

### Building Relationships with Senior Management

#### Question

My firm has asked me to develop a target client where we've done some work at the middle-management level. How can I now build a relationship with senior management?

#### Answer

You have to start with a mindset change and answer the question, "Why would top management want to meet with you?" Only by understanding the interests and needs of these executives will you be able to formulate the right approach. Here are some suggestions that will help:

1. Always get a "warm" introduction. Network in through your existing contacts in middle-management; other current or former clients who may know the senior managers; social, political, or community contacts; other senior professionals in your firm; and so on.
2. Find out what's on the agenda of the executive you want to meet. What are his/her 3-4 most pressing concerns, right now?
3. Identify a few compelling or just plain relevant ideas that you can use as a hook for a meeting. Ask: What will truly grab this person's attention?
4. To your current client, articulate compelling reasons as to why it is very much in his or her interest to connect you to senior management.
5. Create a non-threatening first meeting that focuses on some compelling conclusions from your current work, or a piece of interesting research that you/your firm has done—as opposed to a "pitch."
6. Identify a potential business opportunity or idea that you can put on the table for this client.
7. Create a special event that will be attractive and relevant for the executive you want to meet.
8. Focus on an issue or opportunity that your competition has probably not covered and which will not threaten any incumbents.
9. Be persistent: You may have to ask multiple times in order to get in the door. The issue you want to talk to the CEO about this month may not be on his or her list of priorities right now—but that may well change in the future.