



TRANSFORMING IDEAS INTO ACTION

Suppose you've come up with a good idea. You've figured out a way your sales force can get more access to customers; or come up with a better way to implement blended learning; or identified some powerful job aides to enhance O-T-J performance. Good ideas are vital to a healthy business..

But good ideas on their own don't get things done. To make a difference, they have to be transformed into action.

That means you have to sell them to all the people involved—to the decision-makers, to the people who will actually be implementing them, and to peers who may be affected by the change.

Sell Up

Getting your ideas to the right decision-makers in the right way is usually vital. Implementation costs money; *somebody* has to release it. Most of the time you also need the support of other people in your organization as well to get anything done and avoid unnecessarily stepping on toes.

- **Who's your decision-maker?** For small projects that only affect your own area, it may be sufficient to get your own boss's approval. It's likely, though, you may need to look further. Identifying who has the real decision-making power over your idea may or may not be easy—in many organizations, actual power does not flow the way it looks on the org chart, so it may take some investigation and

political finesse to figure it out, especially at the highest levels.

- **Match your decision-maker's style.** People are different not only in their general personality styles, but in the way they make decisions. For the best results, you need to understand how your specific decision-makers work. How do they typically react to new ideas? What kinds of information and presentation do they look for? What can you do to trigger their interest and engage their support? Some of the common decision-making styles include:

- **Charismatic:** they are talkative, enthusiastic, and intrigued by new ideas. Resist the urge to share their excitement, but focus the discussion on results: use straightforward arguments and visual aids to emphasize features and benefits.

- **Skeptics:** are aggressive, demanding, and suspicious of data that challenges their viewpoint. Credibility is crucial in dealing with them. If you don't have enough clout, get the endorsement of someone they trust.

- **Followers:** are cautious, bargain-conscious, and tend to decide based on precedent. They prefer proven methods, so references and testimonials are helpful. Emphasize the success others have had with similar initiatives.

Sell Down

It's always best to get the willing support of the people who will be carrying out your idea in practice; if you have to rely on coercive power, they are unlikely to give it their best shot, and may find subtle ways to derail or sabotage it. Make sure to solicit their input, listen to what they say, and incorporate it into your action plan.

- **Hold small meetings** to discuss things. 8-15 people is a good size for getting everyone involved. Start holding meetings early in the process when matters are still fluid.
- **Present a loose framework** of your vision of change, then let people challenge it, argue it, pick it apart, and suggest changes. Healthy dialog is valuable. And they may spot problems you have missed, or find better ways to achieve the result you want.

Sell Sideways

Don't ignore your peers, even in other departments. Careers have foundered on turf battles and the competition for resources. Help them see your idea can lead to benefits for them as well. Give them reasons not to stand in the way.

