



# Stop Accepting Defaults: Bend Reality With Persistence

*Most people accept defaults and leave their potential on the table. You can bend reality more than you think by asking directly, persisting longer than feels comfortable, and practicing practical optimism.*

## Name the trap

Let's start where most people get stuck. Most of us quietly accept how things are and assume the rules are fixed. That reflex hides how often outcomes are negotiable. The real blockers aren't mysterious forces, they're self-doubt, giving up too early, and a habit of easing off just when a push would matter.

Consider a simple local example. You need a city inspection and the website says "earliest slot in 6 weeks." You wait. A colleague phones the office, explains a concrete deadline, and asks if there's a cancellation list. Two days later, they slide into a freed slot. No tricks, just a clear ask and a polite follow-up.

Once you can see the trap, you can choose a different stance. The next move is to treat reality as bendable and act like your behavior can move it.

## Choose willful reality

Seeing the trap gives you a choice. Willfulness is deciding to shape the result instead of watching it happen to you. That often means stating what you want plainly and enduring the awkward friction that follows. You won't get it most of the time, and yes, the "no" can sting, but the hit rate is better than the zero you get by not trying.

Try this small shift at work. A team dreads a 90-minute weekly status meeting that breaks everyone's focus. One person proposes a one-month trial: replace the meeting with a written brief due by 3 p.m. Thursday and a ten-minute Friday stand-up for blockers only. The manager agrees to test it, and the group gets back six hours a month.



When it works, it works surprisingly well.

That said, a single ask rarely creates a breakthrough. The common thread in real outcomes is time in the game, which is where persistence comes in next.

### **Extend your runway**

Choosing willfulness is necessary; staying in the game long enough is what lets luck find you. Persistence is the engine: “I’m going to keep going until this works, and I’ll figure out the challenges as they show up.” It doesn’t guarantee success; it increases the surface area for beneficial chance, more shots on goal, more cycles to learn, more moments where timing lines up.

Airbnb is a benchmark for endurance, not a checklist to copy. Their early survival included maxed-out credit cards stored in nine-slot binder pages, dollar-store cereal, and repeated fights with entrenched interests, approaches you shouldn’t emulate. But they did stay alive long enough for luck to go their way, which is the point worth carrying forward.

Here’s a practical founder example. You extend runway by six weeks doing 10 hours of freelance work per week. In week five, you meet a beta customer at a small meetup you wouldn’t have attended if you’d shut down. You couldn’t script that meeting, but you created the condition for it by not exiting the game. Persistence sets the stage; the next lever is the direct ask.

### **Ask with intent**

Persistence creates chances; asking turns chances into decisions. The tactic is simple: ask for what you want, clearly, courteously, and with a specific next step. Expect lots of rejection. Don’t dramatize it. Treat “no” as a data point about timing, fit, or clarity.

Picture a designer seeking pilot users for a new workflow tool. They send 30 targeted emails with a one-sentence value proposition and a two-line call to action. Twenty-seven go unanswered, two decline, and one says “maybe.” That one “maybe” becomes a 30-day pilot and three concrete improvement requests, enough traction to earn the next conversation.



When you need a compact process to make the ask, use this micro-protocol:

1. Define the specific outcome you want in one sentence and the smallest acceptable next step.
2. Find decision-makers, not spectators; send a short, relevant message that names the outcome and the next step.
3. Follow up twice on a predictable cadence; if no response, close the loop with a polite "I'll assume no."
4. Log outcomes and adjust the message or target list based on real responses, not guesses.

Because repetition and rejection are hard to stomach, you'll need fuel you can renew on your own: practical optimism.

## Train practical optimism

Asking and persisting both sting, so you need optimism you can practice and not just feel. Think of it as a bias toward the possibility of improvement, backed by evidence you collect. You build it by noticing small wins, reframing setbacks as information, and resetting quickly.

Run a one-week drill to make this concrete. For seven days, write down one ask you made, one rejection you received, and one tiny win you created (e.g., "moved a meeting, " "got a warm intro, " "improved the pitch sentence"). On day four you'll likely notice the rejections hurt less when you can see the wins next to them. On day seven, re-send one earlier ask with a clearer next step and a more specific reason it matters; you'll often get a response you wouldn't have gotten on the first pass.

You begin to see yourself as someone who moves the needle, not someone waiting for permission.

The compound effect is identity-level transformation. So start today, pick one ask you can make in the next hour, commit to ten follow-ups over the next two weeks, and decide, in advance, how long you'll stay in the game. That simple plan won't guarantee a win, but it will bend reality in your direction more often than you expect.



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### **Here's a thought...**

Pick one ask you can make in the next hour. Send it with a clear next step, then commit to following up twice over two weeks regardless of the initial response.