



Harvard Business Review

REPRINT H05FW8
PUBLISHED ON HBR.ORG
MARCH 06, 2020

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NICHOLAS RIGG/GETTY IMAGES

Successful leaders who shift their attention to tackling big, societal problems can be overwhelmed by how little control they actually have. But, by using network-building and collaboration skills, they can navigate a path to successful innovation and transformational change. Here are the stories of three such efforts and the six essential lessons for attracting support for change they illustrate.

Show up. Presence is powerful. Being on the scene provides a first-hand look at problems. New possibilities and new relationships might emerge. That's how successful Washington lawyers Mary Louse and Bruce Cohen started on the path to innovation.

The Cohens had been thinking about the Syrian refugee crisis, but their vague interest became more focused when they attended a fundraiser at which actress Tea Leoni, a UNICEF goodwill ambassador, reported on her recent trip to refugee camps. Leoni was struck by how many of the refugees she met had been successful professionals before fleeing the turmoil. Less than 1 percent of approximately 12 million refugees of working age would find meaningful resettlement through conventional channels – which was a great waste of human capital and talent.

The Cohens decided to see for themselves. They visited camps in Lebanon and Jordan. Talking with refugees led to the idea for an Uber-like platform to match talented people to unfilled jobs in friendly countries. To develop what became Talent Beyond Boundaries, they ventured into other unfamiliar places to find allies and build coalitions, attending numerous international meetings, gaining support and ideas from the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, NGOs, and corporate human resource executives.

Leaders find both possibilities and partners by showing up in person to places they don't usually go.

Knock on many doors. To help reduce deaths caused by drunk drivers, Jay Winsten, a public health scientist, wanted to involve the biggest players reaching the largest audiences. He knew none of them. He used classic networking principles: find people who know people; every contact leads to another; and don't ask too much from any single contact. Winsten went outside his home base to knock on doors in New York, Los Angeles, and wherever media influence was found. He built a wide circle of support from Hollywood moguls, television networks, advertising agencies, the press, and politicians.

He improvised, seizing opportunities. Winsten told his story to a top advertising executive who happened to be in the next seat on a flight to New York; she offered to provide her agency's services pro bono, which resulted in the Designated Driver Campaign's widely praised poster and slogan. He dined at celebrity chef Wolfgang Puck's famed Spago restaurant in Hollywood and approached Puck and his then-wife, co-owner Barbara Lazaroff. Spago ended up sponsoring a Hollywood reception for the embryonic Designated Driver Campaign, and Lazaroff became an adviser.

Small asks of many people proved helpful. A former CBS president introduced Winsten to a one-time rival, the former chairman and studio founder of NBC, who agreed to edit the campaign's outreach letters to fit the Hollywood creative community's values. Keeping requests modest makes it easier to get people to say yes and join coalitions with competitors.

Help your way into inner circles. By helping others with their agendas, before pushing his own, Torsten Thiele moved from being a threatening outsider to a familiar insider.

Thiele, a banker, wanted to improve the health of the oceans. He believed that adding considerations about finance and technology to climate-change discussions would accelerate change. Early on, he

didn't push the agenda of his Global Ocean Trust on the hundreds of advocacy groups and government entities worldwide who were suspicious of bankers and their motives.

Instead, he developed a reputation as someone who could be counted on to contribute without seeking credit; that reputation started to move him from outsider to insider. He wrote briefings on ocean finance and thus introduced the idea of blue natural capital. He joined working groups for behind-the-scenes planning; one of these laid the groundwork for seven Arctic nations, including the United States and Russia, signing a joint moratorium on commercial fishing for 16 years. He volunteered to support others' efforts for a Norwegian government ocean action initiative and the European Union's blue strategy. He organized a conference for the German government, staying in the background. He helped technology companies form an Ocean Data Alliance and a Coalition for Private Investment in Conservation. He assisted every sector.

Ask to be taught. You build trust by seeking to understand others' points of view first and then, as you learn from them, converting them into allies for innovations – even ones that might challenge your point of view. Being a learner and asking questions has an added bonus; the people whom you ask tend to think you're smarter than people who don't seek information.

Mary Louise and Bruce Cohen started as novices, respecting existing expertise and encouraging people to teach them about refugees and government policies – even though their talent-matching venture was a radical new approach. Ask enough questions, absorb enough knowledge, and soon you're an expert yourself.

In initial meetings with major global NGOs such as the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), Torsten Thiele didn't inject his perspective as a finance expert; instead, he showed genuine interest in the ecology, biology, and conservation aspects of climate change. "I'm learning from you," he would say. When he added his economics agenda to conversations, he could present it as aligned with theirs. WWF officials saw that Thiele took their interests seriously and eventually invited him to speak about the value of establishing blue finance at major conferences.

Plant seeds and pre-sell. On contentious matters, it's smart to hold private conversations before seeking public commitment. Lining up new relationships behind the scenes, before anyone even comes to the table, is one of the secrets of great negotiators, as expert James Sebenius has demonstrated. It's also dangerous to walk into a meeting without knowing where people stand – that is a sure way to build a community of people totally united in opposition to your agenda.

For multi-stakeholder meetings, Thiele held one-on-one advance discussions. To launch the blue finance idea at a UN conference, he invited senior bankers to join officials from an NGO and two governments. Rather than bringing them into the room right away, "where they wouldn't have understood each other (or felt it was a good use of their time)," he met with them separately, then slowly brought the parties together. He explained the issue in each group's professional language, contacted the others for their input, circled back, and slowly got buy-in. He used a similar approach

to other successful cross-sector discussions with business leaders, development bankers, and conservation organizations.

To avoid public clashes, win people over in advance. Help them understand how their perspective fits in with a larger one.

Demonstrate and deliver. The Cohens had to prove there was refugee talent before asking employers to join a market for it. To create an online talent catalogue, they hired a skilled programmer they had met in a camp in Beirut. Allies went to camps to encourage refugees to provide data. When they had 11,000 skilled professionals with English language skills – engineers, accountants, and specialist roofers, among others – they used this unique database to line up talent-hungry employers, initially in Canada and Australia. Talent Beyond Boundaries began to work with global accounting and consulting firms, national companies like Shopify in Canada, and small and mid-sized enterprises in places that were talent-hungry. The first refugees were resettled in Canada and Australia.

Thiele and his Global Ocean Trust generated private sector interest in ocean finance. In collaboration with the *The Economist's* World Ocean Summit, he helped create an innovative finance challenge won by the Seychelles Blue Bonds proposal, the world's first sovereign blue bond, to invest in marine and fisheries projects. He helped bring insurance companies into the new coalition at a 2018 Ocean Risk Summit in Bermuda, resulting in a scheme for “Blue Carbon Resilience Credits,” a cross-sector collaboration between XL, a major insurer, and The Nature Conservancy, a leading NGO. Wary adversaries found a common task that made them allies.

Jay Winsten's Designated Driver campaign was highlighted on more than 160 prime-time programs over four U.S. TV seasons, with an estimated \$100 million a year of donated airtime. It became “cool” to name a designated driver; the term made it into dictionaries. People didn't feel preached to; they embraced responsibility for others' safety. Traffic fatalities declined, due to this and other factors.

Tangible demonstrations of impact justify the faith of early supporters and attract new ones. Small ripples grow into waves of change.

In a world where networks are more important than hierarchies, power goes to the connectors. The best leaders leap over silos and across organizational, geographic, and sector divides to align others behind their agendas. They think “outside the building” to form coalitions for change, built on a foundation of respect, and trust.

Rosabeth Moss Kanter is the Arbuckle Professor at Harvard Business School, former chief editor of *Harvard Business Review*, and author of the new book *Think Outside the Building: How Advanced Leaders Can Change the World One Smart Innovation at a Time*. Follow her on Twitter [@RosabethKanter](https://twitter.com/RosabethKanter).
