



LEADERSHIP LAB

Five steps to get buy-in for big ideas in business

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I imagine that herding cats is a lot like running a franchise network. We've spent three decades perfecting our systems, but it still takes constant effort and communication to keep a team of 4,000 people aligned. When we have to roll out new initiatives, things can get complicated.

In 2012, we decided to make our first foray into radio marketing. At first, not everyone could see the value — myself included. We'd always done our own PR, and our main form of advertising was driving around in our branded [1-800-GOT-JUNK?](#) trucks. The way I figured it, why should we pay for expensive radio spots when we can advertise for free?

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Many of our franchise partners agreed, but a few forward-thinkers convinced us that we had to embrace paid media to take our brand to the next level. It took patience, strategy, teamwork and trust, and while it wasn't easy, it's been one of the most profitable business decisions we've ever made.

Rolling out a new idea is tricky in any organization. But you can avoid major headaches as long as you have a plan and involve your people in the process. Here are the five steps you must take to effectively introduce any new program.

1. Have a clearly defined strategy

To get buy-in, the key is to be straight-up about how everyone will benefit (and what they stand to lose). In the case of our radio campaigns, our goal was to penetrate local markets by maximizing the frequency, reach and consistency of our ads. The benefit was massive growth and brand awareness; the potential loss would be missing out on this huge opportunity.

But our plan wouldn't work without the right person. We needed someone whose style matched our company's quirky personality, so we found the Wizard of Ads (a.k.a. Roy H. Williams).

His work isn't loved by everyone. You know those over-the-top [Spence Diamonds commercials](#)? We hired *that* guy. His magical thinking and proven track record perfectly matched what we were after, and once he was on board, he set a strategy we all bought into.

2. Prove it's working — then keep on proving it

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It's one thing to talk about hypothetical results; it's another to provide evidence of success. To keep people excited and moving in the right direction, you need to prove that your program is working.

Several of our top franchises volunteered to be our guinea pigs and invest in a 14-week radio campaign. The ads took off unexpectedly fast, and, encouraged by the early success, our largest franchise committed to a 52-week test campaign. In its first year with ads, our Toronto franchise saw an increase in revenues we couldn't have predicted.

Seeing those results, more and more of our franchise partners opted to launch their own radio programs. Now, we have over 60 per cent buy-in to the strategy. If you're testing an unproven plan, start small, experiment, and validate your idea. A more clearly-planned start will lead to wider acceptance in the long run.

3. Ongoing communication and training are key

In a franchise system with a million moving parts, communication and alignment are absolutely critical. To ensure we stay on the same page, we have a team in the field available to help our franchise partners adapt to major changes, plus weekly phone calls and newsletters.

By keeping the lines of communication open, we're able to identify and react quickly to challenges. We have people designated as the main contact for new programs (like our radio campaigns) to ensure a smooth rollout for everyone involved. Our hands-on approach to communication allows us to consistently monitor success and support our franchise partners when they have questions or doubts.

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4. Be patient — change takes time

The success of our radio ads didn't happen overnight; we almost called it quits a few months into the program. The Wizard calls this the "[chickening out period](#)," when people drop off even though they're about to turn the corner. In radio, it's been statistically proven that if you hold on past 12 weeks, the program will take a turn for the better.

Whether you're implementing a new hiring process or transitioning to new software, there will be times that you'll question why you did it, and you might even want to give up altogether. Don't! If you're ready to quit, you could be on the verge of success.

5. Don't listen to doubters

Our radio ads have inspired some very strong opinions. (If you've heard them, you know why.) People either love the campy quirkiness, or they absolutely hate it. We get an endless barrage of less-than-favourable responses on our social media. Do we care? Heck no! Because what makes our ads annoying also makes them work.

No matter what, when you introduce new programs, there will inevitably be naysayers — employees and customers alike. But if you trust your instincts, take a risk and can prove your