



HOW TO ENROLL SUPPORT

by Mitchell Ditkoff

It's one thing to ask people for their support on your hottest new ideas. It's quite another to actually get it. Why is it that some people get the help they need on a new venture, while others don't? Simply put, they know how to ask for it. They understand that enrolling someone into their network of support is a **FINE ART, A CAREFULLY CRAFTED NEGOTIATION** that requires a nuanced blend of vision, skill, and chutzpah. Unfortunately, most of us hail from the "Why don't we get together for lunch sometime?" school of enrollment. Our requests are usually flaccid, ineffective, poorly timed, and do not result in the kind of committed support we require to really break through to the next level of success. The reasons are many:



- ✚ We feel undeserving of support
- ✚ We are unwilling to support others
- ✚ We inadequately communicate our ideas
- ✚ We present our requests as either/or propositions
- ✚ We rarely ask for commitment or closure
- ✚ We infrequently follow through on our requests

Is there a way out of this mess? Yes there is. And the following seven guidelines will be more than enough to get you on your way. Ready?

1. GET THEIR ATTENTION

Don't assume that your potential "support people" have been waiting all week for you to approach them. Chances are good that they are already over their head in projects and responsibilities. Begin your conversation by asking them if they have a

few minutes to talk. If they do, great. If they don't, at least you won't alienate them with your untimely enthusiasm. Simply agree on another time to talk and take it from there.

2. SET THE CONTEXT

Let your potential supporters know what the ensuing conversation will be about before you go rushing into your impassioned requests. A simple sentence or two will suffice, something like, "Is now a good time to talk? I'd like to tell you about a fascinating new project I'm working on."

3. DESCRIBE YOUR PROJECT

Now that you've got their attention and created a context for your discussion, provide a few pertinent details about your venture to engage your listener more deeply, i.e. "I'm inventing a new way to slice bread."

4. MAKE A GENERIC REQUEST

By this time, your listener's interest should be piqued. However, he or she will still not necessarily understand what it has to do with them. Now is your time to invite them into the project, i.e. "It looks like I'm going to need some support to pull this together and I wonder if you'd be available to be part of my support team?"

5. MAKE A SPECIFIC REQUEST

If your potential ally has not run screaming out of the room yet and appears to still be interested, propose a practical way to participate, i.e. "Great! I'd really appreciate it if the two of us could have lunch once a week to explore some marketing ideas. How about Thursdays at the corner Deli?"

6. CREATE AN OPENING FOR NEGOTIATION

It is more than likely that some people you approach will not be able to provide the help you ask for in precisely the way you request. No problem. Simply allow time to

brainstorm an alternative way they can contribute, i.e. "Would every other Thursday work better? Or maybe we should just talk once a week on the phone?"

7. OFFER YOUR SUPPORT

You are far more likely to create a viable network of support if you remember to offer your support to others. Beware of the tendency many aspiring innovators have of only asking for help, but never giving it. The Golden Rule applies: What goes around comes around. "Is there some way I might be of support on one of your projects?" you might ask.

What support do you need with your most compelling project?

Who will you ask?

When will you ask for it?

*This article is excerpted from **BANKING ON INNOVATION**, a 172-page workbook that accompanies Idea Champions' 2-day creative thinking training. Log onto www.ideachampions.com/banking_on_innovation.shtml for more info.*

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