

June 2002 Business Tip

Selling a Potentially Unpopular Idea (read: 'change')

A few years ago, a friend gave me a mug engraved with the quote, "If you keep doing the same things you have always done, you will always get what you have always got." To state it another way, "If you are banging your head against the wall and it hurts, then, stop." Rhetorical question: why is it, many folks will repeatedly take an action (or inaction) even though they 'intellectually know' that taking this action (or inaction) will result in pain, sometimes intense emotional pain, the worst pain of all?

After a short period in a leadership position, I began to realize that virtually every time I found a need to introduce a change there was opposition no matter how valid the need and how 'good' the decision. In the name of not banging my head against the wall, I began to devise a 'model' to give me the greatest chance of successfully selling a potentially unpopular idea. It has five steps and it takes time to think them through and present them but the time you invest on the front end saves way more time and stress on the back end. The five steps:

1. Articulate the problem (just this much separates yourself from the average leader);
2. Identify all the alternatives you considered (shows thoroughness)
3. List the pros and cons of each solution including the disadvantages of the one you chose (shows confidence, objectivity and willingness to share perspectives);
4. Announce your decision and why;
5. Confidently ask for the support of your constituents (punctuates your decisiveness and general leadership skill).

Roll this model around in your mind, tinker with it and you will begin to see how many applications there are. Best of luck selling your changes!

Make it a great month.

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