

Persuading people

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It's simple: Figure out what the person wants and offer it to them...as a part of the plan that nets you what you want. Since most of us know that Santa isn't real, then we should know that it's rare to get something for nothing, especially in the business world. First and foremost, any proposal needs to be constructed from the viewpoint of the person you need to persuade.

What's in it for them

What do editors/reporters want?

Better deadlines?
Longer stories?
Better headlines?
Better designs?

What do managers want?

A better product?
A happy, productive staff?
On-time press starts?
Less reader complaints?
Less mistakes?

Professional proposal

You should develop a professional proposal in writing, that includes positives and negatives of your plan. People will trust you – and, by extension, your proposal – if you're honest and objective (but include what you would do to counteract the negatives).

Spell out how your proposal benefits the parties involved – and ultimately the product. Be as tangible as possible.

Ensure all your comments are positive and productive. You cannot include anything negative about the parties involved.

Cite examples

Be careful here. No one likes to hear their way of doing things is “stupid” or “so 1970.” Examples should not be pie in the sky (“They do this at the LA Times....so should our staff of four copy editors”).

Include data

The fact that you're proposing something means that something isn't working. Include hard data, not emotions, in your proposal. The issue here isn't just to make you happy – it's to have a tangible,

measurable outcome that is a benefit to the company. Nowhere in your written proposal or during your pitch should you ever use “I feel.”

Your attitude

Shed your frustrations at the door. The past is the past. Forget old battles and old wounds. The only emotion you should exhibit is enthusiasm.

When to stay quiet

If you're asked a question and you have no clue, then just say “That's an interesting take. I'd like time to mull the possibilities. Can I get back to you tomorrow?” — or something along those lines. Too often you can feel defensive and nervous when you walk in the door, and you may give bad answers in haste. Don't blindly defend your plan and spout off assurances when you really don't know. Managers like to know if they give you room to try your proposal, you'll adjust or kill it if it's not working. Blind promises make leaders nervous.

Work from the bottom up

You have to get buy-in from the parties involved. It is much easier to persuade photographers, editors and reporters first. Pick someone from all parties involved and get their input. If you can get middle buy-in first, it not only will help you work the kinks out of your plan, but it can seal the deal for upper management. It is easier for me as a manager to say yes when a group of people want to try something than it is when one person wants me to force-feed a plan on others.

Start small

If you want to turn the world upside down, start by trying to shift it a little to the left. Then point to that success and shift it a little more...until you get the darn thing flipped.

Limit your proposal to one staff, one day's paper, one section....

Failure follow-up

Did you fail? Get brushed-off? Before you leave the room, ask specific questions.

“What do you think it would take for us to implement this plan?”

“What do you see as roadblocks?”

“I still see great value in this. Can I work on the kinks and come back to you next week with a revision?”

“What if we started with part A? Then if that works, move to part B?”

Know your boundaries

Find the right balance between being persistent and a PITA. Don't make your manager and co-workers want to avoid you.