1548 How to Make a Good Idea Better

Imagine that you have an idea that could make a real difference for your organization, but it's somewhat unorthodox and will take some massaging before people will be ready to see it. How do you approach the situation? Why not go straight to the boss and lay the whole thing out? Or, wait until a staff meeting and when the time is perfect you present your concept? Those are your options, or are they? I'm Jerry Roberts and we'll dig around for the best way to get your brilliance the airing out it needs, next on The Extra Point.

You're sitting on what you just know is the idea that will help your group to get further and do better. It is so exciting. You're thinking to yourself, "This could be the start of something really big. Maybe I'll get a promotion, maybe the boss will come to see me as the go-to person around here, and maybe my career will begin to soar!"

The only question is, how do you make this idea public? We mentioned taking it directly to the boss, or exposing it in a meeting where everybody will hear it at the same time. Are those the only two options? No, they are not.

While attending college, I was part of a three-person team that cleaned over 400 fleet vehicles. All of us were 19 and full of ideas. One day, the most experienced of the three of us, Bobby, went in to spring an idea on our boss, Big Ed. After about 20 minutes, he came out to the lot where we were washing and waxing cars, and he said that Ed wanted to see all of us. We headed for the office.

When we sat down, Ed said that Bobby bringing him the idea gave him a chance to pass along an important lesson. What he proceeded to tell us was that having an idea is great, but it won't get you very far unless you can present it effectively — and that wasn't just about how well you spoke. He said the key was getting the opinion of people who could give you valuable feedback.

Then, after considering what others had to say, you might make important changes to the concept before presenting it to the people who would decide its fate. It made sense to me.

Bobby jumped in and said he would gather the other guys on the night shift, and probably figure the whole thing out over lunch. What Ed said next was a surprise, but it was a lesson I never forgot.

He advised Bobby to make a list of the people who would have the insight to offer good feedback. Then, Bobby would first interview them individually. The reason was that people very often perform a certain way when one on one, and another way when in a group.

In front of a group, some folks don't like to present ideas, particularly those that are different. There's a chance of embarrassment. All it takes is one wise guy making a comment, everybody laughs at you, and you end up embarrassed. Nobody likes that, so it's likely some people will hold back.

The other thing which often happens is the phenomenon known as *groupthink.* This is when one person gives an opinion or makes a statement, and then others all fall in line, agreeing with them. Nobody challenges the group. A lot of bad things have happened throughout history, when large numbers of people have fallen prey to groupthink.

If interviewed individually, Bobby could ask questions and get answers, exploring areas he might never get to with the group. Then, after that had been accomplished and Bobby had a chance to consider all of the responses and where those took him, he would package up his presentation.

The final step, if Bobby chose, would be to bring everybody who had responded into a group, put all of the ideas on a blackboard (they didn't have whiteboards in those days), and do some brainstorming. Out of that, he would put his presentation in final form and present it to management.   (Con't.)

So, if you have an idea, get individual feedback from people you think can help you make it better. Then, repackage it and bring all those people into a group to brainstorm. After that, put it together and — hopefully now a far stronger concept — hand it into the company for consideration.

If you're in the idea business — and we all should be — this can be a great way to make advancements and improvements.

One more thing. If you do get an idea adopted and leadership tosses some praise your way, don't forget to mention everyone who contributed to the development of the concept. You share the love, and you'll find people eager to share more feedback the next time you ask for it.

That's the Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3FM, the Ray Gibson Show, and First Hawaiian Bank, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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