

# Setting the groundwork for innovative ideas

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*Bloomberg Government regularly publishes insights, opinions and best practices from our community of senior leaders and decision makers. This column is written by Amy Showalter, [part two of her series on influence and selling your ideas](#).*

## **Attention Millennials (and all others): Respect the Past**

I believe that effective millennial leadership and communications are nothing more than good leadership and communications—the principles apply across generations. Don't we all want to be heard, acknowledged, and praised? We all want to advance. We all want the ubiquitous and deceiving life balance.

Believe it or not, there were smart people with ability and initiative in our organizations before we came along! They established new coalitions, provided compelling legislative testimony and raised thousands of dollars of PAC funds. It's their history and base on which you're trying to build. Absent their contributions, you might not be doing what you're doing now, or even

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employed in this organization. When we fail to respect that, we reduce the opportunity for future cooperation and good will.

False praise is easily recognized, so don't "kiss up" – research the history of the organization and find praiseworthy contributions. Is there anything you can sincerely acknowledge? If so, acknowledge the past and respect it. Soon enough it will be your turn to be second guessed by junior executives, so pay it forward now.

### **Know How to Lead Change**

Leading organizational or departmental change is a skill distinct from suggesting change. Perhaps you have led an initiative to reevaluate your PAC disbursements, coalition memberships or data gathering practices. It was so successful that your leaders even now view these changes as their ideas. You were, however, passed over for a promotion.

Many government relations professionals are adept at explaining why change is necessary but less proficient at executing change. Research from Liminal Strategies assessed over 42 differentiating characteristics of high performers. Their findings from employees in the trenches found that "the ability to lead change resulting from his or her recommendations" was the second-most important skill of top-rated knowledge workers. It's nice to recommend change, but it's high level influence and leadership skills that get others to follow.

### **Initiate Useful Evaluation and Recalibration Meetings**

Many good ideas aren't accepted because we unconsciously repeat the same mistakes from previous initiatives — you have a track record, but it's not a

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good one. You can increase your “accepted idea batting average” via initiating regular evaluations with organizational leaders/board members. I am not suggesting that you initiate these meetings when there is an implementation glitch, but rather, on a regular basis regardless of new project implementation status.

This demonstrates accountability and a willingness to receive feedback beyond the nonsensical annual performance review that is usually based more on what your boss remembers from the last 30 days than your annual work portfolio. (Thankfully, there is a [trend toward the abolition of annual performance reviews.](#))

A caveat: your personal visibility is not an adequate reason to request this review. Keep your eyes up and view this from your leader’s perspective: will the information you convey help them achieve their goals? Does it fit with the organization’s highest priorities? Will it give them a view of potential “red flags” surrounding these priorities, thereby helping them avoid surprises?

Remember that you are meeting on their turf, and most leaders are not averse to reminding you of that, particularly if they are not getting the information they want, or if they view this as a waste of time.

Many great ideas aren’t accepted because the soil hasn’t been tilled in advance. Prepare the ground and you are more likely to harvest great results from your ideas.