Ever have a great idea? If you do and you want to translate that idea into reality, you’re inevitably going to have to convince someone else to support that idea. Maybe you work in a hospital and you need the support of a manager or someone more senior in your organization. Maybe you need someone to give you the resources to support your initiative. In either case, a good idea rarely ‘sells itself’. You typically have to present a business case or a convincing argument that gives the decision maker the information they need to make an informed choice... but even that is rarely enough. Every decision maker has their own range of factors to consider when reviewing your proposal, and understanding those factors will ultimately help you to build a better business case. It may even help you to address some of those considerations beforehand, making it easier for the decision maker to say ‘yes’. But you are not done yet. Even if your proposal is supported, you will still have to successfully implement your idea,... and most decision makers will want to know how you intend to do that before they lend their support.

So while there is obviously much to consider when building your argument, you can approach it systematically. The model that follows breaks down the overall process into three steps: building the business case; paving the way; and winning the decision (Figure 1). The goal is to use all three to identify and address everything that could affect the success of your idea... and you can use this for tackling any decision, big or small. The steps intentionally overlap with one another – you will be discovering new information all the time, so be prepared to go back and revise.

**STEP 1: BUILD THE BUSINESS CASE**

**Developing your idea**

A good place to start is to spell out exactly what it is that you are proposing. You will want to explain why your idea is needed, perhaps by providing a description of the current state. You will need to determine how much it will cost, in terms of both dollars and human resources; the timelines involved; and, if you have any codependencies (ie, are you doing this by yourself or does someone else have to do something as well?). Let’s hit that again... the financials matter. It does not hurt to get input or help from someone with experience when working through your idea, especially in this area (eg, your manager). Of course, it is absolutely crucial that you can describe your idea in simple, concise terms – think ‘elevator speech’. A decision maker wants to be clear on what he/she is agreeing to and the easier an idea is to understand, the easier it is to support.

**Articulating the benefits**

Next, you will want to describe all the benefits that you can expect to realize, perhaps coupled with what will happen if you do not implement your idea. You cannot assume that the decision maker knows what you know; therefore, try to identify what assumptions are embedded in your proposal and make them explicit. It is important to be honest and factual in this, regardless of how enthusiastic you are about your idea. Embellishing or diluting the facts with your own opinions will only serve to undermine the credibility of your idea. It is also important to put the benefits in the language of the decision maker. That perspective will be different than your own so do your homework. Talk to people who have similar positions or even ask your decision maker what they need to hear in your proposal. Better to get it right than to bring forward a proposal that does not cover the things that your decision maker is really concerned about.

**Framing the idea**

Once you have your case well built, weave in elements that make it a compelling argument. For example, are you asking for something that has already been done successfully elsewhere? Precedents help strengthen your argument and speak to risk; therefore, they are definitely worth mentioning. Is there a higher principle that you can appeal to? Improving patient safety, for example, is much more compelling than a more humble goal. Finally, try to put your idea in perspective – will your idea improve safety for two patients or 2000? Essentially, if the primary beneficiary of your proposal is you, good luck...

**STEP 2: PAVE THE WAY**

Now that you have a strong business case, you can start gathering additional information, consider other perspectives and build support to pave the way for a successful decision.

**Understand how the decision is made**

It is important to understand who is making the decision on your idea. Is it a single person or is it a committee? If it is a committee, you will need to know the mandate of that committee. This will help you refine your framing of the idea – make it match the mandate. Who is on that committee and how will each person vote? Be systematic about mapping your support and take the time to connect with each person before the discussion of your item. If they have any concerns, this allows you to discuss them outside of the formality of the committee, to gather valuable feedback to better refine your idea and to build support... and you have to present a business case or a convincing argument that gives the decision maker the information they need to make an informed choice... but even that is rarely enough. Every decision maker has their own range of factors to consider when reviewing your proposal, and understanding those factors will ultimately help you to build a better business case. It may even help you to address some of those considerations beforehand, making it easier for the decision maker to say ‘yes’. But you are not done yet. Even if your proposal is supported, you will still have to successfully implement your idea,... and most decision makers will want to know how you intend to do that before they lend their support.

**STEP 3: WIN THE DECISION**

Once you have a strong business case, you can start gathering additional information, consider other perspectives and build support to pave the way for a successful decision.

**What is your power position?**

This is often overlooked, but where do you sit in terms of positional power compared with the decision maker(s)? Are you a direct report to the decision maker? Are the committee members reporting to you? Is the primary beneficiary of your proposal is you, good luck...

*Figure 1* Three key steps for moving your argument forward

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Power and politics are prevalent in every large organization and often have a significant impact on which ideas move forward and those that do not. Determining the answers to these questions will help you to leverage your own power and, perhaps, that of your supporters.

**Should someone else take it forward?**
After contemplating your power position, does it appear that you are a little fish with a big idea? Perhaps you need a bigger fish to bring your idea forward. For example, if you need an executive vice president to sign off and you are a staff respiratory therapist, that often represents a span of three to four organizational levels in a large hospital, and the first question the executive vice president would likely ask is where your manager or director sits on the issue. You will have more success if you engage your manager or director and leverage their support when bringing it forward.

**Relationships matter**
You will have a much easier time moving your idea forward if you have a relationship with the people that you need support from — if they happen to like you, even better. This underscores the importance of networking within your organization and reinforces the value of meeting with the members of a committee one-on-one while ‘paving the way’.

**STEP 3: WIN THE DECISION**
After you have completed your homework, built support and are confident on how the decision will go, you are now ready to present your proposal. There are a couple of final points to consider.

**Presenting your case**
Obviously, preparing your presentation beforehand is of key importance. You will want to keep your presentation simple, factual and concise. You can include the answers to the questions that you have already identified and you will want to avoid letting the conversation stray from your main points. Run it by a trusted person to get honest critique; the more removed they are from the issue and the more objective the better. Then, run through your presentation enough times that if you are asked some questions midway through, it will not throw you.

**Identify your best alternative to a negotiated agreement (aka ‘Plan B’)**
The ‘best alternative to a negotiated agreement’ is an expression from the world of negotiations but it essentially means ‘Plan B’. When someone says ‘No’, there is often a possibility of winning some concession or finding a compromise. So, plan ahead for this and try to be as prepared with the details on the alternatives as you were with your original idea. If the discussion is starting to erode support for your proposal, you may be able to win support for part of your idea or even win a reasonable alternative. Either way, it is still a step forward and you can always use that as a new starting point to try again later.

**STEP 4: BUILD A REPUTATION BY IMPLEMENTATION**
Congratulations, you won the decision! Now what? Well, your next idea’s success begins right now. People who build a reputation as ‘someone who delivers’ are the ones that decision makers support the most. You definitely do not want to be seen as that person who always brings ideas forward but never actually does anything about them. Therefore, make a point of reporting back to the decision maker(s) on your progress and absolutely share your success with others.

**BUSINESS CASE TEMPLATE**
There is no better way to track your progress than by writing it down. The business case template presented in Figure 2 captures all the above and will help you develop your idea, pave the way and win the decision.

**DISCLOSURE:** Kevin Taylor is the CEO and Registrar at the College of Respiratory Therapists of Ontario (CRTO) – the regulatory body for Respiratory Therapy in Ontario, Canada – and is a member of the National Alliance of Respiratory Therapy Regulatory Bodies (NARTRB). This article is adapted from a presentation at the CSRT Educational Conference and Trade Show 2013.

**RECOMMENDED READING**
CSRT / CAREstream Student Excellence Awards

The CSRT is proud to partner with CAREstream Medical Ltd., to provide recognition to students in the twenty two educational programs across Canada. This award recognizes students in each respiratory therapy program (accredited through the Council on Accreditation for Respiratory Therapy Education) who have successfully completed the certification exam and have made a substantial achievement as a student. The Student selected from each of the eligible programs will receive their award at the President's Banquet during the CSRT annual Education Conference.

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