



## Transformational Leadership & Service Podcast

### Episode 9 Transcript

#### *Earning the Right to be Heard*

Have you ever experienced a situation where your boss didn't seem interested in listening to your ideas? Have you ever been frustrated by not being able to get to first base selling a worthwhile concept to upper management? Have you ever been tempted to stop trying all together? If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, maybe you need to brush up on your skills in the fine art of earning the right to be heard.

I would suggest there are four questions that all decision makers need to have answered before they can comfortably and confidently approve any idea. For those of us able to both identify these four questions and formulate appropriate answers for each, the probability of our concerns being heard and acted upon increases greatly. Consider the following four.

**Question 1: How much is it going to cost?** No self-respecting manager would ever approve any proposal unless armed with this answer. Therefore, take the time to do your homework upfront. Be prepared, but be honest. Never over-estimate or pad the numbers! Others may, but for those of us wishing to earn the right to be heard, the risk is too great. If decision makers believe you're playing games with them, they may let you play your games somewhere else.

**Question 2: What are the benefits?** This may be the most important question to be answered. Benefits serve decision makers as both reason and motivation for taking action. Whenever we sell any idea we should be prepared with as many tangible benefits as possible. However, be careful. Only benefits which are *legitimate* and *defensible* should be included. Even one benefit that is not legitimate or defensible may serve to make the entire list suspect in the mind of the decision maker.

**Question 3: How long will it take?** Time is money. Therefore, we need to offer decision makers a realistic expectation of the time required to get our recommendation up and running. However, contrary to my earlier advice regarding question number one, always over-estimate the length of time expected for the project to be completed. Create a specific implementation plan that will allow you to position yourself in such a way as to always be under time and under budget.

**Question 4: What happens if we don't do it?** This is a favorite question of many decision makers. After listening to your well-prepared case for a certain action to be taken, many decision makers may seem compelled to consider the downside of the equation. Don't despair – prepare. Prepare yourself with a ready response for this predictable question. My suggestion? *“Boss, if you decide not to approve this proposal, I will accept your decision. However, let me remind you of the benefits which will not be realized as a result of your decision here today.”* Then immediately refer to the earlier list of legitimate and defensible benefits.

Will leaders always be successful in getting what they want when following the approach outlined here? Of course not. However, even if we don't get what we want, we may still be successful in creating quality “face time” with the appropriate decision makers. After all, the first step to getting to “yes” either now or in the future, is earning the right to be heard.