

Transforming Thought Leadership into Action

Nature abhors a vacuum, and so does thought leadership. Yet, ~~all-too-often, a thought leadership vacuum that happens~~ emerges all too often these days with as everyone ~~expressing expresses~~ an expert point of view, and few people actually ~~listen~~ ing or ~~try~~ ing to act on it. Does a tree falling in the forest make a sound? Are you a thought leader if nobody follows?

This is especially challenging in the nonprofit world, ~~because~~ It here are many great ideas out there. As ~~the~~ a leader of a nonprofit organization, you are often inclined to seek out thought leaders who can potentially help your organization meet its goals. As the nonprofit saying goes, “Ask for money, get advice; ask for advice, get money.”

~~But~~ The challenge that exists is taking that thought leadership and turning it into action that can benefit your organization. In my time with Junior Achievement, I’ve seen many concepts born ~~off~~ from “thought leadership” take root or fail at our organization. Here are some things I’ve learned:

Do Research

Hearing a speech, watching a video, or reading an article on LinkedIn are all good ways to be introduced to a new or innovative concept. ~~But~~ take the time to actually research an approach you find compelling. That goes beyond reading a book or one or two articles, ~~but~~ it involves delving into the most recent thinking about the subject, as well as the history of it. Gaining a thorough grasp of the concept is important because when...not if...the idea is challenged, you will be able to articulate its value in a way that’s credible.

Consider Viability

This is especially critical for a nonprofit. A new way of doing things often costs money to implement and additional resources to maintain long-term. A “great idea” might not necessarily be great for your organization if it isn’t the right fit. Don’t make the mistake of thinking with your heart and not your head. Do the necessary homework to ensure that something ~~that~~ you believe ~~could~~ can be transformative is also doable financially.

Be Inclusive

Too often, ~~when~~ we become the champion of a new idea or new concept, we want to become the gatekeeper of this newfound knowledge. This can be due to a variety of factors, ranging from the desire to maintain control to – let’s be honest – a concern that this new approach might not stand up to intense scrutiny. As much as people claim to embrace ~~“new” and “change,”~~ it can be scary. You need to bring your team and stakeholders onboard as part of the process ~~and to~~ share what you know with them ~~what you know. If you don’t, Otherwise~~ you will be trying to promote adoption through osmosis, and that simply won’t work.

Promote Ownership

In the nonprofit world, team members and stakeholders aren't necessarily going to follow your lead as fervently as necessary if there isn't a sense of ownership. Culture change is a critical part of adopting new ways and new approaches. It's important to create opportunities for your key constituents ~~to feel~~ in order for them to feel they have a sense of ownership in the process. This means asking for honest feedback and, if needed, making necessary adjustments to the approach to increase the odds of success ~~without~~ within your organization. Not all input has to be incorporated, but people need to feel they are being listened to and their thoughts and concerns are being seriously considered. This process will not only mediate resistance, but will create champions who will help promote adoption among their peers.

For final consideration, remember that thought leadership can introduce revolutionary ideas to your organization. But know that it's not a revolution if nobody follows; ~~it's~~ it's just a very lonely and self-defeating stroll.