

# The Politics of Going Around Powerless People to Reach Decision-Makers

By DIANNA BOOHER JUNE 29, 2021



Powerless people typically refuse to admit they have no real authority. They may tell you they're recommenders or influencers, but you know them as gatekeepers without the final say-so.

decision-maker related to your innovative idea, your proposal, your push for change.

## Go Around the Powerless Person to Reach the Real Decision-Maker

**Warning: Do not try this at home.** Seriously, before you attempt the techniques that follow, assess your situation carefully: Will the decision-maker likely react to your idea any differently than the powerless gatekeeper? Did the decision-maker likely put the blocker in place as a protective shield? What do you have to gain? What do you have to lose?

If your answers to the previous questions don't frighten you, proceed along the following path:

### Lead the Powerless Person to Admit Lack of Authority

When your gut begins to tell you that you may be dealing with a powerless blocker, start asking questions intended to get the person to acknowledge the situation and step out of your way. Here are some starter questions:

- “How do you go about setting your budget for these items?”
- “Do you typically get pushback from your team when you assign them these various projects?”
- “Do you ever have to haggle with other departments over how these funds are allocated?”
- “How involved is the process if you decide you need to go back to the drawing board? That is, when you decide you need additional headcount or funds for a special pet project?”

You get the picture. Either they can or can't answer such questions. They'll either be comfortable or ill at ease discussing these questions with you. They'll be either informative or evasive. In any case, it'll be quickly evident to both of you how much knowledge and authority the person really has.

Then, once the powerless person acknowledges the situation, you can move forward in your discussion. Enlist their advice or help as you move your idea forward to the real decision-maker.

If you determine that maybe the decision maker has purposefully put the blocker in place as a vetting process, become their coach and help them tell your story in the best way possible. Provide them with all the necessary information they need to educate the decision-maker. Put together a proposal for them.

After all, you can tell your story better than someone else can tell your story. Ask them questions about the current situation — what has worked and not worked in the past — so that your proposal contains all the relevant information. Assure them that your idea will deliver value for the organization and leave them looking good for passing your idea along.

Admittedly, this may be a little sneaky. But if the powerless person has been blocking all viable attempts to move your valuable idea forward, this may be your last chance.

Plant the seed with the powerless person that you are “toying with a breakthrough” idea, on the “verge of receiving the results of a critically valuable study,” or “so excited about a new ruling about to be released that will revolutionize some key policies.” Just convey the idea that this new study, survey, publication, or ruling may come through any day, week, or month, and you know the person or the organization will want to see it as soon as possible.

Then look for the powerless person’s first absence — a holiday, vacation, extended travel. While they’re out, leave them a voicemail or send an email (which you know they won’t respond to immediately). Then go ahead and escalate the matter to the real decision-maker, asking for quick consideration because of the “immediate response requested by the vendor offering this bulk discount,” or “the serious danger of inaction,” or the “lost opportunity of such a valuable idea if we wait too long.”

Make sure that others in the organization will appreciate that you are concerned about the wellbeing of the entire organization, not just the ego of the one person you “went around” in this situation.

Granted, this last technique may burn a bridge with the blocker. Unless you have alternative paths, make sure it’s a bridge you won’t need to cross again.



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Dianna Booher is the bestselling author of 49 books, published in 62 foreign-language editions. She helps organizations to communicate clearly and leaders to expand their influence by a strong executive presence – and often by their own published book. Her latest books include *Faster, Fewer, Better Emails*; *Communicate Like a Leader*; *What MORE Can I Say?*; *Creating Personal Presence*; and *Communicate With Confidence*. National Media such as Good Morning America, *USA Today*, *The Wall Street*

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