



**4 KEYS**  
to Making  
the Transition  
**from The Lab Room  
to the Board Room!**

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**Y**ou are an established technical expert (*techie*) with great ideas about how a new technology or a neat invention is going to take the world by storm and generate tons of cash! You dream about presenting a pitch to the CEO about how this idea can transform the company and generate a big bang in the industry.

Then, one day you get your chance. As you enter the elevator, the CEO comes in right behind you. He asks, "How are things going in R&D? Any good ideas to help us beat the competition?" You take a deep breath, and begin to talk. Heck, you have 23 floors and 90 seconds to make your big "presentation." You tell him about this great technology and he immediately resonates with your idea! Then the bell rings and he asks you to step out with him. "I have a few quick questions. Can you talk with me for five minutes?"

"Certainly," you respond. Your 90 seconds just turned into 5 minutes! The boardroom may not be the forum, but the hallway will do just fine. Then he starts asking you questions. Unfortunately, the questions he asks are not the questions you expected!



*At first, making the leap from R&D to the business side can seem daunting, but these key tips will help you climb higher to reach your goal and make an impact!*

*"How many of these can we sell in the next 12 months? What price do you think we can command, and what profit margins do you expect? Where do the competitors stand in this area, and do we have an intellectual property advantage? Can our sales teams support this or do we need to establish alternate distribution channels?"*

What the heck is he talking about? Units, margins, sales channels – this is for the marketing guys to figure out, isn't it? After you stumble and mumble for a few moments about the patent you applied for, you go blank. You say that you need to work some of these issues with the marketing team. He tells you that he has to go and asks you to schedule some time on his calendar when you have more of the "strategy" worked out. Your dream turned into a nightmare. What went wrong?

What happened is that you were impacted by that invisible "fence" which exists in many corporations: the fence between the technical community and the business world. Each world has its own issues, priorities, and philosophies. This is an important concept to grasp, especially for those techie individuals looking to interact with the business side of the business. So if you want to jump that invisible fence, here are 4 tips for success!



## 1. Perform a Data Paradigm Shift

When I was an engineer with AT&T T -0.4% Bell Laboratories, I needed to ensure that I always had the appropriate amount of data before I even talked to anyone about an idea for product enhancement or new product development. In addition, the data had to be accurate to the nth degree ... plus one! The data that was collected would lead the way in deciding whether the results were published or buried.

**FOCUS  
ON THE RIGHT  
THINGS**

In the business world, people do not lead with data. Instead, data is used to support an idea or position. It is still important that the data quality is verified, but the data itself is not the main focus. The focus is on the position taken for the business proposition – entering a market, developing a product, etc.

## 2. Keep the Spotlight on the Business

It many ways, an R&D community is very much like an academic community – Publish or Perish! This creates a momentum toward developing technologies that satisfy the needs of the most dominant Technical Committees or Conferences. This may NOT be the same technology that is needed to satisfy your company's or customers' needs.



As strongly as you may feel about leading-edge research activity, you need to de-emphasize it when you interface with the business side of your organization or with your customer base. Remember, in both cases, you will be dealing with results-focused individuals. They want solutions to their business problems – period. They tend to care very little about the technology actually used to deliver the solution.

So don't try to force technology down anyone's throat; this will usually lead to a perception that you are arrogant. Here's a clue: if you find yourself saying, "My management/the marketing department/the customer just doesn't get it," the problem most likely is that you just don't get it. You're focused on the technology, not on the business.



### 3. Make a Great Impression



*Making a great impression includes not only a professional appearance but also confidence and preparedness.*



In the technical world, if you can design a complex integrated circuit, no one cares if you mumble your words, have messy hair, and wear a pocket protector with lots of pens. On the business side, there is an emphasis on personal appearance and the ability to successfully communicate and interact with a diverse set of people.

The appearance part of this is pretty straightforward. In these days of casual dress codes, you may not even need to make a huge investment in suits. Get some nice dress clothes, some khakis, maybe a couple of nice golf shirts, and relax ... but be neat.

Regarding the interpersonal skills aspect, take time to assess your strengths and weaknesses in this area. Can you speak clearly? Do you present in a monotone voice? Communication is key! Whether it be to internal executives or to a customer, your ability to communicate will play a key role in establishing yourself in the business arena.

### 4. Keep Your Head UP!

**S U C C E S S**

In the technical environment, keeping your “head down” in your work is encouraged: go in the lab, become one with the subject matter, and emerge with a hypothesis. In the business world, it’s all about keeping your head up and being aware of the market environment dynamics and the customers’ needs.

Some of the most successful people in business today achieved their great results by being aware of the market, the competition, their colleagues, the executive team, great talent, new ideas, and organizational dynamics. If you want to emulate them, you need to keep your head UP.

I hope the next time you meet your CEO in the elevator it turns into an offer from him/her to join the next executive meeting to present your idea in more detail. By keeping these 4 tips in mind, you will be able to jump the invisible “fence” and maximize your opportunities you make and the impact you have in the business side of business!