



## **SELLING INNOVATION: how to overcome cynicism and grow your business**

It's not easy to convince a frightened bunch of employees that there are better ways to grow your core business. It's so easy to think that everything is in the hands of an unfriendly economy. Here's how to proceed: tips and techniques from a guy who has led a billion dollar turnaround and overcome a tsunami of skepticism.

Document the problem. Nobody likes to bring up the obvious, but most managers don't want to acknowledge how bad the situation really is. Highlight statistics others may not have thought about. For instance, 'how many new initiatives we've evaluated and acted upon in the last 12 months.' Or 'what percentage of our current customers would pay a premium to continue working with us.' Sales and profit trends are just the tip of the iceberg. Loyalty and future value ('brand equity' and locked-in customers) of your business is most important. Explode the issue in all its glory.

Remember: initially, your job is to get your team's attention by growing their level of dissatisfaction.

Provide inspiration. Begin to move your meeting from negative to positive. Use a quote that sets a tone of hopefulness and determination. Examples:

*"Because its purpose is to create a customer, the business enterprise has two and only two basic functions: marketing and innovation." - Peter Drucker*

*"How you handle the space between where you are and where you want to be has everything to do with how well you solve problems and how successful you are at innovation." - Mathew May, The Elegant Solution*

*Our greatest assets are our expectations and our imagination.*



Provide a solution - then challenge others to improve it. Consider the pain points that precede and follow a transaction with your company: could your company minimize them? Remember, your idea will evolve faster if you can bolt someone else's idea onto it without compromising the core idea. Most ideas that make it to the marketplace are variations of an original idea that we know nothing about.

Prepare in advance. Talk to individuals and garner their support by linking the idea to something they would care about. Don't go into a 'new idea' meeting cold and expect rousing affirmation of your idea without planting supporters around the table.

Liken your solution to something that your team will recognize, even if it's out of your industry. Even cynical executives understand that some ideas can 'travel' successfully from industry to another. Research articles about that case study and pull sound-bites that can be used to support your own idea.

Lower the risk. Develop a low cost prototype of your idea that can be tested and verified before committing big funds.

Provide a plan for implementation. Include two scenarios...best and worst case. Document each step and make it clear when each phase of rollout is measured.

Push forward. Many organizations will like your general idea but get sidelined before resource allocation and timing is laid on the table. Be prepared to say, *"I'm going to make this happen unless you insist I stop."*

Innovation is never easy, but it's the fastest path to true leadership. It's exhausting, but it's also meaningful and fun! Remember: cynicism is simply a way for a weak executive to say, "I don't know and am embarrassed to admit it."

If you need support, contact Omegapoint's Lynn Hinderaker at 402-884-2031.