

The Correct Way Entrepreneurs Should Manage Warm Introductions

Warm intros are hugely important in the startup world, but inexperienced entrepreneurs are always bungling them.

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One of the startup world's most valuable assets is a perfectly made introduction. Simply put, a great intro can be life changing.

I'm not even exaggerating. Having the right person introduce you to your dream VC, dream customer, or dream employee can literally be the difference between a company becoming a billion dollar unicorn and a company that shuts down in six months.

Considering the potential value of a perfect intro, you'd think entrepreneurs would be obsessively careful about how they pursue and manage introductions,

but that's rarely the case. Instead, most entrepreneurs I encounter bungle intros in terribly embarrassing fashion.

Just in the past couple of weeks I've offered three intros that entrepreneurs completely mishandled. Plus, I've had a handful of people make intros to me that the entrepreneurs themselves bungled. It's been frustrating enough that I'm taking matters into my own hands and writing this article. Let's call it the definitive guide to handling introductions in the startup world. Just follow the simple steps I'm about to outline and it could quite literally be the difference between massive startup failure and enormous startup success.

Step #1: Facilitate the intro

Once someone has agreed to make an introduction on your behalf, one of two things is going to happen: either the person is going to make the introduction on his/her own; or, you're going to have to facilitate and/or nudge the introduction forward.

This is where I often see entrepreneurs make their first big mistake. They assume they're supposed to just sit back and wait for the intro to happen.

WRONG!!!

Whenever possible, try to guide the introduction yourself. If someone agrees to make an intro on your behalf, send the person making the intro a polite email with the following information:

Hi [Person Introducing You],

Thanks, again, for agreeing to connect me with [name of person you're being introduced to]. I'm looking forward to the opportunity to speak with [him/her] about [name of your startup].

I've included a brief blurb about [name of your startup] below that you can forward along. Feel free to copy/paste as-is or edit in whatever way makes most sense for you.

Thanks,

[Your name]

At the end of that email, include a brief — three sentences, max! — description of your startup and why you want to meet with the person you're being introduced to.

This strategy for facilitating intros has two huge advantages:

First, it helps ensure the intro actually happens by making it as easy as possible for the other person to make because the person no longer has to figure out what to say.

Second, this strategy lets you control the messaging. By crafting the description of your startup and why you want to meet, you ensure the person making the intro doesn't share inaccurate information that could potentially impact the connection's value.

Step #2: Follow up on the intro

Once someone has introduced you to the person you're hoping to talk with via email, it's time to take over.

First and foremost, it's your responsibility, as the person being introduced, to follow-up on the intro email.

This is so important I'm going to repeat it: *It's your responsibility, as the person being introduced, to follow-up on the intro email.*

Do not... I repeat... DO NOT wait for the person you're being introduced to to respond. You want to demonstrate that you're proactive and excited to talk with that person by immediately following up on the intro email.

When you do follow up on the intro email, politely thank the person who made the introduction and move that person to BCC, like this:

Thanks for this introduction, [Name of person introducing you] (Moving you to BCC to spare your inbox).

The reason for moving the introducer to BCC is because that person's job is done. I promise the person who introduced you doesn't want an inbox flooded with all the back-and-forth emails concerning the new relationship and whatever meetings might get scheduled. Always be kind to the introducer and BCC that person out of the email chain immediately.

Step #3: Execute on the intro

Because people get introduced for all sorts of reasons, I can't share any specific advice about what to do or say once you actually begin engaging with your new contact. But hopefully you're sophisticated enough of an entrepreneur to figure that out on your own. After all, you're the one who wants the intro. However, I'll remind person who's ever introduced to someone else that the intro you received makes you a representative of the person who introduced you, meaning what you say and do reflects on the person who made the intro.

To be clear, this doesn't mean you have to wow the people you've been introduced to with a company they immediately want to invest in or a product they instantly want to buy. I just mean you need to behave professionally and respectfully. Don't be late for your meetings. Be well-prepared. Be polite. And so on. The more professionally you act during meetings fostered by a mutual connection, the more likely you'll be to make the kind of impression that, at the very least, can lead to more introductions.

Step #4: Close the loop on every intro

Remember back in Step #2 when you BCC'd the person who originally made the introduction to spare that person all sorts of needless emails? Even though that kind person didn't want to be bothered by the nitty-gritty of what happened, I guarantee he or she is still invested in the outcome of the intro, so be sure to communicate that you've had a positive and productive conversation.

No need to go into extreme detail in your follow-up or anything like it. A quick note with the following information should do the trick:

"Thanks, again, for introducing me to [name of person you were introduced to]. We just had a great conversation and our next step is to [one small detail about what might happen as a result of the introduction]."

This small bit of extra effort will be hugely important because it'll make the person who introduced you feel good about having done it, which, in turn, will encourage the person to make more introductions in the future. And, of course, more introductions are exactly what you want because, as I explained at the beginning of this article, a great intro is one of the startup world's most valuable assets.