



March 2008

Masterful Mentoring

TIP

Tip of the Month

Building a network of trusted advisors provides you with ready-made collaborators and resources when you are trying to sell an idea.

SELLING YOUR IDEAS TO OTHERS

By Randy Emelo

One of the more critical career management skills is the ability to convince others to act on your ideas. It is not enough to tell others what you think or what you need; you have to be able to sell them on what you want them to do. If done correctly, this type of idea selling is viewed by upper management as motivational and inspiring leadership.

When we have a good idea, most of us are not in a position to simply command others to follow. Instead, it is far more common to find ourselves in situations where others need to be sold on the value and merits of our ideas. This is true regardless of whether you are trying to gain support from those in your organization whose [positional power](#) is [up](#), [down](#), or [sideways](#) from your own.

In this article, we will examine best practices for selling your ideas to others and will discuss how to use your mentoring relationship to improve your effectiveness.

Four Steps to Selling Success

Selling something to others, regardless of whether it is a product, service, or idea, is a skill that can be learned and improved upon by practice. One technique to help build your selling skills uses four consecutive actions that build upon the success of one another.

4-Step Sales Model



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1. Think It Through

Consider the problem your idea solves, the solution you create, and the way it affects those around you.

2. Socialize Your Concept

Test your assumptions and further refine your idea into a presentable plan.

3. Make Your Pitch

Describe the problem your idea addresses and lay out the benefits of your idea.

4. Follow Through

Take action to ensure that your idea is acted on.



✎ AUTHOR INFO

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✎ SELLING YOUR IDEAS TO OTHERS (cont.)

These four steps help you build a solid plan for bringing your ideas to life. Let's examine these more closely.

Step 1: Think It Through

The first step in selling your idea to others is to take the time to consider the relevant issues surrounding it. The most significant consideration you need to make is determining the merit or worth of your idea. In other words, how big of a problem are you addressing or solving? The bigger or thornier the problem that your idea solves, the more compelling your argument will be.

Once you have determined that your idea solves a worthy problem, you need to consider how your solution will affect the status quo. New ideas usually cause changes to systems, processes, and/or procedures. Because of this, new ideas are almost always met with resistance from the existing order of things: present customs, practices, and power relations. In considering the status quo, ask yourself:

- *What are the risks?*
Risks are the dangers, possible losses, or damaging effects that could result from your idea being enacted.
- *What trade-offs will have to happen?*
Trade-offs are compromises or exchanges that have to take place to enact your idea. Good ideas are not always fair to everyone. You may need to consider how to compensate those who may feel overlooked or deprived.
- *Where will the resistance come from?*
Resistance to acting on your idea will come from those who will not readily understand your idea or stand to lose power or prestige as a result of your idea.

Step 2: Socialize Your Concept

It is very beneficial to socialize your concept with others who can give you more insight, support, and understanding. As you socialize your idea, you want to determine where the greatest points of resistance lie, who the potential supporters of your idea are, and what things are going to be affected the most by your idea in both positive and negative ways.

With this in mind, there are two main considerations for socializing a new idea: who to socialize and how to accomplish it.

- *Who to Socialize*
It is important to be selective in who you choose to share your idea with. It is best if they can be viewed as collaborators rather than competitors. Good collaborators are willing to help you think through the critical dimensions of your idea without the need to own it or take it as their own. If possible, they should be known as positive influencers with solid reputations. People who have connections can help point you to other like-minded collaborators.



☑ SELLING YOUR IDEAS TO OTHERS (cont.)

- *How to Socialize*

It takes a deft touch to socialize an idea in a way that gains cooperation and support rather than condemnation or scorn. At this point in the selling process, you may not be able to fully explain your idea in a way that does not raise defenses. Therefore, it is best to approach others with thoughtful questions and inquiries rather than trying to present your entire idea. Look to engage collaborators in the portion of the problem that they have the most influence over or understanding of. Remember, you want to identify resistance, supporters, and consequences.

☑ QUOTE

Persuasion is often more effectual than force.

- Aesop

Step 3: Make Your Pitch

Now that you know what kinds of resistance you will have to overcome, you are ready to prepare a sales pitch. A sales pitch is a value-based presentation of your idea that connects with a key decision maker in the matter of a few moments. The sales pitch needs to describe the problem and the benefits of your idea (who, what, by when). The key to making an effective sales pitch is to tailor it to the person you are trying to persuade. It must meet a highly perceived need for the person you are trying to influence, and it must end with a solid call for action from the decision maker. If not, you may have convinced him/her that you have a good idea, but left them wondering what you wanted from them.

There are three major considerations for tailoring your sales pitch: politics, perspective, and priority.

- *Politics*

There may be political considerations that need to be addressed before your idea can be implemented. Your idea may necessitate the redistribution of resources and will have to be agreed upon by other policy makers. As a result, more pitches may have to be made to other influencers.

- *Perspective*

Each decision maker has a unique set of concerns that is determined by his/her role and responsibility in the organization. Your pitch needs to center on their concerns, not yours. You must empathize with their perspective and speak to their needs.

- *Priority*

Most decision makers are constantly juggling competing interests. You may need to tie your idea to a hot organizational imperative if you want to get a fair hearing. You will need to help them understand why immediate action is important.



RESOURCES

Triple Creek offers many free resources on our web site, including booklets, research papers, and an archive of past newsletters.

Visit www.3creek.com for access to these additional mentoring resources.

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Step 4: Follow Through

After you gain a commitment from the decision maker, you need to make certain your idea gets acted on and not just accepted as a good idea. Ensuring that this occurs begins with telling the decision maker that you will send him/her a follow up communication recapping the idea and outlining next steps, and then doing exactly that as soon as you can. It is not uncommon to gain commitment for an idea only to watch it be delegated to someone who has not been sold on its value. This often leads to little or no change taking place. To combat this, you may want to request that you remain involved with enacting the idea. This will allow you to champion the cause through to implementation.

Bear in mind that various factors may impact your plan to follow through, such as:

- *Stakeholder Engagement*
It is quite possible that multiple stakeholders who are affected by the implementation process will need to be enlisted to enact the new idea.
- *Resource Allocation*
Personnel, training budget, processes, policies, or procedures may have to be added or altered to implement the new idea.
- *Implementation Plan*
An implementation plan needs to be created and at minimum should include a sequenced list of actions with assigned task ownership and deadlines.

By implementing this 4-step process, you can feel confident that you are selling your idea with purpose, direction, and aptitude.

Careers are not made by having good ideas. Careers are made by being able to get others to bring your ideas to life. The ability to sell your ideas to others is a highly complex skill that will take time and effort to master. By making idea selling a focus of your mentoring relationship, you can leverage the experience and wisdom of your partner to help you as you develop.

The Practice Exercise on the following page provides a starting point for you and your mentoring partner.



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Practice Exercise

The following exercise can help you construct a plan for increasing your effectiveness with selling your ideas.

1. Use the following self-evaluation to assess your ability to sell ideas.

Self-Evaluation

Take a moment and recall a time when you attempted to sell others on a significant idea that you had. With this memory in mind, rate how closely you agree with the following statements.

	Low				High
I determined the worth and value of my idea.	1	2	3	4	5
I determined the risks associated with my idea.	1	2	3	4	5
I determined the trade-offs associated with my idea.	1	2	3	4	5
I determined the resistance associated with my idea.	1	2	3	4	5
I selected the proper collaborators to socialize my idea.	1	2	3	4	5
Through socialization I was able to properly test my assumptions.	1	2	3	4	5
Through socialization I was able to refine my idea into a presentable plan.	1	2	3	4	5
I made an effective sales pitch that considered the political situation of the decision maker.	1	2	3	4	5
I made an effective sales pitch that considered the perspective of the decision maker.	1	2	3	4	5
I made an effective sales pitch that considered the priorities of the decision maker.	1	2	3	4	5
I gained the commitment of the decision maker.	1	2	3	4	5
The proper stakeholders were engaged in the follow through.	1	2	3	4	5
The proper resources were allocated in the follow through.	1	2	3	4	5
A workable implementation plan was utilized in the follow through.	1	2	3	4	5

2. Discuss your self-evaluation results with your mentoring partner and solicit his/her perspective of your results.
3. If you have determined that you need to strengthen your idea selling ability, determine what new actions you are going to take.
4. Set up a time to review your progress with your mentoring partner.