

Getting Face Time
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Put yourself in the right place at the right time to get in front of that elusive someone.

When you're trying to meet someone who seems unreachable for whatever reason, sometimes getting access is just a matter of putting yourself in the right place at the right time.

Barry Diller, the CEO of InterActiveCorp., was someone I'd wanted to meet for years. He's a visionary in commerce and media, with an uncanny ability to foresee, before anyone else, where innovation will turn into profit. He smells money.

While doing my homework before attending a conference, I noticed he was scheduled to speak. I found out when and where, and got access to the area where he would have to get on and off the stage. I positioned myself in a place where it would be damn near impossible to get by without giving me a little nudge.

As he walked by, I got his attention. "Mr. Diller, my name is Keith Ferrazzi. I work for Barry Sternlicht as his CMO at Starwood. He's mentioned before that you and I should talk, and I thought I'd just make the introduction myself. I know you're busy, but I'm wondering if I can call your office and arrange a time to meet with you when we get back home?" [Pause--to which he responded, "Sure, call my New York office."]

"Great, I wanted to talk to you about a number of ideas I have about your business, but I've also admired your career and pioneering work you've done for a long time." That was it. I played my heaviest and hardest card, which was my boss, a fellow visionary entrepreneur for whom Diller held respect.

With a name as big as Diller, sometimes the bump can't be as deep as you'd like. Still, with limited time I managed to gain credibility by dropping a familiar and trusted name, show a bit of vulnerability in admitting I admired his career, and suggested I had value to offer with my ideas. And this is important: if you don't have good, generous reasons to talk with someone, you might just be putting yourself in the right place at the wrong time. But if you're well prepared, creating this kind of encounter, however brief, can lead to great results. In this instance, it was the start of a relationship that produced a job offer for me and introductions within Diller's company that are now important clients for FerrazziGreenlight.

This kind of planned chance meeting can be useful even in reacquainting yourself with people you have met before. I recently spoke at the Microsoft Small

Business Summit up in Redmond, Wash., and although I was speaking on the same stage as Microsoft COO Kevin Turner, and I had met him once at Bill Gates's CEO conference years ago, I knew it would be difficult to get a moment with him.

When I looked at the conference schedule, I realized my best chance would be to catch him in the green room when he was in makeup before he went on stage. Then, in preparation, I did some research on him. I learned that he loves homilies. He's really into the power of motivational thoughts and words. I also learned that he's from a meager background like me, and he worked his way up the corporate ladder.

So I went through a copy of *Never Eat Alone* and highlighted several of the great lessons my father taught me like "Never be afraid to ask. The worst anyone can say is no." I wrote them on the back of a card, stuck the card in the book, and took it with me when I went to camp out beside the makeup artist.

Sure enough, I got three minutes of his attention without the usual circus that surrounds a Fortune 500 executive. And as soon as I re-introduced myself, shared the gift with him, and got to talking a bit about my father and our similar backgrounds, we were into a great conversation.

Putting yourself in the right place at the right time can be very helpful in meeting some of the people you want to meet. But remember, getting access is only the first step. To execute a productive "bump," you'll still need to draft off a reference when possible and always do your homework to discover what you share in common and how you can be helpful to that person to give them a compelling reason to invest their time in talking with you.