

Teamwork at its best: How to sell ideas to your staff

In the workplace and the sporting world, teams that buy into their coach's vision have a much better chance of success. How can you get your team all working toward the same goal—your goal?

Start by following these four steps to build support:

Step 1: Spend time with your people. It's important to get to know people and to respect their individual goals and aspirations. Doing so allows you to more easily build win-win rewards if you really understand other people's needs.

Step 2: Communicate fully, regularly and consistently. You can't suddenly try to open the lines of communication when you need support for an idea or project. It's vital to have them open and functioning at full capacity all the time.

Step 3: Encourage people to bring you bad news as well as good. To supervise a group effectively, you need current information about what is going wrong—the more current, the better. So never shoot messengers who bring bad news. Instead, thank them and give positive rewards.

Step 4: Set up a climate of healthy dissent. Encourage people to tell you frankly what they are thinking. In addition to bad news, you also want to hear them object to ideas they don't think will work. Then you want to nix idle sniping by asking people to back up their objections with facts or hard logic, listening carefully all the while.

Bottom line: Reward people for shooting holes in your ideas, but make them help you patch them up.

The selling process: a checklist

In many ways, selling ideas to your staff is not much different than selling an idea to anyone else. Use the following checklist as your guide:

Start by stressing benefits. Talk realistically about all the good things that can result from a job well done—benefits to the department, the company and the people involved.

Don't oversell your idea. People will react negatively if you present a distorted picture. Talk in terms of realistic results.

Make sure the idea is understood. It's not enough to talk through an idea, assign it and walk away. The only way to make sure someone really understands is to have that person recap your idea. You could say, "Just to be sure we're on the same wavelength, tell me what you understand the idea to be."

Give employees latitude. It's unrealistic and counterproductive to expect others to act on your idea exactly

as you would. People will be far more eager to “buy” your ideas when they know they have your permission to act autonomously.

Set up appropriate checkpoints. In a three-month project, for example, set up meetings every two weeks. This helps the project stay on track, plus it boosts the odds that your idea will receive a favorable reception. Why? Because workers like knowing they’ll have your support during the course of a project.

Commit resources. At the outset, give a clear description of the resources that will be made available. If people must beg for needed resources, their enthusiasm for a project will wane.

Don’t overuse compliments. If you try to sell every idea, for example, by saying, “You’re just terrific at this kind of thing. Nobody else could handle it as well as you!” people will brand you as insincere. It’s better to thank people for work well done and then ...

Give positive rewards for work well done. It could be anything from a simple “thank you” at a staff meeting to a major promotion. The point is that you boost the chances of selling your ideas when you take the time to reward and recognize people who have done a good job.