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How To Communicate With Clients And Coworkers Who Hide Behind Gatekeepers



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You need a communication strategy. ICLIPART

By Dianna Booher—

Getting a critical email or voicemail response from people who like to *ghost* can give you ulcers. These are the times that try our souls. Or has that already been said? Never mind, it's still true.

So buck up and develop your strategies and techniques to handle such *recluse* situations with finesse.

5 Tips For Dealing With The Reclusive Prospect, Client Or Coworker

Recluses hide behind their gatekeepers and their voicemail greeting. If the *recluse* you're dealing with is a prospect, you may question whether they actually need your product or service and have authority to buy from you.

The more frustrating experience, however, is having a recluse for a client—someone who has already signed on the dotted line but with whom you need to interact to implement the sale or service the account.

The ultimate frustration: dealing with a coworker *ghosting* you. After all, you and the coworker play for the same team, the same organization.

One thing all these people—prospects, clients, coworkers—have in mind: control. So with that in mind, here are a few techniques for dealing with them without losing your sanity:

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Email Rather Than Call

Recluses like to respond at their leisure. No matter how busy and what the crisis brewing, communicate in writing. They can read your full message without interruption, even if at midnight. That allows full control of the time and interaction—something they demand from all who do business with them. It's all about control, control, control.

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Leave Complete, Concise Voicemails That Specify Action

Never leave a recluse *teaser* voicemails that aim to elicit callbacks. Leave two, or at most, three voicemails spread over a couple of weeks that answer his or her questions very specifically and succinctly: Why should they return your call? What specific value can you give them immediately? An extensive answer to a question asked in a meeting? A demo? Research from interviews you've just completed?

If you're calling a client or coworker, specify the action you want, give all the details they need to take action, and don't necessarily ask for a call-back. Yes, you read that right. No call-back request.

Instead, give them options to reply. Ten to one, they'll reply by email so they can control the length of the interaction and respond on their own schedule. Remember, for them, it's all about control, control, control.

move the action along because they do intend to do business with you and/or move the project-in-progress along.

Connect on a Personal Level

Find a way to show a broader interest in the recluse than just what you can sell them or how they can help you on your current project. For example, forward a brochure on a conference they might be interested in attending—one that your organization isn't sponsoring but that they might enjoy.

Send something related to their hobby, hometown, health club, children's school, spouse's workplace, or favorite charity. Even commenting on their social media post may break the ice and open the door.

Avoid Entangling Your Ego

Sometimes locking horns with a recluse becomes a challenge of the wills. When it does, you lose.

As an author, I work from a home office. Several years ago, I received a call from someone about midmorning, asking for my husband by name. I told him my husband wasn't available to take the call. The caller said he'd try again. The next day, the same caller. I gave him the same response.

On this second call, he identified his organization, stating that he was calling about "investment opportunities" and said he'd try again later. (I'm always intrigued by such callers, who never bother to clarify who makes the investment decisions for the family, which happens to be me in our case.)

A few days later, the same broker called again at 6:30 a.m., asking for my husband. When I told him my husband wasn't home (he'd gone to the office early that morning), the broker became very rude and hung up abruptly. He called every few days for months, late at night and early in the morning, determined, I assume, to catch my husband answering the phone.

Obviously, this broker had let his ego get the better of his judgment—and his time.

Know when to acknowledge the real situation and move on.

Prospects, clients, and coworkers may play “hide and seek” for any number of reasons—from fear, to incompetence, to control. Whatever their reason, determine not to let their games jeopardize your project or your success.

Observe, personalize, strategize.

*Dianna Booher is the bestselling author of 49 books, including **Communicate Like a Leader**. She helps organizations communicate clearly. Follow at BooherResearch.com and [@DiannaBooher](https://twitter.com/DiannaBooher).*

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Tickle a Funny Bone

If the first two tactics have produced no response and if your recluse has a sense of humor, this tactic often breaks the ice and generates a call-back or a more elaborate response to answer your real, earlier voicemail or email message. Examples for your checklist:

Ms. Quiet:

I've tried several times to reach you without success. Please check your response below:

_____ *We're in crisis mode. We're all bleeding. Call 911.*

_____ *I got your earlier message. I did it already!*

_____ *I'm working under a hectic deadline. Call me back in _____ days.*

_____ *I'm asking _____ to handle this. You can reach her at _____.*

_____ *Go away. You've got the right person, but the wrong offer. No interest. Zero.*

_____ *I'm really a nice person. I just don't like to talk on the phone or respond to the bazillion emails I get every day. Mail whatever you have to me. I promise to take a look.*

_____ *Do you want me to call my friend Guido?*

Most will have a sense of humor and respond. Some will not have a sense of humor—but be embarrassed at this deficiency. But they'll get the point and