't focus on how you could help solve it – which will feel to them like you are "selling them"; instead remind them that their problem still exists and that they need to handle it in the best way for them.

Stay in touch – don't be shy

Keep reaching out to them. Leave messages, but not the same one over and over. Map out a set of statements in advance that you like, and in the absence of a response, just work your way through them over time. Perhaps leave one message a week, although more often may be appropriate for situations where moving quickly is critical for the client's success. Each message should emphasize your interest in their success. For example:

1. I want to make sure that you got what I sent and see what adjustments you think might be needed. Very interested in being helpful to you however I can be.
2. I would like to understand the progress you are making with the other people you need to bring on board. Very interested in helping you achieve your goals.
3. How are you doing with addressing problem X? I know you felt when we were talking that it was

critical to handle, and I'm wondering how well you are doing on reaching your goals.

4. Want to make that you are making decisions in your best interest. If you are not doing something, there's a real cost of delay, as you had mentioned to me early on.
5. Want to understand if you had decided to do nothing, do it yourself, or do it with someone else? Want you to be successful with it, whatever course of action you choose.

You can also mix in other calls that have a benefit for them, with any of the ingredients you'd include in a "warm call".

Make it easy for them to respond

One technique is a phone call followed up by email (tell them on the phone call that you are going to also leave the email). Let them hear your voice (voicemail) but have the easy way to respond.

If they have an assistant, schedule a phone call with the prospect. Maybe the prospect is busy and just isn't getting around to responding.

You can also contact them for a warm call personal visit or a breakfast or lunch, if you are nearby. A visit strengthens the relationship and makes it easy for them to respond.

Stop, eventually, with a "final call" that says you are moving on (but not terminating the relationship)

Eventually, you can leave a "final call" something like this: "Sorry we haven't had a chance to talk about it. I'm going to assume you have found a different way to address this problem. I'll check back in 3-4 months to see how you are progressing. In the meantime, I'll (and fill in whatever you'll be doing on the relationship side – without reference to that current issue)."

The reaction to this sort of call may well be a phone call back. The idea that you won't be calling on this actually prompts many people to respond, because they are interested in talking with you about this matter – and also may be conflicted about it. (See discussion of pushaway reactions in "[Getting Relationships back on track](#)")

What to do this week

Map out the set of calls you'll make to follow up on a stalled conversation. If you've got one that's stalled right now, then start making the calls.

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