



Age And Generational Issues

How to Get Your Big Ideas Noticed By the Right People

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April 21, 2021



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Summary. Many young employees early in their careers have big ideas for change in the world and in their organizations, but often, you're met with barriers to big change. Finding and connecting with the right people within your organizations to listen to your ideas can... [more](#)



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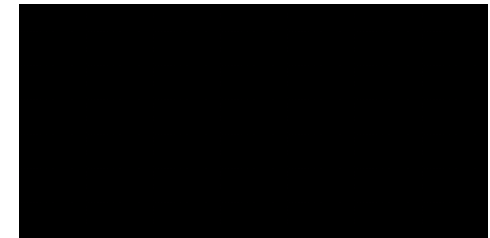
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When I ask my undergraduate students at Brandeis what they hope for in their future jobs, their answers typically involve making an impact. They have big, sometimes revolutionary, ideas around how to address climate change and social justice issues. They talk about ways we can improve our efficiency by updating outdated communication systems, and even pitch solutions that could help big corporations market their products to younger consumers. But most of all, they are excited to put their pitches into practice — that is, until they get their first jobs and realize they have much less power than they had imagined.

I feel for them, and for anyone making their way into the corporate world for the very first time. It's not easy to turn an idea into a reality, especially when you are in an entry-level role with limited resources and connections. The people who do have the power to make big decisions often have their own beliefs and assumptions about how to do business based on what has, and has not, worked in the past. If those people are not on your side, they can present you with some serious roadblocks.

So, how do you work around them and get your big ideas noticed, especially as a young person in the workforce?



I'll tell you what I tell my students: You don't. You work with them. To make a real impact, you need to get the right people — people with decision-making power — to listen and believe in you.

Here's how.

First, figure out who holds the power to implement your idea.

Before you pitch your idea, ask yourself: Who has the power to decide whether or not it will be implemented, and what they will base their decision on?

Sometimes this question will be easier to answer than others, depending on what kind of company you work at. Organizations with a clear, hierarchical structure are more likely to have a well-defined process around who needs to approve an idea before it is executed. But organizations with a flat structure, in which there is no real “person in charge” at each level, can be more difficult to navigate.

Take the time to study these dynamics at your own company. There are a few tools you can use to help you diagnose who holds the ultimate decision-making power. One of the most common is called a [RACI matrix](#). The acronym “RACI” stands for the four roles people usually play on a team or project. Here's a simple breakdown:

- **Responsible:** the people who are in charge of completing tasks or reaching an objective.
- **Accountable:** the person who must sign off on the work of the group mentioned above, and give final approval.
- **Consulted:** the people who need to give input in order for the group in charge of completing tasks to do their work.

- **Informed:** the people who need to be updated on the status of the project and the decisions that are being made.

Creating this matrix will help you clarify the roles and responsibilities at each level of your organization. Most likely, the person you identify as “accountable” is the one who will ultimately say “yes” or “no” to your idea.

Note that it’s rare for one person to have all the deciding power. More likely, it will be broken up among different leaders who are accountable for different teams, projects, or people.

For example, let’s say you have a fresh idea around how to engage a new audience for a particular marketing campaign. It may be easiest (and fastest) to look for the person who drives your overall engagement strategy. This could be the leader of the marketing division, or someone who works closely under them. Using the RACI matrix, you may discover that this person makes the final decisions on engagement initiatives, but also relies heavily on specific members of their leadership team for input, and considers market data before making big decisions.

Whatever team, project, or division your idea falls under, get to know what leaders are involved in those areas of your company, and ask around to learn about what factors they consider when making choices.

Choose your champion.

Even after you identify the decision-maker, it’s unlikely that you will get direct access to them. Few young professionals have the social capital to get their ideas immediately noticed by the right people. That’s why you need a champion — someone to advocate for your idea in the high-level meetings and discussions that you probably won’t be invited to.

Picking the right champion will depend on the magnitude of your idea. If it's a smaller idea, or one that won't cause significant disruption (like experimenting with a social media post, or reaching out to a new type of client), you might be able to find a champion who has the direct power to put your idea into motion. But if your idea is more disruptive (updating an age-old business model or restructuring a team's entire workflow), you might need to find a different kind of champion: someone who has acquired a level of informal power that allows them to exert influence over those who are formally in charge.

Take the previous example of engaging a new audience for a marketing campaign. Your champion might be the chief of staff to the head of the marketing division. While this person won't have direct decision-making power, they still have influence over the person who does.

That said, before bringing your big idea to a champion, you first need to build a foundation of trust with them. This will take time, and it will need to be developed over a series of projects in which you prove your ability to pitch good ideas, provide evidence that give those ideas merit, and consistently follow through on your assignments or tasks. You need your champion to respect you as a professional, and believe you are credible if you want them to be your advocate.

To fast-track your relationship, study and analyze your champion's management style. Then adapt your ways of working to fit their style. By doing so, you will increase the odds of producing work they are aligned with and proud of. When they speak, listen with intention, and don't be afraid to ask questions. Proactively set up feedback sessions with your champion and leverage this feedback into clear goals for improvement.

Do your homework.

Once you build that foundation of trust with your champion, you may feel ready to share your big idea. But wait. It's critical to stress-test the idea first. This process will allow you to create a more robust and thorough pitch with fewer holes and logic gaps.

Start by gathering feedback from various stakeholders. A stakeholder could be someone directly involved in the decision-making process (who you identified earlier using the RACI matrix), or someone in your organization whose work might be directly impacted by your idea.

Sticking with our previous example, a key stakeholder might be the head of sales. Although the head of sales does not influence decision-making within the marketing division, they may be able to provide you with a perspective you had not considered before, especially if your marketing and sales teams work closely together. Another stakeholder might be a trusted peer or manager on the marketing team whose responsibilities may shift should your idea be implemented. This person may raise or problem or concern you can now address.

Stakeholders often have access to critical information that can strengthen your pitch. Connecting with them can also help you develop advocates throughout the organization.



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Frame your pitch in the most compelling way possible.

When pitching your idea to your champion, you need to have a clear objective, purpose, and success metrics. Your goal is to walk away with their buy-in. That's why it's critical to frame your idea as one that will not only improve the organization, but also make your champion's life easier. Before presenting, ask yourself: What does my champion care about? What are their goals and challenges? How does my idea address a pain point they are facing or help them overcome an obstacle and pave a clearer path to their success? People tend to be more excited about ideas when those ideas improve their lives directly.

In the example we walked through above, we'd recommend using your pitch presentation to explain how and why your idea is critical to expanding the reach of your company, including: who the audience is that you are trying to reach, metrics around what they care about, and why their engagement is good for your business (backed by numbers and evidence). Outline the success metrics you plan on using to evaluate the performance of your idea. These might include the number of unique customers you hope to bring in the first six months after implementation.

Follow through and follow up.

After you present your idea — the one you have worked so hard to manifest into action — you will either gain the buy-in of your champion or you won't.

If you do get their buy-in, here are the next steps:

Ask your champion how you can go about presenting your idea to the broader team. For instance, is there an opportunity to present at an upcoming meeting? Work with your champion, and potentially someone who has access to your key stakeholders' schedules. Administrative

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assistants often play a critical role in this process, as they are the masterminds behind piecing together all of the important meetings. Sometimes they even manage which topics make it on the agenda. Building a relationship with them will be beneficial to you in the future.

If you didn't gain buy-in from your champion, work with them to understand why. Are there particular gaps in logic that you missed? Are you presenting your idea in a way that resonates best with your audience? Or perhaps there is nothing inherently wrong with your idea, but there are competing priorities outside of your control. Maybe the C-suite has suddenly re-directed the corporate strategy to shift the customer base away from that audience you wanted to engage. Or maybe all non-essential marketing initiatives have been put on hold for the time being to focus on sales.

At the end of the day, there's no magic or luck in getting someone to believe in your big ideas, and there are limitations and obstacles in almost every organization. Navigating these obstacles is not easy. In fact, it's time-consuming and frustrating. Patience is key. But with careful observation, strategic decision-making, smart communication, and persistent determination, it's very possible to get the right people to listen to you, and bring your big ideas to life.



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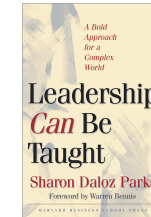
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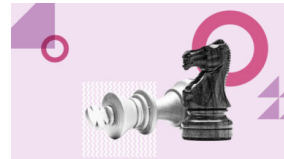


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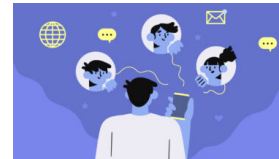
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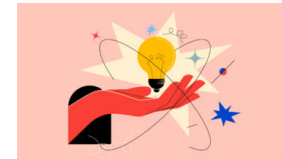
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