

How managers can encourage employees to share their best ideas

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You had a really great idea to share with your boss that would save your employer money. The boss agreed and assigned the project to you. Which gives you yet another thing to do in your already busy schedule.

So, what happens the next time you have a great idea? You keep it to yourself.

Daniel Newton, professor of management and entrepreneurship in the University of Iowa's Tippie College of Business, has seen this happen and knows the harm it can cause. The [employee](#)'s morale suffers, and the organization loses a source of good ideas. But how prevalent is it, and what can managers do to keep lines of communication open?

Newton led a team of researchers that surveyed more than 1,000 [employees](#) in the United States and China, which included both staff members and managers. They found that, as expected, those employees who offered a suggestion and then came to regret it because the manager told them to "make it happen" were less likely to voice their ideas in the future.

"If the supervisor said, 'Good luck, you're on your own with this,' that led to the most overload and the most regret," Newton said.

However, when managers also offered their own help, guidance, and additional resources after delegating the work, employees were more likely to feel better about speaking up and would be more likely to keep communicating ideas.

"If the supervisor says, 'great idea, let's do it, I'm going to be here in the trenches with you,' employees felt less overload and experienced less regret," he said.

Strategies [managers](#) can use:

- Managers should give employees the power to run with their ideas by being there and "running" with them.
- Managers should ask employees what they think during the

[decision-making process](#), so they feel psychologically empowered in the project and give them a sense of ownership.

- It also hurts morale when an employee's idea isn't implemented. If a manager doesn't go with someone's idea, explain why. That way, the employee doesn't think their idea went into a black hole and disappeared, Newton said. It shows their idea was at least given due consideration and leadership wants to keep hearing from them.

The study, "Loaded down from speaking up: A resource-based examination of voice regret following [supervisor](#) delegation," was co-authored by Hudson Sessions of Southern Methodist University, Chak Fu Lam of City University of Hong Kong, David Welsh of Arizona State University and Wen Wu of Beijing Jiaotong University. It was published in the *Journal of Management*.

More information: Daniel W. Newton et al, Loaded Down From Speaking Up: A Resource-Based Examination of Voicer Regret Following Supervisor Delegation, *Journal of Management* (2023). [DOI: 10.1177/01492063231163583](#)

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