

3 Questions to Ask Yourself Before Pitching an Idea to Your Boss

Generating cutting-edge concepts isn't just good for the business -- it's good for our careers. Most of us realize that it's not enough to just generate novel approaches. We need to ideate, evaluate, and then get buy-in to move from idea to action.

More often than not, the person whose buy-in we need is our boss. And that's not always easy. Our bosses are often busy with (if not overwhelmed by) implementing their own priorities, as well as the priorities of their higher-ups. Getting them to think about original approaches may take a backseat to handling day-to-day responsibilities.

So, let's say you have an amazing idea that you truly believe will positively impact the business, and boost your own profile as well. Congratulations! Before you bombard your boss with a new pitch, do your homework and ask yourself these three questions first:

1. How does my idea relate to what keeps my boss up at night?

If you want to get your boss' attention, and gain their buy-in, you need to make a direct link between how your idea will address what your boss is worried about. If your manager is constantly challenged to retain the business of a few big, but on-the-fence clients, be prepared to address how your approach will solve for that. If your boss has been asked by their boss to increase service quality without increasing costs, show how your idea will do that. If it doesn't connect to something that your boss cares deeply about, and is charged with solving, you don't need to pitch it now.

2. What might be the unintended impacts of my idea?

Chances are, you've thought about the positive, visible impacts of your idea, whether it's increased customer satisfaction, reducing production time, or generating new revenue. But have you thought about secondary impacts -- which may not be desirable for everyone?

Make sure you think about unintended impacts up, down and across the organization, as well as for key stakeholders outside the business, who may not experience your great idea as all that terrific.

3. How many ideas have I tried to sell to my boss recently, and what can I learn from my track record?

Take stock of the pitches you've made in the past, and analyze what worked and what didn't, and any feedback you may have received. Adapt your approach accordingly.

A great idea without a great plan to sell it isn't great. In the words of business guru Mary Kay Ash, "A mediocre idea that generates enthusiasm will go further than a great idea that inspires no one."