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Internal Approval Toolkit: Building Support for Security Initiatives

How security leaders get others to say yes

Security leaders often recognize opportunities to strengthen their programs, gain outside expertise, improve visibility, or accelerate strategic objectives. Yet many worthwhile initiatives fail to gain approval.

The challenge is rarely the initiative itself.

More often, the proposal is presented as a security need when decision-makers are evaluating business value, competing priorities, and organizational impact.

Successful security leaders understand that gaining approval requires more than identifying a need. It requires building a business case, aligning stakeholders, and communicating value in terms leadership cares about.

Why Good Ideas Get Stuck

Many security proposals struggle because they focus on:

- Security activities rather than business outcomes
- Features rather than organizational benefits
- Risks without explaining business impact

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- Costs without demonstrating value
- Leading with the solution before establishing organizational need

Before introducing an initiative, ask yourself:

- What problem does this solve for the organization?
- Why does it matter now?
- What groups or business functions will be positively impacted?
- Who needs to support it?
- What will improve if this initiative is successful?

Answering these questions creates the foundation for a stronger approval process. More importantly, it demonstrates that the initiative has been evaluated through a business lens rather than a security lens, increasing its credibility with decision-makers.

Positioning the Initiative Internally

The most effective discussions focus on business impact and decision enablement, rather than security activities alone.

Risk and exposure

"This initiative will help us better understand and reduce areas of exposure that could impact operations, reputation, or financial performance."

Business alignment

"This ensures our security efforts remain aligned with organizational priorities and positioned to support key business objectives."

Investment discipline

"This enables better decisions about where to invest, where to optimize, and how to maximize the value of existing resources."

Executive engagement

"This strengthens our ability to communicate security's contribution and engage leadership in decisions that affect risk and resilience."

Before Requesting Approval

Before seeking approval, take time to understand the environment in which the decision will be made.

Stakeholders

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- Who can influence the decision?
- Who can actively support the initiative?
- Who could unintentionally delay it?
- Whose endorsement would make approval easier?

Budget Context

- Does the initiative support an existing priority?
- How will funding decisions be evaluated?
- What competing initiatives exist?

Potential Barriers

- What objections are likely?
- What concerns need to be addressed proactively?
- What information will leadership need to feel confident moving forward?

Successful approvals often depend on these conversations occurring before the formal request is ever made.

Address Common Leadership Questions

"What will change?"

Leaders often approve initiatives when they can clearly see the outcome.

Examples include:

- Improved visibility into risk
- Greater confidence in security decisions
- Increased operational resilience
- Better alignment of investments and priorities
- More effective communication with executive leadership
- Accelerated progress toward strategic objectives

"Why should we act now?"

Position the initiative in the context of:

- Current business risks
- Strategic priorities

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- Organizational growth or change
- Leadership and board expectations

"What is the return?"

Return is often demonstrated through:

- Better understanding and reduction of risk
- More effective allocation of resources
- Increased resilience and preparedness
- Improved support for strategic initiatives
- Improved decision-making and leadership confidence

"What happens if we do nothing?"

This question is often overlooked.

Explain the likely impact of maintaining the status quo, including:

- Continued blind spots
- Growing inefficiencies
- Misaligned investments
- Increased difficulty demonstrating security value
- Missed opportunities to improve resilience and decision-making

Next Steps

In general, people don't approve security initiatives. They approve business outcomes. Building the connection between security needs and business value is often the difference between a stalled proposal and an approved initiative.

Organizations that need additional perspective or support may benefit from our experienced advisors who can help strengthen the business case and communicate value in a way that resonates with leadership. Contact Us today to find out more of how we can be of assistance.

Visit the Security Executive Council web site to view more resources in the Security Leadership : Executive Communication series.

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About the Security Executive Council

The SEC is the leading research and advisory firm focused on corporate security risk mitigation solutions. Having worked with hundreds of companies and organizations we have witnessed the proven practices that produce the most positive transformation. Our subject matter experts have deep expertise in all aspects of security risk mitigation strategy; they collaborate with security leaders to transform security programs into more capable and valued centers of excellence. Watch our 3-minute video to learn more.

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Website: https://www.securityexecutivecouncil.com/

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