

Get Through to Your Boss: *Essential Communication Techniques for CAD Managers*

As a CAD manager, communicating effectively with upper management is essential. For example, to get your users the tools they need, you must convince the person holding the purse strings that those purchases are worthy investments. To make these conversations less challenging, try these field-tested techniques from CAD management expert Robert Green.

Speak the Language

Trying to convey CAD management issues to people who don't have a firm grasp on CAD technology can be vexing. But if you can't communicate your concerns and requests clearly, succinctly, and in terms that your audience appreciates, you'll be tuned out.

Focus on the following:

- Condense your proposal or problem into a core message. Think "elevator speech" — in other words, keep it brief.
- Frame your message in language that makes sense to your audience. Talk about project timelines and financial goals rather than bits, bytes, and technobabble.
- Provide specific examples of how the problem or proposal affects the bottom line. (See "Rely on ROI.")
- If management doesn't realize the importance of a risky situation, such as unsecured employee devices, equate it with potential liability.
- Help your audience understand that a new expenditure may be the key that unlocks an investment that's already been made. For example, a training program may be required to make full use of that expensive software application that the company purchased last year.

Rely on ROI

Your senior management team will only purchase something if they have a reasonable expectation of making a profit from it. Therefore, CAD managers must be able to communicate the value of their proposals using return on investment (ROI). It's a simple equation — ROI equals savings divided by costs — that has persuasive power. First, work out how much your proposed purchase can save the company, then present your calculations to management; your boss will be much more likely to address your request.

ROI Example

If an outdated workstation wastes 3 hours per rendering project, for an employee who performs 20 projects per year and earns \$45 per hour, then the amount saved by replacing that workstation is \$2,700 per year. Costs include the new workstation (\$1,895) plus the CAD manager's setup time (2 hours at \$60/hour), which equals \$2,015.

The ROI for this scenario is 134% (\$2,700 divided by \$2,015) — that means the workstation **will pay for itself** in less than a year, and the company **will continue to save money** in coming years!

Report the Right Way

It's essential to inform your management team about your activities on a regular basis, but it must be done in a consistent, concise, and unemotional way:

- Report on key personnel, systems, and projects proactively; don't wait for an update request.
- Explain how you're delivering projects on time, which tasks you've done, and what you're planning.
- Write in an executive-summary style: limit your reports to one page, and avoid jargon.
- Keep your budget updated, and always tell management about financial needs ahead of time.
- Craft brief, open-ended presentations that allow attendees to draw their own conclusions.

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