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Getting Past Dr. No

He works at retail companies, transportation organizations and manufacturing firms. He might work in IT, operations or finance. He seems reasonable, smart and entirely committed to your company. But for whatever reason, he does not like radio frequency identification technology, and thus marshal's all of his political weight to kill RFID projects before they begin. He is Dr. No.

I've heard about this character from end users who are frustrated by his opposition, and from vendors who say he is all that stands between them and a successful deployment. He is a fact of life, and he's tough to deal with. He doesn't go away—even if you can get your company to deploy a solution.



There is really only one surefire way to deal with Dr. No: Get a group of loyal RFID team members, some baseball bats and take him out in a dark alley. No, I'm kidding, of course, but I do know a few frustrated individuals who have neared that point of frustration. The good news is that there *are* ways in which to deal with Dr. No. Here are some suggestions.

Shift the focus: Often, Dr. No feels threatened by RFID. The impression, he feels, is that he's not doing a good job, and that RFID might fix things, thereby threatening his standing. Shifting the focus away from improving current shortcomings can make the technology seem less threatening. I know of an RFID project leader who brought in a Six Sigma team, and used Six Sigma quality improvements as the rationale for one project. This made it seem that RFID was just part of the company's ongoing efforts to achieve Six Sigma quality.

This strategy also worked at a company that positioned an RFID project as part of its ongoing efforts to reduce its on-hand inventory (then valued at more than \$1 billion). At another firm that was planning to close its warehouses, RFID was introduced to manage one central facility. And some retailers are positioning RFID as a way to respond to online sellers,

such as Amazon.com.

Make Dr. No the hero: If, in spite of his objections, the pilot goes ahead, it might be possible to let Dr. No take credit for its success. Put aside your ego, and let him position the project as his baby and present the savings and benefits to higher management. I know this worked at one company—Dr. No turned out to be a huge champion of RFID, speaking at several RFID events and taking credit for a project he'd once wanted to kill.

Rally the troops: Dr. No is often unaffected by the problems that RFID can solve, so he has no burning desire to try a new technology. But there are people whose jobs would be made easier, and whose results would be better if the technology were deployed. And those individuals can become your allies. You have to be careful, of course, not to make it appear that the RFID team is leading a revolt against Dr. No. Instead, it has to be a subtle effort to win hearts and minds at the grassroots levels. I've seen this strategy work—the head of the area reaping the benefit becomes a champion for the technology, and a strong counterweight to Dr. No.

Appeal to the CEO: It's not easy to obtain buy-in at the highest level, especially if RFID hasn't yet proved it can deliver real value to an enterprise. All CEOs are constantly being pitched to regarding the "next great technology," and they are rightly skeptical about what they hear. But occasionally, going straight to the top works. I am told that Walmart made the shift to item-level apparel tracking after its RFID team set up two rounders full of clothing for a demonstration to senior executives. One rounder contained clothes tagged with RFID, while the other had clothes with standard bar codes. The team timed how long it took to perform an inventory count with RFID versus bar codes, just as we did a few years ago at our RFID in Fashion event in New York City (see Live Demo: RFID Put to the Test). After witnessing RFID's speediness in action, the CEO backed plans to use the

technology to manage apparel.

I should point out that Dr. No is probably not a bad person. He likely believes he has the company's best interests at heart, and might feel he is protecting the firm from wasting millions of dollars on a new technology that he thinks won't deliver what it promises. So my advice is to treat him with respect. Try to understand his concerns, address them as best you can, and use the strategies above whenever possible to prove that RFID can deliver value. Maybe, just maybe, Dr. No will see the light.

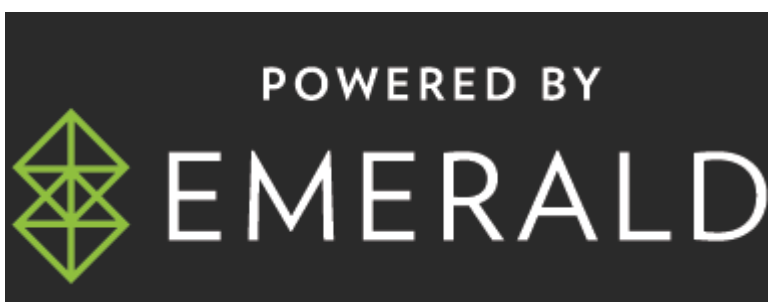
Mark Roberti is the founder and editor of RFID Journal. If you would like to comment on this article, click on the link below. To read more of Mark's opinions, visit the RFID Journal Blog, the Editor's Note archive or RFID Connect.



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