

John's guide to getting things done in the Skypark

Preface: Though not currently a Board member, I (Wilson) have served on Skypark boards for somewhere around twenty years total, so I think I am qualified to offer some suggestions regarding how, and how not, to get the Skypark Association to do something you want done. I speak of what are basically “discretionary” projects or actions, by which I mean ideas which may have merit but are not part of our core function of operating the airport.

Many owners seem to think all they need to do is show up at a Board meeting, make their wants known, politely or not, and “someone” will make it happen, no more effort on their part needed. In my experience over the years occasionally that has worked, but for many reasons it often has not. When it didn't work I often observed that the proponent of the idea, whatever it was, frequently exited the process angry and apparently with little understanding of the dynamics of the situation or why his/her idea didn't fly. Contained within the paragraphs below are a few clues as to what likely went wrong.

Part A: Points to remember

1. The Skypark is a large “partnership” made up of 63 individual and equal interests. It is a representative democracy. If you, as one of these 1/63 interests, want your other partners to do something for you (i.e. you are promoting something you yourself think should be done), then you need to have the support, or at least the acquiescence, of your fellow partner/owners.
2. If the majority truly wants the thing done and it is a thing that is both possible and practical, it will almost certainly happen with little prompting. If the majority definitely does not want it done it probably will not happen regardless. If they are ambivalent, the outcome rests on the ability of the proponent(s) to sway the ambivalent.
3. You can get this needed support from your fellow owner/members by going directly to them as individuals and convincing them it is something they should support, but obviously it is much more efficient if you can first get the support of the Board of Directors by convincing these fellow owner/members it is something they should support. The Board may then be able to cause it to happen without further effort on your part, but if not at the very least they will be a powerful ally in bringing the partnership majority on board. If you find the Board doesn't immediately embrace your idea, or worse seems actively opposed, read the next point.....
4. Be honest with yourself; don't engage in self-delusion. Although you are firmly convinced whatever it is you want done is such an open-and-shut slam dunk marvelous deal that every rational person simply MUST be supportive of it, be a realist and accept that others, misguided though you are convinced they are, could be seeing it in an entirely different perspective.
5. Most important of all, you must keep in mind that you are engaged in a real-world exercise in interpersonal relations. Regardless of how you personally feel about your partners in this Skypark enterprise, in order to prevail it is critical you accept that they are in actual fact your PARTNERS who must be motivated to support you willingly. You CANNOT simply order them to comply with your wishes. They are your equals, not unpaid minions or indentured servants; if you treat them or communicate with them as if they were it is almost an absolute certainty that your quest will be doomed to failure.

Next Page: Some additional interpersonal relations tips. (Actually an expansion of item 5, above.)

Part B: Expanding on the previous page, some additional interpersonal relations tips.

1. Above all, don't be confrontational or obnoxious!! You are trying to get people who are your equal partners firmly on your side. If your idea of how to make this happen is to be abrasive, snide, insulting, dismissive, superior, demanding or otherwise obnoxious you might as well not even make the effort. Act this way and I can assure you that these people, these equal partners you are trying to recruit, will not be intimidated nor will they be impressed with you as a person, and will almost certainly simply shut down on you no matter how compelling your case is.
2. Get support from others & go in with evidence of it. Stating you speak for the "masses" when you do not is a turn-off. I have listened to far too many presentations to the Board where the proponent asserts "everyone wants this done" yet somehow all these other supporting members are never in evidence nor is any documentation of their support presented. Believe it or not, in my experience the Board members typically do in fact have a fairly good sense of how the overall membership feels about things (it's their job, after all), so be sure if you claim support of others you actually have it and can demonstrate it.
3. Forget that sense of entitlement: Yes, some of your fellow partners do, of their own personal volition, take on the responsibility of ramrodding unessential discretionary projects that are suggested by others. But regardless of what you may think, none of these partners "owe" you this service. If you initially present something you want done to your partners and find that in spite of your best efforts at presenting it no one steps forward to do it for you, take that for exactly what it is: A clear sign that none of them find your project sufficiently compelling to make them volunteer to accomplish it in your behalf. So, go to tip #4....
4. Back up and re-evaluate: Failure of your partners to embrace your project on the first go is not necessarily the end. You may be able to salvage things. But don't beat the dead horse. Simply trying over and over in the same way to get others on board without changing any element of your approach does nothing beyond wasting everyone's time and further alienates potential supporters. Instead, try tip #5...in fact, why not just start off with tip #5...
5. When seeking Board support, be a full partner in advancing your project: Here's a BIG tip, maybe even the biggest of all: Volunteer to actually get the project done yourself and/or round up supporting individuals to do it with you. Assuming your partners are not absolutely against it, it may be that the only thing stopping approval of a project is that, in their view, the benefit received does not justify the effort required to make it happen – a perfectly valid decision item. Alter that equation and things may click.

If what you want done is something simple that you can do personally, fine, you volunteer to do it if they approve it. If it is something more complex and/or involves substantial resources, then you take on and accomplish all the necessary but annoying & time consuming legwork & research the project requires. When you have all elements covered, including valid cost estimates if appropriate, prepare & present a "shovel ready" package that can be considered ***with all relevant questions already addressed***, voted on and, if approved, undertaken without much further effort by anyone. If there is any hope for your project at all, this will go a long, long way toward insuring whatever it is will actually happen.

Good luck!

John