

How to Get Executive Commitment for Risk and Continuity



Whether you're responsible for risk management, continuity, resilience, disaster recovery, crisis management or any related field, you need to find a way to get your executives involved. Without their engagement and commitment, it's almost impossible to create a culture of preparedness. So how can you talk so that executives listen?

If you're frustrated because you can't get the C-suite to understand the importance of risk and resilience, to internalise it and advocate it at every level, use these tips for more effectively communicating and gaining the attention your programme needs.

Start by setting your expectations

If you don't know what you want, you may not recognize it when you have found it. Engagement means that one or more executives act as a champion for your programme and can clearly articulate the importance of having a programme in place. Executives should understand how resilience within the organisation is a strategic business component and one that frequently gives the organisation a competitive advantage. More often than not, executives care about far more strategic initiatives than tactical, day-to-day issues. They are more focused on things such as continued growth in revenues and profitability, increasing shareholder values, protecting brands, and similar topics. In order to engage the interest of your executive, it's important you talk about your programme within the context of a bigger picture, keeping the value of your programme aligned to the strategic initiatives of the executive.

Consider corporate culture

Keep in mind that a culture of preparedness often requires a change in company attitude; a sense that resilience is not only an accepted practice, but is an integral part of the way you do business. You'll know you have the culture of preparedness ingrained when you begin to see the following within your organisation:

- The C-suite will lead the charge for risk and preparedness programmes, taking ownership and helping you along. This starts with simple recognition about what you do, but soon will grow into recognition of the vital importance a resilient business model holds. They know they are responsible for the company and will appreciate that someone (you) monitors and manages that risk for them.
- Once the executive team and board realizes the importance of a strong programme, everyone in the enterprise will hold some accountability for managing risk and building resilience into key business operations. Resilience will be designed into critical business processes as part of any restructuring or realignment of key business processes.

- Risk-based activities will be included in strategic decision-making and everyone will understand their part. Doing business responsibly will become the foundation of your brand.

Attitudes really can change

If you're faced with a stubborn situation and it seems like a change in attitude is called for, try these tactics:

- Find an executive champion who can be a sounding board for your pitch
- Collaborate on ways to expand the continuity conversation beyond regulatory compliance by mentioning impact on earnings or brand and reputation enhancement
- Remind them of the Prudent Man concept; that is that if they ever find themselves defending their actions in a court of law, their decisions will be compared to that of a prudent person in a similar situation
- Show how your programme enhances business value, enables viable and proactive business decisions and helps to ensure achievement of the company vision and mission
- Start with a focus, like the biggest risk or a single critical component that can be minimized or improved
- Explain how your resilience programme can improve your organisation's competitive edge

Choose an advocate

Find someone at an executive level within the organisation who can serve as your advisor, sounding board and advocate to other executives. Often this will be a person who has actually suffered the ill effects of a company shutdown, fire, chemical spill or any other event that puts the spotlight on the company and its reputation in a way that could damage customer loyalty. This advocate will become someone you can go to for guidance and feedback in many areas, including the communication and engagement of your key executive.

Talk the way they talk

As a BC professional, you regularly use terms and acronyms like risk assessment, BIA, resilience, RPO, etc. However, these terms may not mean much in the executive suite. Learn to speak in the language executives speak and frame issues in a way that touches on business reasons that they can relate to. One hint: the people at the top are almost always focused on keeping the company healthy and viable with a strong brand and trustworthy reputation. If you keep returning to those points you are likely to get and keep their attention.

Often a risk and continuity professional feels it's important for executives to understand the methodology of the discipline. They may use jargon or insist on following their script for continuity,

including details that are not particularly relevant to the corporate initiatives of the executive. If you do this, it's a sure sign that you are not thinking from a high-level perspective and may be perceived as wasting the executive's time.

If you're not sure how to approach the men and women at the top level of the company, ask for coaching from someone who does or go to your advocate for help. Request honest feedback for your way of speaking, your written word, email copy and even reports you may submit—and listen carefully to the information and advice you receive. No matter where you are in your career, an informal mentor can provide invaluable feedback that will benefit you immediately and in the future.

A word about regulation

Some BC professionals prefer to work in an industry where compliance standards are mandated by governmental regulators. Others prefer the unregulated side where they may have the opportunity to develop more customized solutions. Wherever your career takes you, remember that no matter what the industry, all businesses are driven by the same core initiatives: asset protection, stakeholder accountability, brand and reputation.

Summary:

1. Do your homework. Know your industry inside and out, who your competitors are, if your organisation is subject to regulations and how your company stacks up financially
2. Talk in business terms and think strategically, incorporating business directives that matter to executives
3. Develop your value proposition, one that can be easily understood by executives. Be ready to articulate that value when the chance arises, no matter how short the time available
4. Discuss initiatives and show how operational resilience, risk, and continuity can be embedded into the business
5. Find someone to serve as your mentor, someone at a higher level in the organisation who can become your advocate in the executive offices.
6. Establish a link to other assurance disciplines; consider aligning areas such as risk, compliance, security, business continuity, etc.
7. Don't ask for, or expect, everything at one time. Start with small successes and grow as executives become more comfortable with your direction.
8. Illustrate your point with short, real-life stories. If you haven't been in a company that suffered a crisis, use a story from another company you're familiar with
9. To show you can think beyond your area, show your value in ways that are not so obvious: solve a business issue and take on projects

10. Use business terminology, not in terms that are tied to methodology, or acronyms and jargon
11. Summaries are essential; keep them short, sweet and specific
12. Discuss risks that *need* to be addressed and stick to that
13. Keep the conversation high-level, don't provide step-by-step processes

One final key: keep it brief. Executives are busy and you'll be lucky to get 30 minutes with them. You must get to your point quickly to keep their attention.

This paper was written in collaboration between Ann Pickren, president of OnSolve® and Jeff Dato, director, corporate risk (Americas) of InterContinental Hotels Group.

For more briefs, white papers and other helpful resources, visit: onsolve.com.



About OnSolve:

OnSolve is the market leader in real-time, mass notification and collaboration solutions used by the world's largest organizations. The OnSolve suite of critical communication tools is a key component of effective business continuity, emergency response, IT alerting, and security programs around the globe.