

Consultant Leadership forum
July 18, 2013 10:30-12:30

Book: *Buy-In: Saving Your Good Ideas from Getting Shot Down*
By John Kotter & Lorne A. Whitehead

CLF-Generated Ideas and Feedback

These ideas were generated through small group discussion—some are validations of Kotter & Whitehead’s ideas as laid out in the book, and others are tried and true methods generated by CLF member’s experiences in building buy-in. Ideas have been categorized into topical areas.

On Getting the Best Outcome

- As a consultant, be committed to the process, not your agenda
- Orient to the ideas in the room—“The best ideas are almost always in the room” not necessarily brought in from outside—the role of the consultant is to help bring out the ideas, not necessarily generate the ideas
- Be willing to engage in rapid testing/ prototyping (design-thinking—look to Ideo for examples) in the nonprofit world to test a concept, survey or approach quickly and with minimal risk
- Process of facilitating a group can move good ideas to better ideas
- Establish the “right” frame of mind for the group to discuss ideas and make decisions—somewhat group dependent, but what are the things that make this group tick and in a good headspace (location of retreat, use of humor, food...)
- If the risk is manageable, sometimes letting the group learn the hard way is the best initial outcome—“let them fail”
- In general, be willing to take a gutsy stand as a facilitator/ consultant to hold the group accountable to their values, mission and process—say no gently, but be willing to say no!
- Many groups fearful of change—help messengers and believers in the group sway others—don’t try to accomplish outcome all at once (concept of contagion)

On Anticipating the Things that Kill Ideas

- Make ways to kill ideas an explicit part of the process—ask at the beginning “How are we going to kill these good ideas?” “How will we be aware of ways we are limiting our possibilities through nay-saying?”
- Be aware of your own biases as a consultant—we often do many of the things Kotter & Whitehead warn of in their book and can be naysayers ourselves—have ways to check self for these negative impacts on the group
- Plan ahead—make sure you identify some of the key arguments and concerns people will bring up when reviewing ideas and have a plan of how to address

- Help provide coaching to idea messengers—what are ways a messenger can deliver the idea and be prepared for nay-saying?
- Pick the right messenger to deliver a new idea—in some cases it might be an outside consultant, in others a particular staff, board or community member
- Identify those people most likely to kill an idea and work with them in advance to understand / address their concerns

On Assisting with Process of Shepherding New Ideas

- Use humor if appropriate to deal with tense moments and to point out inconsistencies in approaching a new idea (idea: humor gong app to play a gong sound when someone is “killing” an idea)
- Engage naysayers in the moment and validate their concerns
- Show every person in the room respect, even if he/she is not being respectful
- Set ground rules to govern the discussion—have the group help generate and validate, then seek permission to enforce
- Set a consistent vision – what does the organization look like as a result of the idea being implemented?
- Help participants see the vision in action through an experiential and emotive opportunity (field trip, volunteer opportunity, etc)
- Use concepts from the book in terms of how ideas are shot down to “diagnose” what is happening in a conversation and draw attention to the underlying concern and response
- Look for the agreement and positive responses/ body language in the room, not just the naysayers—allows you to get a full sense of the views of the participants
- Remember, rely on and engage the champions who brought you in to do this work—they believe in the idea—how can they support it and you?
- Create a parking lot (a visual place in the room to record feedback/comments that might be taking the group off track)—this validates and captures everything that’s shared but allows you to revisit some of these ideas at a later time
- Make sure the group is generating or contributing to the idea so members feel ownership over it’s implementation
- Don’t get caught up in who had the idea (credit can be detrimental to ownership), unless it is critical to making the idea happen (i.e. the ED has not been on board with the concept until he/she believes the idea is his/hers)
- If someone is really difficult pull him/her aside on a break and let this person know the impact of his/her actions—possibly make a suggestion this person leave if they can’t be open to other ideas in the room
- Identify where the group is in advance (pre-survey, interviews) and then meet the group where they are—can help avoid being blind-sided
- Avoid being defensive as a facilitator (be conscious of body language, not just words)
- Make your “enemies” in the room your best friends—engage them in participatory roles and ask for their perspectives

- Consider using a task force to explore an idea and make a recommendation to the group
- Engage in community input and listening sessions
- Use storyteller to paint a picture of the future or the idea in action
- Redirect or deflect attacks on self
- Seek to understand all perspectives
- Consider that nay-sayers might be right—be open to their feedback and concerns