Extracted from:

Driving Technical Change

Why People on Your Team Don't Act on Good Ideas, and How to Convince Them They Should

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Why People On Your Team Don't Act on Good Ideas,
and How To Convince Them They Should

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Chapter 24

Target the Willing

You've put a pin in the Irrational for now, and you want to start converting people. Who do you start with? Well, start with the easiest to convert, that's who.

You might think it was the other way—convert the hardest, and then the rest will fall in line. But in practice that doesn't work. It's too easy to claim that no one else is doing it, so why should I, in these situations.

However, as we will see in Chapter 25, *Harness the Converted*, on page 117, the converted can be powerful allies in this effort. The more converted you have, the better off you are. So, this is about quantity and not quality. It doesn't matter that Bob is a better programmer than Ed and Steve combined; you're better off focusing on Ed and Steve if they are easier to convert and then enlisting their aid in bringing Bob into the fold.

24.1 Order of Difficulty

In my experience, you can break the groups of skeptics into three groups of difficulty: easy, hard, and harder. Why no *medium*? Well, in my experience, there is a big delta between the first group and the second group. When you are finished with the first group, be prepared for a much harder time when you move to the second. It's important that you understand this, because taking on the second group can be a real morale killer for you if you are unprepared for the difference in difficulty.

24.2 Easy

Far be it for me to call anyone easy. This group of developers isn't easy in the sense that they are pushovers. They're easy in the sense that you know what you have to do. You inform or lead depending on the group. You're taking a stationary rock and starting it rolling.

Uninformed

The Uninformed are your first stop. You completely control their first exposure to a technology. Everything they think about it will be compared and contrasted to what you told them about it. That's a huge advantage for you.

Think about every email forward you've gotten from a relative warning you about an urban legend. Have you ever tried to refute them? It's almost impossible. Even with great skeptical sites like snopes.com, people don't listen. Why? It's because you're showing up after the item has been absorbed and therefore are refuting what they now believe. It's much easier to shape an opinion than it is to change one.

Now, I'm not suggesting everyone is as willing to believe something as your email-forwarding relatives. But the first impression effect is very real and very powerful. So, use it to your advantage—be the first to define your tool or technique.

Herd

The Herd are for the most part looking for leadership. The cost of getting them on board is providing that leadership. Now, don't think that it's as easy as "Use this."

True leadership in this case will mean providing ongoing support and guidance to those you seek to lead. You'll have to help them out when they hit a pain point. You need to provide them with arguments for why they are using your tools from time to time.

24.3 Hard

If converting the first group is like starting a stationary object rolling, then this group is like reversing the direction of an already rolling object. It much harder. You have to overcome the inertia of these guys, who are not neutral on what you're pitching; they're opposed.

Add to it that there isn't one thing that will convert them. One demonstration, shared project, or group success will not convince them. It takes combining multiple successes to do so. And that combination is unique per person. So, the difficulty factor is higher. But they can be convinced.

Burned

Of this group, the Burned are, by a slight margin, the easiest. At one point, they thought your tool or technique was a good idea, even if they don't now. This is a good thing; they have the capacity to accept your tool or technique. You just have to reignite it. However, it might not feel like they are the easiest, because the Burned can be the most passionate of skeptics. They can be violently disagreeing with you until a moment before they decide to give your tool a try.

Time Crunched

The only thing in your favor with the Time Crunched is that their opposition to your tool or technique is not specific. They don't oppose your tool; they oppose a change to their current way of doing so—they cannot tolerate the time cost of a change.

The Time Crunched won't give you a shot unless you can prove that your tool will ultimately save them time. So, the point of hitting them up later has to do with providing proof. By having the Herd, the Uninformed, and the Burned on board already, you have opportunities to provide third-party proof that you can save them time. It's not definitely going to bring them in, but it does make it more likely.

Cynic

The Cynic often feels like a lost cause. They have a horror story or statistic for every argument or point you have. It doesn't look like they can be brought over. However, they may have a huge weakness: they are motivated by a need to appear smart (see Section 7.1, *Underlying Causes*, on page 37). So if other smart people are jumping onto a technology, they can be brought on board too by appealing to that desire. But to do that, you have to have smart people on board, which is why they are one of last groups to try to get.

24.4   Hardest

The hardest cannot be approached until you at least have some other group on board. You can skip the easy if they don't exist at your workplace. But you cannot approach the hard group, until you at least have some converts on your side.

Boss

Bosses are the hardest to convince. They take a lot of effort. You have to approach them on special terms, specifically their terms as noted in Chapter 10, *The Boss*, on page 46. Additionally, you're not trying to influence them in a vacuum. Everyone wants a piece of their time and attention, not just for issues related to your matter but all sorts of administrative minutiae. It's not just about making the argument to them; it's about making them care.

Adding to the difficulty factor, in most cases you pretty much cannot do this alone. You need other converts to prove to the Boss that your idea has merit. If you cannot convince co-workers who are ostensibly your peers to come over, why should the Boss? And they're not wrong to have that attitude. What's more likely? You didn't mention your tool to the rest of your team and instead talked to your Boss first, or you tried to get them on board, no one bought it, and you're trying to get them to mandate it. It's pretty clear that if you're talking to the boss without support, it's because you failed to get it, not that you were keeping your discoveries a secret.

Now these are general guidelines. They tend to work. But don't be rigid with these. If you believe you have a good chance to convert a harder skeptic out of order, don't hesitate. The idea here is to go after the easiest first. If circumstances align to make a Cynic or Boss temporarily easier, you should definitely go for it.

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