

The Anatomy of *Persuasion*

Aubuchon & Associates

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The Death Knell for American Innovation

An estimated sixty percent of good, useable ideas generated by our brightest people don't happen.

These ideas die at birth or shortly after, disappearing silently, mourned and sadly remembered only by their disappointed creators. They are ideas that should have happened but not only didn't happen but won't happen.

Included in large share are ideas created by our most talented executive- and professional-level people working in American industry. This is a silent process. It is a huge, ongoing, tragic loss. It saps our creative energy and damps commercial incentives.

And -- it is especially costly now when we face unprecedented worldwide competition and our need for innovation is paramount. This is a wake-up call for American management.

First off you may be questioning the statistic. Wow! Six out of ten good ideas never happen. Unbelievable!

How can anyone know about things that never happened?

For us the answer is straight forward. We have been in touch with a lot of people who have told us about their ideas that didn't happen. We have listened carefully and kept score over time.

You can believe the statistic. Here's why.

For over 20 years we have worked with thousands of these bright, creative people in our seminars on persuasion skills.

They have shared their bitter experiences about their ideas that have been rejected

These are corporate people -- a cross section of America's brightest: engineers, chemists, biologists, botanists, physicists, and management people at all levels. Again, we are confident that the statistic is correct or close enough to reality to be alarming.

Question: How is it that good ideas fail to happen?

Answer: They are regularly and consistently killed off silently by the three lurking enemies of innovation.

Worse, these enemies are **us**. They are:

[1] Technically educated people like those mentioned above who create most of our best ideas.

[2] Top management people, though calling for ideas, often fail to provide direction and conditions conducive to innovation.

[3] Middle management people some of whom skillfully undermine and otherwise resist change of any kind. These people can be and often are lethal.

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The Power of Personal Development

Research and common sense have made it clear -- unwanted employee turnover is a costly, counterproductive occurrence that plagues many organizations in today's marketplace, where the negative stigmas once associated with changing jobs are virtually non-existent.

So, what can management do to encourage employee loyalty?

According to a 1999 Massachusetts HR firm's study, and as noted in *The Top 100 Places to Work in America*, the three most critical factors contributing to employee loyalty and job satisfaction are:

1. High levels of workplace morale
2. The availability of personal development
3. A belief in a secure future

Further, it is also believed that education, or personal development, plays a strong role in promoting the other two items on the list! So, simply stated, resources allocated to training and staff development might well qualify as being well invested.

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Let's consider them one at a time:

Technically educated people: These bright creative people, as a class, are their own worst enemies. When they develop ideas (or inventions or new processes), they believe that the benefits of those ideas should be self-evident to all except morons. The notion ideas to be adopted and used must be sold is not readily accepted. Thus they believe that the *"world will beat a path to their door."* To many the thought of selling anything is demeaning – Willie Loman stuff. This is the heart of the matter, the prime reason for failure. This is where the correction needs to be made. These people need to be convinced that to succeed they themselves must learn how to gain acceptance for their ideas – that every idea needs a skilled advocate, and that they themselves need to gain that skill.

Top management people: We hear the bromidic calls from the top, *"We need all the ideas we can get from our people."* Yeah, yeah! But—seldom do we hear specific direction as to what kind of ideas fit the corporate direction, nor do we hear of offers to teach technically people the need for and the principles of advocacy, in short how to move ideas from concept to application and use.

Middle management people: With all due respect some of these people present overt resistance to change, others quietly undermine, and others attack head on. They inhibit progress. These are those who see change as career threatening missiles. You've heard it. *That won't work here. Our competition tried that and failed. It's not in the budget. We will consider this for next year. Don't rock the boat.* These people should be persuaded or bypassed or removed.

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So now what should top management do:

- First, management needs to get involved with the problem. How? Talk candidly with employees, one on one. Find out what happens to ideas within the organization. Are they poorly presented? Do they fail to meet needs? Are they being shot down before being seriously considered? Get to the truth.
- Second, teach employees, especially bright, technically trained people, the persuasion skills and strategies they need to be successful. And, by the way, how to identify and defeat the enemies of innovation. This is key.
- Third, be remedial. Start giving solid, reasoned direction about areas of interest. Define problems, corporate needs, and keep the minds of middle management open.
- Fourth, establish a new culture that is designed to nurture budding ideas. Reward failure as well as success. Maintain incentives.

Innovation should be high on the agenda of most organizations. Major change is accelerating.

A couple of quick examples: The imaging industry has moved from the silver-halide process of developing film to the instant digital imaging. There were casualties, big ones, and winners, bigger ones. The incandescent light bulb is being replaced at warp speed by fluorescent lighting. Energy conservation is impacting industry after industry. How long before SUVs become pariahs? And so on...

In short, we Americans cannot afford to lose our ideas. If our management people don't take heed, recognize and stop the loss, foreign interests will continue to snatch opportunity after opportunity away with lightning speed.

Wake up! It's your call, America.