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Focus on Innovation

Focus on Innovation is a monthly electronic newsletter designed to provoke thoughts and ideas on how to bring innovation to life within the organizations in which we work.

For Those on the Run

Coming up with a great idea is one thing, however, being able to sell it to others is often considered far more daunting. Read more on how to improve the odds of your ideas being accepted and implemented.

Selling Your Ideas

Most jobs require us, on a regular basis, to sell our ideas. The ability to sell our ideas does not come without its challenges. First, when it comes to selling our ideas to others it is important to remember that one's credibility and power to make the changes desired must be earned. Our credibility in the organization will make or break our ability to have our ideas heard. Second, in selling our ideas we not only need our listeners to agree with us in principle, but also to take action. Many good ideas get lost in translation and never get acted upon. Finally, in the majority of cases the problem isn't that the other person "didn't get it" when it came to our idea, rather we don't always understand or don't communicate how our idea fits into a project plan or the company's strategic goals. The ability to sell our ideas to others is a key determinant of our success, and is often an ability that is missing in organizations.

How can you improve your ability in selling your ideas? Here are six suggestions:

- **Make selling ideas part of your job.** Successful innovators know that selling is a constant need and never-ending requirement. Consider taking courses and/or reading books related to selling, influencing and persuasion to help hone this ability. Observe and learn from others who are good at selling their ideas.
- **Build a foundation.** Have evidence to support your idea. Gather facts, statistics, case histories, documents and other evidence that supports your idea. Consider all the alternatives to your idea and provide evidence as to why you rejected them. Develop a business case for the idea that answers the following questions:
 - *What project or projects will it help?*
 - *Will we be able to expand our market?*
 - *Will we get our product to market faster?*
 - *Will it offer new capabilities?*
 - *Will it be better than what the competition is offering?*

- *What is the cost impact?*
- *What kinds of additional financial and staff resources will it take to implement?*
- *What are the risks and the trade-offs?*
- **Know your target audience.** Determine who your target audience is and request a meeting with them. Put yourself in their shoes. What would they want to hear? What would persuade them that your idea is worth pursuing? Express your idea in clear terms appropriate to the target audience.
- **Be prepared to give a short presentation.** Ensure that your presentation highlights the critical points. Avoid using weak and ineffective communication when selling your idea such as "You probably think idea is silly but how about..." or "I'm probably way off track but..." It is important to use strong communication and emulate the physical 'presence' and mannerisms of a self-assured and confident person when selling your ideas.
- **Practice before going live.** Consider presenting your idea to a "mock" audience. Better yet, present your idea to a sceptical audience. Ask them to tear your idea apart, finding the weaknesses in your idea, then see how you feel about it - if you are still convinced it is a good one go for it.
- **Use the power of visualization.** First, help others visualize your idea by including in your presentation pictures, prototypes, etc. The more your audience can feel, taste, touch and see your idea, the greater the chances of getting it accepted. Second, in preparing to sell your idea, consider using outcome based thinking as a way to persuade others to your way of thinking. Before presenting, sit quietly and visualize the following:
 - *Decide specifically what the desired outcome is at the beginning of the communication. What do you want out of the process?*
 - *Predict what the other person wants, or will want.*
 - *Determine what is the least you will accept.*
 - *Predict what possible problems may come up.*
 - *Determine, in advance, how to deal with each problem, and how you can turn that specific problem into a benefit for the other person or people.*
 - *Decide how you will bring the process to conclusion.*

What's the Bottom line

The ability to sell ideas and have them accepted and implemented takes preparation, practice and persistence. In the words of Mark Twain, "The man with a new idea is a crank until the idea succeeds."

It's not enough just to generate a large quantity of ideas for a problem you are trying to solve or a product you are trying to develop. Good brainstorming also involves an organized way to evaluate the ideas you have generated. Like brainstorming, there are some general guidelines to consider and helpful techniques to evaluate ideas effectively. Read more to find out about the how to evaluate ideas.



Please feel free to pass this newsletter on to others. If you would like more information about the ideas and topics listed in this issue, contact Judy Laws, Ph.D. at jlaws@foursightconsulting.com.

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