



By Joe Byerly

Have you ever had an idea you thought was solid gold, but when you presented it to your boss or coworkers it fell on deaf ears? Maybe it wasn't that your idea was bad. Maybe it was you. Hear me out: Sometimes our ideas ARE solid gold, the problem is that we get so wrapped up in the idea itself and it's ingenuity that we don't pay attention to delivery.

And delivery can be as important.

But, before we explore delivery, let's jump into the time machine and look at an idea in history that fell flat on its face when it was initially proposed: hand washing.

In the early 1800s, mothers who had just given birth died at an alarming rate in European hospitals. One in six died from what was at the time known as childbed fever. In 1846, a

young 28-year-old Hungarian physician named Ignaz Semmelweis discovered a correlation between mothers catching the disease and direct contact with physicians coming from surgery. He immediately instituted hand washing in his ward and the disease significantly dropped off.

One would think that this innovative young doctor who had a solid gold idea revolutionized medicine across Europe and saved the lives of countless mothers, but he did not. It was another 21 years before British surgeon Joseph Lister published his papers on sterilization and hospitals across the world adopted his methods.

So why wasn't Semmelweis successful? His delivery sucked. He had a tough uphill battle to fight against a conservative establishment who had its own beliefs and way of doing business. And unfortunately, he refused to play by their rules. He was argumentative and so fanatical in his beliefs that he struggled to get his leadership and peers on board with his new, innovative method.

In addition to a few fun facts we can gain from the story to help prepare us for trivia night at the local pub, we can also learn something about communicating ideas. It isn't only the idea that matters, but so does our approach. Below are a few factors to take into consideration when dropping your amazing idea on your organization.

1. Read the room, Karen

Atmospherics are always important, but they are especially important when presenting a new idea to an organization. If you find yourself in a one hour meeting that is closing in on 90 minutes, that is not the time to spring your idea on the group.

It is best to read the room. Are people fidgeting? Did Bill just get chewed out for missing a suspense? Is everyone's bandwidth wrapped up in another topic? To know these things, you

have to get outside your own head and pay attention to everyone else.

Sometimes you may find that you need to hold onto your idea a little bit longer before you present it. You may also find that by reading the room you are better able to adjust your idea or your delivery to increase your chances that it will be taken seriously and not quickly ignored.

2. Timing, timing, timing

Similar to reading the room, you have to pay attention to the timing of your pitch. The time of day could make the difference between a receptive boss and an angry, dismissive boss. To illustrate this point, most people have a daily or weekly rhythm they follow. Some bosses are more receptive to ideas in the afternoon and not first thing in the morning. Other bosses are more likely to read and respond to your email in the morning after their first cup of coffee. A well-timed email or office drop-in can increase your chances of getting your idea a fighting chance.

Also, since we are talking about timing, if you know the organization is focused on solving a time-sensitive crisis, that is probably not the time to share the neat power point slide you created with your organization's priorities broken out into percentages of effort. I'm sure it's a revolutionary slide, but now is not the time. Timing is also about respect. If you respect their time, they are more likely to take the time to listen to your idea.

3. Keep it short and sweet (and maybe shorter)

When we get excited about an idea, we tend to describe it in great detail, and lose the people we're talking to along the way. Or we forget to mention important things such as why the idea is valuable in the first place.

To avoid this, it is helpful to create an elevator pitch. In his book [*Brief: Make a Bigger*](#)

[*Impact by Saying Less*](#), author and communications expert Joseph McCormack said, “A perfected elevator pitch allows you to convey your message in a short sound byte that inspires and sticks.”

To do this, always start with the bottom line up front — why your idea would benefit the organization in the first place. Include a few key points that support this, and then anticipate any questions your boss or your team may ask about the idea. That is it. They don’t need to know the micro details that you get excited about. This lesson applies to email. You increase your chances of success with a brief email that conveys your idea.

4. Your allies matter and so does humility

When you want to get a great idea adopted by an organization, it’s important to build an alliance. Returning to the Semmelweis story, he was argumentative and alienated would-be supporters for his hand-washing crusade. I once worked for a boss who said that he was more willing to go with an idea, if more than one leader came to him promoting it. So, whenever any of us had a great idea, we would come together and attempt to sell it to each other so we could bring it forward to the boss as a team. We were always successful in this approach.

Humility plays a key role in building an alliance. When we are humble, more people are willing to help us advance an idea. So, as you build your team, be willing to spread the credit and not make it about you. Work on keeping the focus on the idea and not yourself.

Next time you have a great idea, take a minute. Read the room. Ask yourself if the time is right to present your idea. If it is, develop an elevator pitch that sells your idea to other people. And bring your team along with you. Build an alliance. Channel that humility and remember that it isn’t about you, it’s about the idea.

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