Don't be the person who always shoots down an idea !

Years ago, I sat in a meeting with my boss. He said I always pushed back, complained or offered reasons why I couldn't implement ideas presented to me. He said it felt like I was always saying "no." He even went so far to say it was as if I was out hunting and the ideas were what I was trying to shoot down. I was crushed. That was not at all my intention. I felt like it was my job to point out the problems with their ideas. Then my manager made an amazing statement that changed my perspective. He said, "If you always offer reasons why something will fail, that will be considered an excuse or a complaint; but if you bring three alternate ideas or avenues to the table that addresses the issues, that will be viewed as a plan." Saying "that won't work" is not engaging in a productive conversation to resolve a problem. If you strategically lay out new alternatives or ask questions about the current initiative, you have a better chance of resolving things in a way that satisfies everyone.

I quickly learned that presenting three alternatives is easier said than done. Presenting too many alternatives may come across as stiff-arming the team. The key is to present plans and alternatives that push you closer to accomplishing the goal. Many technical leaders and technicians are problem solvers and are perceived to lean negative. We often highlight reasons why something won't work and lean toward normalcy and quick results. Interestingly, we are typically paired up with

worship teams who tend to be out-of-the-box creative thinkers that lean towards the positives of every idea. It's important that when we present an idea or ask a question, we do so from a positive vantage point. If we don't, we can kill the creative mood.

How do you present alternatives that inspire solutions?

First, understand the goal. Ask questions about the idea and the ultimate goal. Just by asking simple questions and understanding the goal, I have seen many ideas refined to fit technical needs or even rejected completely. For example, once a choir director asked me to give every single choir member a microphone. I had access to 10 microphones, but this idea would require 40 microphones. I asked two questions. First, do you want me to rent 30 more microphones? Second, what is the goal for these extra microphones? The answer to the first question was, I'm not sure can you secure a price? The answer to the second was, I want them to be heard better. I responded by saying I would get pricing on the rentals and maybe we could record the choir in advance and use a track to supplement the sound. I had a couple more ideas, but before presenting those, the director decided to record them. It accomplished the goal and resolved the issue without needing to rent additional microphones.

Second, keep it simple and describe your idea at a high level. Notice in the example above I did not get into major details. I knew the details and had thought through them, but I did not bury the choir director with them. It's important to keep things easy to understand, have backup alternatives to each of your

ideas and make sure they all revolve around the goal, but address problems that may arise.

How do I come up with different plans?

What I have done is bring one bold idea, one conservative and one in the middle of those two. Typically, the middle idea is the one to promote. Once an idea is presented, you can measure the temperament of the room and understand how much this new goal fits with your ideas, opinions and how committed everyone is to implementation.

When executing a decision, track data relating to how well you attained or how far off you were from the goal. This data will be very useful when the idea is reviewed. It's helpful if the idea fails or succeeds to have data that backs up why. Be sure to archive this data and the opinions related to it because this idea may be tried again or suggested again and you want to be able to bring this data back to the table so the same mistakes are not repeated.

Finally, no matter what is decided, accept the decision, build it up and give it everything you have to make it work. This will make you a team member that brings ideas to the table and not someone who crushes them.

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