



SELLING TO SENIOR EXECUTIVES

Communication strategies for facility managers to improve their persuasiveness and credibility when they're making a pitch to the C-suite

By virtue of their positions, senior managers consider options, evaluate recommendations, and make decisions using criteria that are different than those at more junior levels. So whether it's making the case for an energy-saving lighting retrofit, or putting forward a proposal for improved office ergonomics, it's critical to adjust the message and method of delivery so that it's relevant and meaningful for an audience of senior managers. Here, then, are four suggestions to significantly increase the likelihood that a facility manager's message is heard, respected and acted upon.

THINK BULLET-POINTS

Present information in succinct sound bites. One of the most common traps people fall into is the inclination to 'vomit data.' With apologies for the graphic choice of words, 'vomiting data' is the tendency that experts have to share everything they know about a subject or topic. Because they're often specialists or authorities in their areas, they have a predisposition to tell it all. But almost every single time, the degree of knowledge that an expert has is far more detailed and comprehensive than what is required for a senior manager to understand the situation and make a decision. So 'vomiting data' only causes a senior manager to either abruptly cut off further dialogue or lose interest quickly. Instead, seek to present information in concise statements that are brief and to the point. The ultimate objective is to

keep upper management in the loop, but without giving it the extended version.

UNDERSTAND A MANAGER'S MINDSET

People operate in different problem-solving modes. Think of mental mindsets as a continuum with brainstorming ideas and solutions at one end, and seeking recommendations and action at the other. Upper management is somewhere along that continuum, and understanding exactly where it is means that the message can be pitched at the right level. If executives are in the brainstorming mindset, then ideas presented as 'alternatives' or 'possible solutions' will get more attention. If they are in a recommendation and action frame of mind, then 'recommendations' and 'implementation plans' will get extra air time. Sometimes it may be worthwhile to pitch an idea as a short-term pilot project if the group is risk-averse. Don't underestimate the value of the right word choices when it comes to being influential; opinions positioned correctly are more likely to get greater interest and consideration.

EVALUATE THE ENVIRONMENT

In times of crisis a facility manager needs to change his or her approach, because senior management is more likely to be in a 'take action' state of mind. When things are coming to a crunch, management values employees who are decisive and action-oriented, so deliver! Don't fall into the trap of thinking that a reasonable analysis and prudent consideration of all alternatives is necessary. It's far more likely that senior managers will view that as dithering and indecisive behaviour. If the business

environment warrants it, don't be afraid to be more vehement about the bottom-line impact of energy-saving devices, or more enthusiastic and energetic while making the case for implementing barcode scanning technology. When in times of crisis, pitches to senior management can be more forceful than usual, so take advantage of the opportunity.

DELIVER BAD NEWS, AND BE SPECIFIC

One of the fastest ways to lose credibility in the eyes of senior management is to shilly-shally and sugar-coat bad news. As difficult as it can be, it's far smarter to muster up the courage, bite the bullet and spit it out. Face it, the people in the upper echelons of any organization didn't get there without having to clear a few hurdles themselves. They've heard bad news before, and they can handle it! When communicating bad news or negative information, the most important thing to remember is specificity. Be specific about what went wrong and why. Emphasize the quantitative rather than the subjective. Be explicit about the impact of the bad news, and exact about the corrective or mitigating measures taken. Be precise about actions and dates.

THE BOTTOM LINE

A facility manager can improve his or her persuasiveness and credibility when it comes to communicating upwards. It doesn't matter what a facility manager is pitching to his or her organization's senior people. As long as the facility manager focuses on how he or she communicates, the facility manager can improve the chances of senior management appreciating and responding to his or her advice. | **CFM&D**

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