



7 No-Fail Secrets to *Engage Challenging* **Process Owners**

*+ 29 specific action plans YOU can
implement TODAY.*

You are telling yourself - “I am just trying to do my job” - to find the courage to go and talk with Bob...but you still dread to approach him.

Bob is THAT process owner...the “challenging” one.

The one who doesn't care about controls – and doesn't fail to tell it in your face.

The one who wonders why the company is still spending money to pay your salary.

The one who rolls his eye every time you ask him for a meeting.

The one who never gives you the documents on time.

The #1 obstacle to meeting the internal control deadlines.

Basically, your worst nightmare. Bad enough to keep you up at night wondering how you can make him to cooperate with you.

I have worked with hundreds of process owners over 10+ years working internal controls across different industries and countries.

Some of them were easy to work with... and some were not at all!

These are my personal go-to strategies that I successfully used over time to get process owners to cooperate with me.

#1 SHOW RESPECT FOR THEIR TIME

Everyone is busy. Nobody likes to waste time.

Sometimes, inaccessible process owners are just trying to protect their time.

Show respect for their time...even when they don't respect yours. YES, I just said it.

There are respectful ways to make others value your time (which I am not going to discuss here...). However, being late because others are late, will not get you any result.

They are going to be annoyed at you for not respecting their time while excusing themselves for doing the same. It is just how our brain works.

Instead, respect their time by being on time and efficient. Avoid endless and pointless meetings.

CHECK-UP POINT

Do you show up to meetings on time?

ACTION PLAN

Set up meeting reminders 5 to 10 minutes before the starting time. When the reminder goes on, gather the documents you need for the meeting and make your way to the meeting room. Plan to be there (or to dial in) a couple of minutes before it starts so that you have contingency time for any unexpected delays.

For important meetings, plan to be there at least 5 minutes earlier than the meeting starting time.

Do you reschedule meetings several times?

ACTION PLAN

When scheduling a meeting, allow for 15 to 30 minutes contingency time between a meeting and the next one.

This way, you do not have to reschedule or to show up late if the previous meeting overruns.

CHECK-UP POINT

Do you end meetings on time?

ACTION PLAN

When planning a meeting, write a list of topics to be discussed and allocate specific times for each of them. Then add 5 to 10 minutes of contingency time.

During the meeting, discuss the topics within the allocated time.

If you run out of time, ask for permission to overrun or agree to schedule a follow up conversation.

Does the meeting have clear objectives?

ACTION PLAN

When asking for a meeting, be very clear on the objective you want to achieve with it.

Add the objectives to the meeting invite and remind them at the beginning of the meeting. Do not send generic invites or invite to “discuss a certain topic”.

CHECK-UP POINT

Do you close meetings with a clear to do list with deadlines and responsibilities?

ACTION PLAN

At the end of the meeting, summarise any agreed action including who is responsible for it and the agreed deadline. After the meeting, send an email to summarize actions agreed, responsibilities and timelines.

#2 DO YOUR HOMEWORK

Nothing is more annoying for a process owner than having to explain the same things over and over again.

The effective internal control professional does his/her homework.

Next time you talk with Bob, instead of asking “how does the payment process work?” – try with “I read the payment procedure dated May 2nd, 2019, and I would like to check with you whether the document is still up-to-date and accurate. Also, after having read it, I have few follow up questions which I would like to clarify with you”.

This shows that you have invested time in digesting information already available and doing prep work. And you are respectful of Bob’s time.

So now that Bob is happy to take your questions, avoid having an attitude of “I-know-it-all”.

Process owners are “the experts” of their process and – hopefully - they know their job better than you.

This doesn’t mean that you do not have to challenge them if needed!

Just show respect for their knowledge and appreciation for sharing it with you.

CHECK-UP POINT

Do you do your homework before asking questions?

ACTION PLAN

Next time you have a question, think about any possible source of info on the topic. Read available information to prep before you ask.

Do you phrase your question in a way that shows that you did your homework?

ACTION PLAN

Prep the phrasing of the question in advance. Does it clearly show that you've done your homework on the topic?

CHECK-UP POINT

Do you ask challenging questions in a way that shows a genuine interest rather than “proving-them-wrong”?

ACTION PLAN

When planning your question, think if it can come across as a “gotcha” question. If yes, then rephrase it as an “I-would-to-understand-more” question.

Do you show respect and appreciation in all your communications?

ACTION PLAN

Review your last 5 emails with the process owner. Do they clearly show respect for their knowledge? Or are you using an “I-know-better-than-you” tone?

#3 HELP THEM

Find ways to make their life easy. Even with small things.

Process owners are going to love you for that.

And it shows that you are genuinely willing to have a positive relationship.

For example – If they don't know where to start to write a procedure – offer your help.

You could share examples of procedures to get them off the ground.

You could review their draft procedure or if you really want to win them over, write it for them.

CHECK-UP POINT

Do you regularly offer your help?

ACTION PLAN

Write down a list of 5 people. Brainstorm ways you can help them or make their work easier. Pick a couple of them and offer your help.

CHECK-UP POINT

Do you suggest shortcuts to achieve results in a shorter time?

ACTION PLAN

When a process owner is worried about some activities taking too much time, think about a way to make it quicker.

Do you put process owners in contact with someone who can help them?

ACTION PLAN

In case you cannot help a process owner, think about who else - internal or external to the company - could help. And put them in touch.

#4 EDUCATE THEM ON YOUR ROLE

“Why are you asking the same thing that I already explained to your colleague last week?” goes Bob.

You stare at him, trying to recall who is "your colleague" he is referring to... nothing comes to your mind..." Who did you already explain it to?" you ask.

“I think his name was Rick... I just spent 2 hours walking him through the process, why you are now asking me to do it again?!” Ahhh – now you understand. Rick is part of the internal audit team, while you are part of the internal control team.

Bob is confused: internal auditors... internal control team... external auditors... compliance team.

Process owners often feel like they are being asked the same questions repeatedly.

Which creates a lot of frustration and makes them reluctant to cooperate with you.

Process owners often challenge your work because they do not understand exactly the scope of your role.

The lack of understanding creates resistance.

Therefore you need to be very clear in explaining your role and how it fits into the overall strategy.

CHECK-UP POINT

Do you explain what is your role?

ACTION PLAN

Take with you a chart which shows how your role fits within the overall organization and how it contributes to the company strategy.

Every time someone is confused on your role, show them the chart and take one minute to explain your responsibilities... and how they differ from the other audit/assurance teams.

Do you explain to them why internal controls are important?

ACTION PLAN

Prepare a short explanation (4 to 6 bullet points) on why internal controls are key to manage risks and to protect the company.

Think about one specific example of risk & control for each key area of the business.

Every time you are facing someone who is not appreciating the importance of internal controls, explain why internal controls are important and give one example of risks & controls related to the area the person is working in.

Try to adapt your explanation to your audience's role and background.

CHECK-UP POINT

Do you give them an overview of the entire internal control process?

ACTION PLAN

Prepare a short overview of the internal control process in your organization and how it impacts their work.

Practice your explanation – even better if you could illustrate it visually with a workflow. Use it every time someone is unclear on how the internal control process works.

Do you explain the importance of their role regarding internal controls?

ACTION PLAN

Whenever you feel that process owners you are communicating with are confused about their role regarding internal controls, take one minute to explain their responsibilities regarding risks and controls.

Highlight how their role impacts directly the company risk management process.

#5 AGREE ON A WAY TO WORK

We are not all the same. Every one of us has a preferred way to work. Some people love face-to-face connections, while others prefer sending emails.

Some prefer to tackle tasks in one session, while others prefer to spread them over more sessions.

Some prefer to schedule meetings well in advance and have a formal agenda. Others are happy for you to pop at their desk.

Agree on how you are going to work together upfront. Suggest a couple of options and leave to the other person the choice.

For example.

Let's say that you need to do a walkthrough of a process.

When contacting the process owner, you could say: "As we discussed, I need to do a walkthrough of the process in the next couple of weeks. I was to create minimum disruption for you and your team, so I am flexible on the approach you want to have. I could start working with each one of your team members and then schedule a session with you to clarify any remaining point. In this case, I would likely need approximately 1 hour of your time towards the end of the month. Or alternatively, I could start working with you first. I will then work with your team on the points that you would like me to discuss directly with them. In this case, I would probably need 2 hours of your time next week. What do you think it will work best for you?"

CHECK-UP POINT

Do you give options to people as to how to interact with you?

ACTION PLAN

Every time you are approaching your customer or a new project, take a couple of minutes to think about a couple of ways you can interact together.

Also, consider how you can interact with the stakeholder's direct reports/team.

Do you clearly agree on how to interact?

ACTION PLAN

Once you presented process owners with ways to interact together, clearly agree on how to do so. Agreeing it upfront avoids misunderstanding down the line.

Do you check on a regular basis if this is still how they prefer to interact with you?

ACTION PLAN

From time to time, check-in with process owners to confirm if the way to interact which was initially agreed still works for them.

#6 BE TRANSPARENT

Sometimes process owners are “challenging” because they are overwhelmed and confused by your requests.

Maybe they don't understand what you're trying to achieve or what is required from them.

Confused process owners are not in the best place to help you.

Be very clear on your objective and what is needed from them. Explain how they are involved at any stage of the process, the timeline and how the end result looks like.

Tell them how you're going to use the information they provide to you. It helps them to give you exactly the info you need.

Give them the chance to review any document you produce so that they get comfortable with it – and you can check that they are accurate. Win-win!

CHECK-UP POINT

Do you explain your objective?

ACTION PLAN

Before any communication, ask yourself: “what am I trying to achieve?”

Communicate your objective clearly and remind it frequently to process owners.

Do you explain all the steps?

ACTION PLAN

Explain to process owners exactly what steps are required to achieve the objective. Clarify the level of involvement expected from them and their teams during each step.

Do you explain how you use the info they are giving you?

ACTION PLAN

Every time you request information/documentation, explain to process owners:

- why you need it,*
- how you're going to use it,*
- with who you're going to share it.*

CHECK-UP POINT

Do you give them the opportunity to review reports to ensure they are accurate before they are distributed?

ACTION PLAN

Every time you produce a document (i.e. procedures, walkthroughs, reports...), send it to the people who provided you with the information mentioned in the document. Ask them to double check the accuracy before issuing the final document.

Do you explain what's going to happen next?

ACTION PLAN

At the end of each communication or meeting, summarize the next steps.

#7 FOLLOW THROUGH

One of the easier ways to lose credibility and trust is to over-promise and under deliver.

Nobody likes that – not you and not me.

So, when it comes to delivering results, be careful about what you commit to. And once you committed, do it. And do it on time.

CHECK-UP POINT

Do you agree on specific and attainable deliverable?

ACTION PLAN

Before agreeing to deliver anything, make sure that the deliverable specs are very clear. And that you are actually able to deliver it.

CHECK-UP POINT

Do you deliver on time?

ACTION PLAN

When committing to a new deliverable, take a moment to consider existing commitments. Evaluate the time they require and add some contingency time.

Then come up with a feasible deadline for the new deliverable.

Do you keep track of your commitments?

ACTION PLAN

When doing your weekly planning, take a moment to check if you are on track to deliver expected results on time. Do that with all your commitments.

CHECK-UP POINT

Do you inform process owners about delays ASAP?

ACTION PLAN

If it is unlikely that you will manage to deliver on time, let process owners know as soon as possible. Explain what made it impossible to stick to the initial timeframe and suggest a new one.

Do you suggest an alternative plan?

ACTION PLAN

If the agreed deliverable cannot be delivered, find alternative solutions. Suggest and agree on alternative plans to reach the objective.

WHAT'S NEXT...

Want to have even more resources on how to be an extra-effective internal control professional?

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Email me at info@internalcontroltoolbox.com