

NANO TOOLS FOR LEADERS®

DRIVE YOUR INITIATIVES WITH SPONSORS

Nano Tools for Leaders® are fast, effective leadership tools that you can learn and start using in less than 15 minutes — with the potential to significantly impact your success as a leader and the engagement and productivity of the people you lead.

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THE GOAL:

Build a strong network of influential sponsors for your initiatives to ensure that they are supported and protected throughout their life cycles.

NANO TOOL:

Inertia is the enemy of growth: for every great idea, there are those who prefer the status quo. This can be true in companies large and small, because inertia is self-perpetuating. Even if you get a new initiative off the ground, you can lose the resources you need to complete it. The success of your projects can't be left to you and your team alone. Instead, you need to build a network of support inside and outside the organization — your own set of “corporate sponsors” — to help you develop your initiatives, protect them as they grow, and transition them into the wider organization.

HOW IBM USES IT:

- When IBM Blue Gene was unveiled in the mid-2000s as the world's most powerful and energy-efficient super-computer, some wanted to continue developing it within IBM's R&D division. Others felt Blue Gene's potential warranted an immediate commercial product roadmap. Ultimately, the latter opinion prevailed thanks to executive sponsors, and Blue Gene is now in its third generation.
- The team that built Watson — a computer smart enough to beat grand champions at the game of “Jeopardy” — faced perhaps the most daunting challenge of their careers. Many executives were skeptical about the project and thought it was pure folly. It took the sponsorship of a senior executive in IBM Research, who encouraged the team to pursue the project, which is now working in hospitals like Sloan Kettering as a digital doctor's assistant for oncology patients.
- IBM's decision to enter a new market for collecting and analyzing data around water management was not without risk. One of the staunchest advocates for the move was a client, who was working with IBM on a beta water management project. Not only did the client firmly believe in the need for governments, companies, and citizens to use data to make water safer and more plentiful, but it reinforced the fact that water would grow into a big business and major force for good. For those involved in the early days of IBM's smarter water business, this client was an important advocate



ACTION STEPS:

1. **What do you want?** — Identify the key things you need from supporters.
2. **Reach out within your existing network.** Look for those who have a personal stake in your venture, or who have the personality or background that can help them understand the need for the concept. These people are open to new ideas, and might also benefit from them. Find ways to connect with them regularly to keep them updated.
3. Extend beyond your own company. Customers and external business partners who have confidence in your idea could be powerful sponsors; their support could help you garner the necessary internal proponents.
4. **Target “harder sells”** — the people you need on your team who are initially cool to the idea or are not yet privy to it. In particular, converting naysayers to supporters will heighten your credibility. For those higher up in the organization, map a path to connect. Often there is one person separating you who can give an introduction or reference. Can that person arrange an “accidental” audience, or get you invited to a meeting the higher-up is attending? Ask if you can present at that meeting. Also, don’t hesitate to seek advice from resisters. Research by Katie Liljenquist and Adam Galinsky shows that advice-seeking can be a powerful way to turn adversaries into advocates by encouraging them to look at the problem from your perspective.

SHARE YOUR BEST PRACTICES:

Do you have a best practice for getting sponsors to support a new initiative? If so, please share it on our blog at Wharton’s Center for Leadership and Change Management. <http://whartonleadership.wordpress.com/>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- *The Art of Woo: Using Strategic Persuasion to Sell Your Ideas*. G. Richard Shell and Mario Moussa (Portfolio, 2007). Provides a four-step process to achieving persuasion goals that Shell and Moussa teach in Strategic Persuasion Workshop: The Art and Science of Selling Ideas. Argues that “woo,” or winning others over, is one of the most powerful skills in an executive’s repertoire.
- *Switch: How to Change Things When Change is Hard*. Chip Heath and Dan Heath, (Crown Business 2010). Offers research-based strategies for aligning the two “systems” in our brains — rational and emotional — to make difficult changes with less resistance.
- “Turn Your Adversary into Your Advocate,” Katie A. Liljenquist and Adam D. Galinsky, *Negotiation*, Vol. 10, 4-6 (Harvard Law School, 2007). Explores four benefits of asking for advice, including disarming potentially defensive opponents, finding solutions, and gaining commitment.

ABOUT NANO TOOLS:

Nano Tools for Leaders® was conceived and developed by Deb Giffen, MCC, Director of Innovative Learning Solutions at Wharton Executive Education. It is jointly sponsored by Wharton Executive Education and Wharton’s Center for Leadership and Change Management, Wharton Professor of Management Michael Useem, Director. Nano Tools Academic Director, Professor Adam Grant.