

CONVINCING COWORKERS

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Convincing Coworkers

Winning Over Teammates, Managers, and Suits

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Facing the Struggle

Who This Book Is For

Nothing seems to turn people against others like the suggestion of change.

I dedicate this book to the defenders, the creators, the insightful, the wise, the inventors, and the champions of causes. To all you who want to make a change, this is for you.

You've got a problem, right? You are full of hope, enthusiasm, experience, or ideas, and you've already faced opposition. The best path forward seems obvious. The only thing standing in your way are your coworkers. Why do they seem so clueless? No matter how great your suggestions, they just don't seem to care.

One or more of the following archetypes might resonate with you. Reflect upon which one you might be: it will help you understand why the message isn't getting through.

The Learner

Learning new tools, technologies, and methodologies is hard, but you know that: you've come this far despite the challenges. You've mastered that new skill by applying your determination, will, and effort. Like a mountain climber reaching the summit, you can finally stop and take a break to enjoy the view. But now you have a new way of putting things together or you've put in effort on the side learning a new tool that you can now suggest. Whatever it is, you feel you have something to offer your group, but they don't seem to care.

The Inventor

You've realized some new truth about the world. You look at the situation and everything snaps into focus. You now see a simple explanation for the issues you have been facing, and you want to share your wonder and excitement with your coworkers. Maybe you've built a tool that could save everyone time. Possibly just modifying the process would benefit the group. Yet the effort all seems wasted when you try to explain it to everyone.

The Defender

Maybe you've seen this all before, and you know where everything is headed. You remember last time: the promises, the enthusiasm, the fancy tricks. In the end, they all turned out to be a salesman's empty promise. You can see that the "new shiny" is just a repackaging of the "old nasty", and the repackaging costs far more than it's worth.

This Book Is For You

Regardless of the circumstances, you've got a problem. No matter how right you are, no matter how brilliant your idea or accurate your prediction, it just isn't getting through. Once again, they react with sarcasm, jokes, incredulity, or maybe even hostility. Why the resistance? How come they just won't listen?!

If you have coworkers to convince, this book is for you.

What to Expect From This Book

Let's be honest with ourselves here, how many unfinished books do you have sitting around? If you are like me, you have so many

unfinished books you couldn't finish them all in twenty lifetimes. If you have people to convince, you don't want to wait around for weeks and weeks to finish what otherwise could be a quick summary. With that in mind, I've decided to make this text as accessible as possible. I've separated the book into three sections:

The Core Strategy

The first section is a simple explanation of the core strategies of winning others over to your cause. The content is presented as simply as possible.

The Actors

The second section is a reference of the main actors in common situations, along with some tips for dealing with their concerns and meeting their needs. The Actors section is lighthearted, with the goal of getting you to think about those around you. While each Actor is presented comically, the represented needs are real. The section can be a helpful reference to look back on when faced with a person who just won't budge.

The Case Studies

The last section is a set of stories of myself and others who have successfully convinced coworkers to make a change. I also included a few stories where the change just never happened. In each case, I apply the core concepts to the story as a case study of where the convincer did well, and where they could have improved.

As you read, you'll be able to start putting together a plan after the first few chapters, then read through the stories as entertaining leisure. When you need inspiration, read through some success stories for encouragement to keep up the good work. When you

encounter blockages, you can commiserate with us as you read some of our stories that will show you how we've all made dumb mistakes and been rejected for no good reason.

Section 1 - The Core Strategy

The Strategy is the most important part of the book. In this section you will find how you are going to go about winning others to your cause! First, you need a strategy, a plan. Without a plan, you will thrash around, stirring up trouble and stepping on toes. Without a plan, you will have no idea what is and isn't working. You'll be leaving everything to chance. That just won't do! Your idea is too important to leave to chance!

To convince others you need to do one simple thing: make the change worth the cost. Ultimately, you need to get your point across, and that means proving that your suggestion is worth it. As the saying goes, "ideas are cheap, execution is everything".

Tip: Make the change worth the cost

The following eight steps outline are my recommendations for how to prepare your idea to be successful. Not every successful idea follows exactly this path, but following it will help you stay organized and ensure you don't miss anything obvious. Over time, you will get skilled enough that you won't need to refer to this list to keep track of the details.

Core Steps

1. Ready Yourself
2. Clearly Understand What You Are Suggesting
3. (Optionally) Find Allies Who Will Support You

4. Determine Decision Makers
5. Isolate Decision Makers' Needs
6. Address Needs
7. Propose Your Idea
8. Modify And Repeat As Needed

Simple as that. If you can figure out how to successfully communicate a proposal that best meets the needs of the decision makers, you will win them to your cause.

In reality it can be very difficult to follow these steps, otherwise you wouldn't be stuck. We'll cover each step in greater detail in the following chapters.

Social Capital

Before we talk about the Core Steps, we need to define an important concept: social capital. Social capital is a term we use to loosely sum up all the trust, respect, credibility, and favors you are owed. You can't actually get any sort of number, but you can roughly estimate how much trust people have in you based on your experiences with them. You can also think of it like an "emotional bank account." Every emotionally positive interaction you have with someone is a deposit in their emotional bank account; every negative interaction a withdrawal.

The amount of social capital you have varies from person to person and your individual interactions with that person. One person might owe you a number of favors. They will give you greater freedom or help than someone who distrusts you because you let them down in the past.

Tip: You can "borrow" social capital to push forward an idea

Think of social capital as a line of credit. The person who trusts you a lot is willing to let you convince them more easily than someone who distrusts you. The problem is you have to pay back that borrowed capital, or they will not lend you as much next time. If you pay it back with extra, they will trust you even more next time.

For example, I want to propose a new idea at work that I think will make us a lot more productive. I go to my boss and propose my suggestion. He thinks it is a bad idea. I have previously made good suggestions, so I have a good line of social capital with him. He lets me implement the idea “on credit” even though he doesn’t like it. If my idea is a massive failure, he will be a lot less willing to trust me in the future. If it is a success, he will trust me even more.

Convincing coworkers requires social capital. Unusual or unconventional ideas rarely stand on their own, and most of the best ideas are unusual or unconventional. The proposer will almost always need trust and respect from their coworkers if their ideas are to succeed.

Ready Yourself

The most important step to suggesting any change is to prepare yourself mentally for the challenge ahead. Convincing others can be as easy as a simple suggestion, or it can be a task that takes years and years. The hardest part for most people is getting their own minds ready to deal with proposing an idea.

I think of bringing an idea from concept to execution like growing plants in a garden. The seeds of the idea are small. You want them to grow into something larger. You need a lot of elements just right to grow a full healthy plant. Sometimes you don't have all the right soil or light, and the plant grows anyway. Other times, everything appears perfect, but the seeds never sprout. So many factors go into a successful idea that all you can do is address as many as possible and see where it goes.

Proposing an idea in front of your coworkers can be terrifying. Since most of us naturally think of our ideas and our value as the same thing, putting out an idea feels like putting out a part of yourself. When the idea gets mocked, torn down, and criticized, it feels like a direct attack on you.

Tip: Mixing your ideas up with your ego is a sure way to never see them implemented

You will be much more successful if you learn to separate your ideas from your ego. If you cannot, and peg your worth to the quality of your ideas, you will quickly find that "everyone is against you". When the first negative criticism comes along, you will get your feelings hurt. You will suddenly find yourself in the middle of an emotionally charged situation. Others will trust your judgment so

much more when they see you are able to let negative criticism be spoken about your ideas without feeling attacked.

While it may feel very strange to separate yourself from your ideas, it is essential to a convincing argument. You must be able to bravely hear judgment and criticism of your ideas. If you cannot, you will forever be trapped in fear of others hearing your suggestions. A distanced perspective allows you to participate in valuable and rational discussion.

Tip: YOU ARE NOT YOUR IDEAS!

Let's look at a completely ineffective way to make a proposal. After coming up with an idea, I bring it up in a joking way to everyone. When the listeners don't immediately react positively, I quickly retract the idea, "just kidding". In the following weeks, I drop not-so-subtle hints, "oh, this would be better with...", or, "well, you wouldn't have this problem if...". Instead of convincing anyone of anything, I just broadcast to everyone how insecure I feel about the issue. Everyone can clearly see that I care, but I am too afraid to put myself out there and make a serious suggestion. I keep avoiding the issue and only coming back to it in a "haha, only serious" tone. For months nothing changes, and I feel more and more bitter that "my idea" isn't being listened to. In reality, I haven't even made a serious suggestion yet!

I know this is completely ineffective because I have done it countless times. I know it can be terrifying to put out ideas when you feel so strongly about them. You feel like your self-worth and your ideas are directly linked. This is why it is so important to learn to separate yourself from your ideas. You are not your ideas. Your worth as a human being, as a member of your organization, is not about having perfect ideas that always work out.

Separating your ego from your ideas will let you produce much more value. You will be able to make suggestions sooner, before they are "ready", because you will be comfortable letting others

criticize the parts that need more work. That criticism can be used to iterate and build better ideas that solve the most problems.

Finally, if you tie your ego to your ideas, you will find proposing them is exhausting. You will spend so much emotional energy and effort convincing everyone that even if it succeeds, you will be completely drained. Your brain will start to associate new ideas with exhaustion and stress. Over time you will be training yourself to hate new ideas. That is definitely not what you want!

When you let yourself be separate from your ideas, it won't be as painful when one fails. It just wasn't the right time, place, or people for it to thrive. You have many ideas, and now the others can get more of your attention.

To help you get used to separating yourself from your ideas, for the rest of the book I will only refer to your idea as: "the idea". This may seem a bit silly, but our language shapes how we think. Using a less possessive language to refer to the ideas will help you start to feel less attached. Think of ideas as a natural resource that belongs to the group, and you have just happened to find it first. It is your duty to bring it forward in a way that benefits everyone.