

Breaking the News: There's Strength in Numbers

By
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Breaking the news about what you really want to do can be one of the toughest parts of making change. Building a coalition can greatly improve your chances for a favorable response. Here's a story to illustrate.

A few years ago I began working with a woman who wanted to leave her career as a college English teacher to become a professional pianist. This was an ambitious goal especially since she hadn't touched her piano in ten years. Surprisingly, changing careers didn't require nearly as much courage as telling her parents did. Since she had chosen a safe career instead of the musical path she had once wanted, she dreaded the arguments her parents would present to keep her from making what they might consider a dreadful mistake. Yet, when she finally did tell them at the annual Christmas holiday gathering at her parent's home, their response was one of complete support. How did she pull it off? She did what politicians do. She built a coalition. Here's how.

- The coalition building process started with identifying whose support would be the most valuable. By listing all the members of her family, she quickly identified which ones she had the best relationships with and which ones would be the most supportive. (She even discovered two relatives who had already built careers as professional musicians!)
- Next she created a script for a telephone conversation she would have with each family member before her trip home. In those conversations, she told them what she wanted to do and was honest with them about how her parents might react. She asked for and received a commitment of support from each of them. She paid particular attention to enrolling her two brothers in her plan, asking them to be prepared to back her up when the time came.
- A few weeks before the event, she began the process of warming her parents up to the idea by having imaginary conversations with them several times a day. They went something like this. "Mom, Dad, I'm going back to school to study music so I can build a new career as a professional musician. It was a really tough decision but I know it's the right one for me. I really want your support."

When the day finally arrived she was scared but she knew everyone around the dinner table was pulling for her. She announced her news and held her breath. When her parents finally spoke, they wanted to know how they could help. They even offered to buy her a new piano!

Whatever it is you want to do, breaking the news will go a lot easier if you build support in advance. When building your coalition:

- Start by enlisting the support of people you trust and who believe in you.
- Add people whose opinion is valued by the person or persons you will be breaking the news to.
- Warm up your target audience well in advance with imaginary conversations that briefly state what you want to do and what you are requesting of them.

Knowledge is power! Coalitions can be a critical part of winning support for what you really want to do.

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