How to Champion Your Next Great Idea

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Ever feel like you could unlock the potential of your center, but no one will let you turn the key? Maybe the ideas you – and your agents – create fall on deaf ears when you sound the call for more staff or technology, or a change in organizational structure? Unless you are able to say "the experts tell us…" or "best practices dictate…" it's hard to muster a receptive audience. So how do you make the leap from insider insight to action and successful implementation?

Frame the idea in the context of strategy

First, frame your need in terms of how it will support your contact center and corporate goals. Making this link is critical for executives to see that goal achievement is at risk without the right resources. Adding external validation such as industry best practices, expert articles, white papers, or industry analyst reports adds more credibility to your idea and lets management know your idea is rooted in proven strategies. Wherever possible, identify quantifiable gains to expect. External reference points may provide hard data to support the benefits that a center might realize when making a change to enable greater efficiency or effectiveness.

As you frame your idea, be clear on what you are driving for and any implications that may affect results. Is it cost saving, revenue growth, improvement in customer experience or something else? We may want it all, but conflicting priorities can hinder your success. For example, if excellence in customer experience is your key driver, you may experience initial additional costs before you realize increased excellence and possibly greater efficiencies. Clarity on goals and drivers helps prioritize decision making and define phased plans.

Be persistent

Old adages such as "persistence pays" and "if at first you don't succeed; try, try again" still ring true. An initial "no" may mean someone needs more information or the idea needs more explanation to strengthen the case. More often than not, leaders are caught in a no win situation with limited budget and unending requests. You have to help solve their problems in order to solve your problem. Be persistent in lobbying for your need while showing you are a team player; help them first with their problem and if your need can support and address their problem make the connection clear.

Persistence also involves taking the time to educate and build a support base for the idea, with a consistent drum beat of your idea in the context of strategy, as outlined above. Building support is key in getting the decision made *and* in successful idea implementation.

Build allies

Building a support base means building allies. It doesn't happen overnight, but takes persistence as noted above. A simple example shows how seeking internal allies to help support an initiative can change the outcome. Several years ago an insurance company reorganized their operation. With the re-organization, they sought an integrated quality monitoring (QM) tool to improve the QM process for analysts. Each year the answer to their QM budget request was a resounding "NO".

While the QM team originally wanted a tool to support their small staff, the more compelling business case focused on the customer experience. The QM team enrolled the front line in their cause, showing how QM would help agents improve their customer interactions, give supervisors tools for coaching, and enable the center leadership to hold agents, supervisors, *and quality analysts* accountable for customer satisfaction. Management bought in to the idea and funded QM. The difference between the first "no" and a successful answer, implementation and outcome involved building allies. With an alliance such as this, everybody wins.

Include Change Management

Championing your idea from inception to approval requires strategy, persistence, and allies…and that's just the beginning. Implementing requires robust planning, whether organizational change, process changes, a new technology, or moving to a new location. Every time you gain approval for an idea, think about the impact on people and include a change management plan. A proven methodology will minimize agent resistance, mitigate union concerns, and reduce technology hiccups, all of which can derail a project or compromise results. Every great idea needs buy-in at all levels of the organization and at all phases of implementation.