



Managing Yourself

Is Your Pitch as Great as Your Idea?

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Summary. Even the most innovative ideas are interpreted as boring if they are presented in obvious ways. Your pitch needs to be as clever as the concept you are presenting if you want people to buy into it. To get your audience to buy into your idea, there are a few hacks... [more](#)



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Have you ever gone into a meeting ready to share your great idea — only to have it brutally shot down?

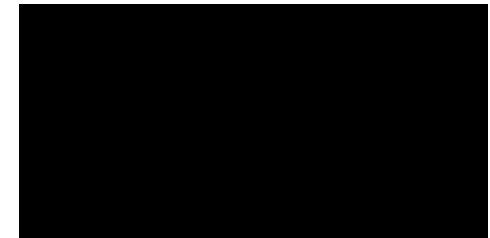
During my time as the head of innovation at Disney, I heard more pitches than I could count. Every day, a handful of new ideas were shared by starry-eyed creatives. Some were celebrated, while others were quickly tossed to the side. In general, few made it past the initial brainstorming meeting.

Eventually, I noticed a pattern. Truly out-of-the-box thinking disrupts the status quo, but even the most innovative concepts are interpreted as boring if they are presented in obvious ways. It's not enough to share your idea in clear and understandable terms. Your pitch needs to be as clever as the concept you are presenting if you want people to buy into it.

Basically, it all comes down to delivery.

To successfully sell your next idea, here are three of the most effective tools I've found for crafting a creative pitch:

Signaling



When you are leading a meeting, as you will be when you present your idea, everything you do or say will be interpreted by your listeners. Your words and actions will not only signal how you feel, but also how you want others to behave during your time together. To get your audience to buy into your idea, there are a few hacks you can try to shift the odds in your favor.

Start with the setup of the room you're presenting in. You've seen *American Idol*. What do the judges sit behind? *A table!*

Similarly, that conference table in your meeting signals to attendees that they are there to judge your idea, not nurture it. So lose the table, or hold your meeting in a space where there's no separation between you and your colleagues.

With the room sorted, it's time to consider the pitch itself.

Walt Disney was a master at getting others to buy into his creative ideas. How? He made each pitch a collaborative journey.

Instead of presenting from the front of the room, Walt put ideas down on large pieces of paper and hung them up like a storyboard. When it was time to present, he asked attendees to get up from their chairs and walk with him from board to board.

This flipped the script: Instead of judging the idea, the group worked together to discuss each possible solution to the problem they were trying to solve. A singular idea suddenly became a collaborative effort proposed by the entire group.



Nurturing

The more experience people have, the more assumptions they are likely to make around why an idea “won’t work.” This is often because they have seen many successes and failures throughout their careers and want to avoid repeating mistakes. As a result, the most seasoned workers — who typically happen to be the most powerful — can be the hardest to convince.

To ensure your creative pitch stands a chance, you must combat their urge to lean on expertise and kill your ideas before they even take shape. One of the fastest ways to prevent a colleague from shutting you down is to use a tool from the world of improv called “Yes, and ...”

When my goal is to generate as many new ideas as possible, I remind everyone that we are *greenhousing* ideas, and not *greenlighting* them. The message is that we are nurturing ideas as opposed to shutting them down. This small shift in language takes the pressure off everyone and encourages my team to share things they might have otherwise kept quiet about. To practice, tell your meeting attendees that they can only respond to ideas with “yes, and.”

Instead of shooting down a proposal for a 90-day free trial, for example, the team will be forced to water that seed and grow the idea. No longer will people say, “It’s too expensive.” They will instead focus on building value around the idea, or coming up with solutions to the problems they would have posed. This could lead to a whole host of spin-off ideas, such

as building out a marketing funnel to follow up on leads at the end of the trial period.

Finally, it can be helpful to brief colleagues on your idea at least a week in advance so that they have time to think on it before you present.

Realness

If I were to ask you how many days are in September, what’s the first thing you’d do? Visualize a calendar? Start reciting “Thirty days hath September...”? Count the months on your knuckles?

Like there are many ways to go about answering this question, there are many ways to process and deliver information. Some of your colleagues might prefer visuals while others prefer listening or interacting. If you want your idea to feel as real to your audience as it does to you, you’ll need to prepare a presentation that brings every type of learner into the fold.

The easiest way to do this is to give people several entry points into the concept you are pitching. For instance, you might incorporate a brainstorming session for the active learners, a visual demonstration for those who need to “see to believe,” and include data points for the analytical crowd. Share your idea in a few different ways, and at least one of them is likely to resonate.

There’s a famous story in Disney folklore of how the Animal Kingdom park came to be that exemplifies this concept. Veteran Imagineer Joe Rohde tried not once but *twice* to pitch his idea for a “living” theme park to then-Disney CEO Michael Eisner. He presented elaborate charts and graphs, as well as plenty of stats on why he believed the park would be a

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success. But Eisner and his team shot Rohde down, simply saying, “Disney doesn’t do zoos.”

For his third and final pitch, Rohde began presenting like the others. But a few minutes in, the back door to the room opened, and in walked an 800-pound Siberian tiger, right next to Michael Eisner. After a few minutes, the tiger was escorted out, and Rohde got the green light for Animal Kingdom. *All because he made the idea of an immersive animal experience real.*

Too many great creative ideas never see the light of day for no other reason than their delivery. But with a few small tweaks that signal the right mindset, help your colleagues nurture your ideas, and make your presentation feel more real, you can dramatically change the tone of your next creative pitch.



Duncan Wardle is the former vice president of innovation and creativity at The Walt Disney Company. He launched his [creative consulting company](#) iD8 & innov8 to help companies embed a culture of innovation and creativity across their entire organization.



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