

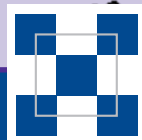
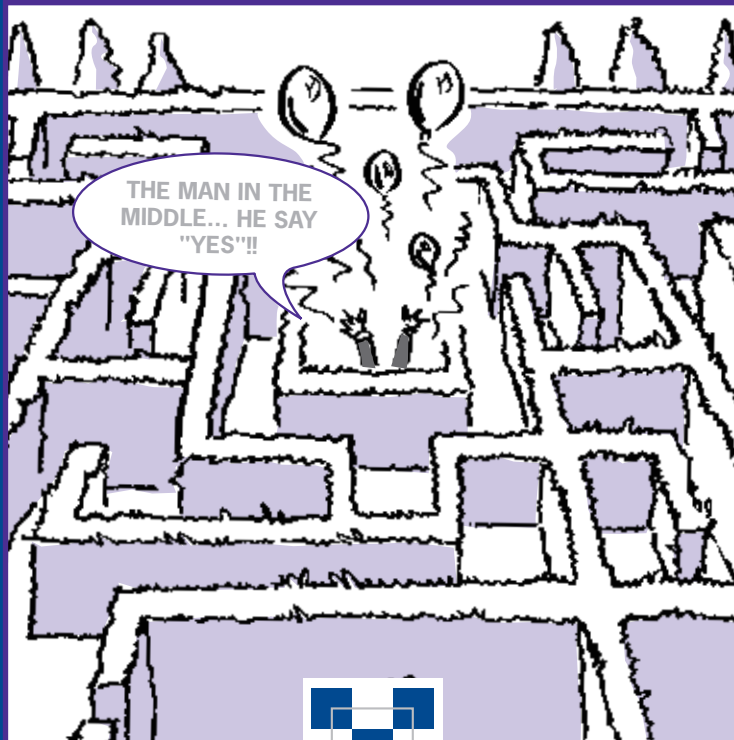
THE SUBTLE ART OF GETTING YOUR BOSS TO SAY

# YES

## TO YOUR BUSINESS IDEA

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*aka* The SCQuARE® route through the corporate maze



A SCQuARE® INTERNATIONAL GUIDE

# In the beginning . . .

In the beginning was the plan.

And then came the assumptions.

And the assumptions were without form.

And the plan was completely without substance.

And a darkness fell upon the faces of the employees.

And they spake amongst themselves, saying

*“It is a load of sh\*t and it stinks.”*

And the employees did go to their managers, saying

*“It is a bucket of dung and no one can bear the odour.”*

And the managers went to their senior managers, saying

*“It is a container of excrement and its smell is so strong that none can abide it.”*

And the senior managers went to their divisional directors, saying

*“It is a vessel of fertiliser and none can abide its rich strength.”*

And the directors went to their executive directors, saying

*“It aids plant growth and it is indeed very strong.”*

And the executive directors went to the managing director, saying

*“Our plan promotes growth and it is very powerful.”*

And the managing director went to the board of directors, saying

*“This new plan will actively promote the strong growth of this organisation.”*

And the board of directors did look upon the plan and saw it to be good, and the plan became policy.

ANON.

(With a nod to the community of joke emailers)



# Getting your boss to say YES!

The key to career advancement and success is to understand how to get your boss to say YES to your ideas.

It is obvious that without innovation and new ideas a business will wither on the vine. Good ideas, if implemented, will provide a business with revitalised energy by delivering a stream of new products and services, access to unexplored markets and a real competitive advantage.

The trouble is, when someone puts forward a new idea, it can be killed off to a cacophony of objections like those illustrated below:



This is the corporate maze where business creativity is stifled. The best idea in the world will be useless if you cannot sell it through the system.

To turn a business idea into a reality, you need to have the skill to present your idea as a workable proposal or plan to which your bosses can say YES.

In this guide, we will profile the characters that inhabit the corporate maze and explain how you can get them on-side. Also outlined are the ten principles of good planning which managers should use to prepare a fool-proof plan which will get their idea through the corporate maze. We hope you enjoy this light-hearted and sometimes irreverent look at how best to go about selling an idea in a business environment.

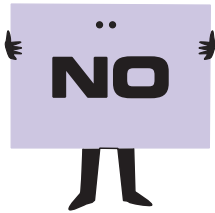
Ross Lovelock

Managing Director SCQ<sub>u</sub>ARE® International

# How to navigate your idea t

The corporate maze is generally, but not always, the black hole of business creativity where good ideas and rational proposals can be lost forever.

In the corporate maze you are likely to meet the following characters:



## The man who likes to say 'no'

This person lives and thrives in the corporate maze where they can express their instinctive urge to say 'no'. Their origins can often be traced to a well-known department whose name is not mentioned to protect the innocent. Here, people are trained to say 'no'. It is their role to be cautious. Ideas require decisions and, inevitably, investment to make them happen. The hero of this department is a man called Gordon who talks much about his beloved Prudence. For this department, it is easy to say 'no', because 'no' means no risk.



## The idea stealer

This is the bane of every creative manager. The idea stealer is someone who will listen intently to your proposal and even ask penetrating questions, fully testing your analysis and conclusions. After careful consideration, they will reject the idea with some glib management speak like "it's a little ambitious, let's park it for now". But, just days later, the idea will be repackaged and represented as the idea stealer's own creation. It will be renamed, of course, but it's still basically the same idea – your idea – only its owner has changed. They may also add insult to injury by saying something along the lines of: "I had an interesting meeting with Smith the other day and some of the things he was saying inspired me to come up with this idea."



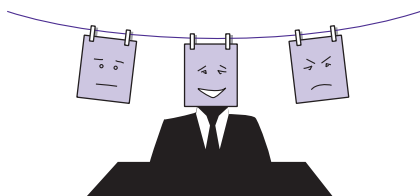
## The terrible twins

The idea stealer has two like-minded colleagues, NIMBY (not in my back yard) and NIH (not invented here). These are precious little executives who come up with phrases like "we do things differently here". Any idea which does not further their own career prospects or help them directly in their own area of responsibility needs, in their view, to be put down at the earliest opportunity.



## The corporate cynic

This negative-thinking whiz kid has seen it all before. Usually recognisable as this character is the one that crushes any new proposal with their cherished mantra of "it's been tried before and it didn't work then." Don't let their world-weary look of disdain kill off the idea before the meeting is over.



## The multi-faced managing director

The MD is normally the final hurdle in any decision-making process. Before presenting any business plan or proposal, try to assess what kind of MD you are dealing with. Put simply, try a little psychological profiling. Ask yourself which kind of MD you have to deal with.

Listed opposite are the four personality types you should look for.



# through the corporate maze

The four MD personality types:



*Clues to help you identify your MD character type.*

## Give it to me straight

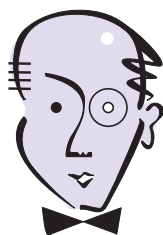


This is someone who, as the name suggests, responds well to straight talking. These MDs come across as strong-willed, single-minded and forceful. In meetings they will always talk about the bottom line, appear very direct and make quick decisions. Competitive by nature, they also have short attention spans. They will respond well to the 'elevator pitch' style of presentation. In a presentation to this type of MD, keep the detailed analysis and any supporting data in reserve for future meetings and get directly to the point.

- competitive by nature, but responds well to being challenged
- prone to be critical of other colleagues' work
- likes short sharp meetings
- likely to gaze distractedly out of the window after ten minutes if you haven't fully grabbed their attention
- often late because of gym commitments.

## The analysis junkie

A person who won't make a decision without poring over charts and detailed analysis first. They appear reflective and thoughtful and are slow decision-makers compared to the 'give it to me straight' MD. Charts with plenty of supporting statistics and analysis will be required to win this boss over.



- meticulous and accurate in their work
- organised to the point of being obsessive
- loves process and procedure
- slave to the product Excel
- owns every gadget on the market.

## Now let's talk about me



The boss who loves to be flattered, entertained and will be impressed with the theatre and style of a presentation. They may well want to claim the idea for themselves being part 'idea stealer' themselves by nature. So, if you want the idea to succeed, let them take some of the credit. The good news is that this kind of MD is likely to be quite creative and wants to make things happen. They love new ideas so, even if they say 'no', keep the ideas coming.

- impulsive and has a poor eye for detail
- receptive to flattery and loves to be entertained
- self-centred, but highly motivational and good with people
- madly impressed by fame and prone to name drop at every opportunity
- star of the company golf day.

## Let's be friends

An MD who will want the whole team involved in the decision-making process and will talk about ownership of the idea for everyone. It may take a long time to get to a decision and meetings will involve a lot of discussion, so be prepared for a long slog to sell in your idea.



- good listener, but can be easily swayed
- dependable, supportive and co-operative
- sensitive and likes to show their feelings
- likely to ask for a group hug
- loves the word 'alignment'.

## Selling a business idea.

### *The untaught skill.*

Many senior managers in UK companies simply do not know how to write a plan. Research shows that 74 per cent have never been trained in this skill, so most managers have to 'learn on the job' or, worse still, they never master the art. They simply just roll along year after year enduring the torture of managerial ridicule as they undertake rewrite after rewrite whilst attempting to justify their assumptions and proposals.

Business planning should take only a few weeks but often wastes months of management time. The result is that companies become focused on internal issues, whilst the customer becomes an unfortunate, and sometimes forgotten, inconvenience. The situation shown below is not just a joke, it is a reality in some organisations.

*Forget the \*@?\* client I've got an internal plan to write!*



# The 10 principles of g

Below is a brief insight into how we would help you develop

**1 Provide clarity of vision.** In every plan, make sure that a clear aim and mission has been concisely articulated. Never be tempted to deliver a tome-like document as a demonstration of your hard work. It is more likely to show a meandering mind and switch off 'straight-talking MDs'. A good principle is to have the ability to distil your proposal to an elevator pitch. If push came to shove, could you pitch your idea to your boss in a lift?

**2 Get to the hub of the matter.** Follow the principle that a problem well-defined is a problem half solved. For every plan there is probably one overriding pivotal question that must be addressed. Developing creative ideas in isolation, without first examining the real issues the business needs to address, is the first deadly sin of business planning.

**3 Look at cause and effect.** Work to the prohibition principle and remember that someone, at some time, thought prohibition was a good idea for reducing alcohol consumption. It was, but the downside was that it created the biggest crime-wave in US history. Every plan should include a causal chain which examines the likely cause of the problem and the effects of implementing an idea.

**4 Don't be seduced by the first creative idea.** Managers need to balance creativity, traditionally achieved by holding brainstorming sessions, with process. Creativity and process are not easy bedfellows. Managers must reconcile the tensions between the two concepts in order to ensure that creativity is always directed towards achieving organisational goals. Brainstorming without direction is useless.

**5 Tell a story.** A common problem in business planning involves overloading a plan with facts, figures and statistics. Facts and data should be there to support the body story of the proposal and used only to aid comprehension. Never leave it to the audience to interpret a 'data dump'. This will only result in you having to endure the patronising statement "Excuse me if I appear a bit thick, but I'm not getting this". This will only lead to 'analysis paralysis', another deadly sin of business planning.



# getting your idea to the 'YES'

a plan and navigate your idea through the corporate maze:

**6 Sell the problem, not the solution.** There are only three reasons why anybody agrees to commit a resource in business. 1) You've identified a problem 2) you've spotted a threat or 3) you've identified an opportunity. The secret of the planner is that they must first sell the decision makers on the scale of the problem or opportunity, and not just walk straight in with a solution. If they don't buy your problem, they won't buy your solution.

**7 Examine all options.** Management don't necessarily want to be presented with a "menu" from which to choose, but they do need to be confident that all of the angles have been considered. They will want reassurance that all possible options have been properly examined and tested for their viability, thus ensuring that bad ideas have been rejected in the process and only good workable ideas put forward.

**8 Explain 'How?' and 'Why?'** This enables the presenter to end their plan with clear decision points that are fully justified. Plans can often end up going nowhere because the two critical questions of 'how' and 'why' have not been answered. The bottom line is that, if you cannot address these two simple questions, you probably do not have a plan, only a concept. The likelihood is that it will fail if it is ever launched or, more likely, it will meet with the response of "we can't make a decision on this, you better finish off on the detail".

**9 Be prepared.** Managers should be mindful of the army officer's adage about the Six Ps (P\*\*s poor preparation makes for p\*\*s poor performance). There is no substitute for thoroughness and an eye for detail. Simple mistakes, like leaving typos in the presentation or using font colours in the slide presentation that can't be read, should be avoided. Allow for plenty of rehearsals to ensure that the presentation of the plan goes smoothly.

**10 Understand your audience.** It is useless to present a plan which does not meet the expectations of the audience or where the decision required falls outside the audience's responsibility. Grandiose ideas should not be presented to timid audiences and cautious plans should not be presented to visionaries.

SCQuARE® International specialises in enabling organisations to solve their business problems and capitalise on business opportunities via training, consultancy and software using our proven SCQuARE® planning methodology. SCQuARE® transfers a world-class strategic framework to operational executives so they can create and sell better proposals faster. It equips executives with approaches and techniques adopted by leading companies worldwide.



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