

Leading Initiatives



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Sherry's Work Context

LBL

- ~4500 employees, ~500 postdocs
- Basic and applied research and development; no classified work
- Many science areas: computing sciences, chemistry, physics, materials, energy research, life science, ...

My division – Applied Math and Computational Research

- Work mode in between academia and industry
 - Research new algorithms → software → apps domains
- “soft” funding; projects come from proposals; primary sponsor is DOE
- Most software is public domain
- Annual performance rating highly correlated with:
 - publication, software release/use, funding
- It is critical to keep updating knowledge



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Kathryn's Current Work Context

Google

- ~140,000 employees spread across Search, Ads, Maps, Cloud, ML, Other Bets, etc.
- Cloud vs the rest of Google

My job

- Cloud Efficiency Programs: Metrics!
 - Engineering efficiency
 - Inventory efficiency
 - Use Google's and the planet's resources wisely
- Organizational alignment between multiple large (~1000 people) organizations
- End to end thinking from node performance, bin packing, to how much we buy for locations and individual customers



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Leading New Initiatives

- Initiatives are non-permanent activities that may or may not become institutionalized
 - Workshops on new topics, new research directions, grants, meetup/employee resource group, interview process, university outreach initiation, improves community, job, etc.
- Why would you want to lead one?
 - To get something done you believe in

CONTRIBUTES TO CAREER ADVANCEMENT



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Leading Initiatives: Key Elements

- Your passion for it
- Clear Statement of Objective
- Determine & Obtain needed Resources
- Desire to make progress and iterate on tasks
- Persist



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Building New Programs

- Programs/projects are semi-permanent and embedded in the organizational structure
 - Both political and technical components
 - Requires leadership – one or more committed advocates who are willing to do the work
 - The results may take much longer than you think they should
- Why would you want to build one?
 - To get something done you believe in!



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Exercise

15 minutes: Get in pairs of 2 & 5 minutes per person

- What new initiative are you thinking about?
- Who would be good on your team & why?
- Who would be interested in sponsoring it and why?
- What is your next step to get to launch your initiative?

5 minutes for reporting out



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Sherry's lessons learned leading initiatives/programs

- Good idea!
- The team: putting together an enthusiastic team with the right skill sets
 - Communicating across different disciplines
- Who is your potential sponsor?
 - What are the open problems your sponsor cares about?
- Writing the proposal
 - If you are an expert, highlight that!
 - Prepare well if you are not already an expert in this area (and often you are not with new initiatives!)



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Kathryn's lessons learned leading initiatives/programs

- Passion for the idea
- The Team
 - Working with people I learn from and that give me joy
 - Upskilling, coaching, & empowering junior team members
- Socializing ideas with trusted peers and senior leadership
 - Takes time and effort to influence large organizations
- Institutionalizing initiative
 - Make the initiative succeed even if you leave it



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Dealing with Setbacks & Failure

- Define scope & timeline before you start
 - Example, you submit a proposal
 - Make a plan before the decision for both acceptance/rejection
- Somethings do not work out ... & are out of your control
- When it happens ... take a deep breath and do not take it personally
 - Recent 'Hidden Brain' episode suggests you will learn more from your failures if you put them in a wider context vs it was all your fault
 - What is under your control or not?
 - What can you do differently?
- Don't let FEAR of Failure keep you from trying



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Resources from prior speakers

- Babcock, L. & Laschever, S. *Women Don't Ask*.
- Rock, D. *Quiet Leadership*.
- W. Ury, *Getting Past No: Negotiating in Difficult Situations*
- Fisher and Ury. *Getting to yes: Negotiating agreement without giving in*
- Patterson et al. *Crucial Conversations*. McGraw-Hill Education, 2009
- 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/15/your-money/15money.html>
- Kolb. *Be your Own Best Advocate*. Harvard Business Review, 2015
- <https://hbr.org/2015/11/be-your-own-best-advocate>
- <https://hbr.org/2017/11/how-to-stay-focused-if-youre-assigned-to-multiple-projects-at-once>

Q & A



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