

SKYLINE G

The Science and Art of Influencing

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“Influence is 15% professional knowledge and 85% the ability to express ideas, to assume leadership, and to arouse enthusiasm among people.” -- Dale Carnegie

Influencing others is the ability to persuade other people to support your ideas and positions. A leader with strong influencing skills creates buy-in and support for their ideas by building consensus and gaining cooperation. It's essential in gaining commitment to vision, mission, organization, and team goals.

In fact, a 2015 survey from Korn Ferry found that influencing others becomes more and more important the higher up a leader is in the organization. If you have refined this skill, you can gather more support for your ideas and programs making it easier to reach your leadership goals.

Whether you are a new leader or more experienced, it's important to stay up-to-date with new influencing techniques. In fact, developing influencing skills is one of the top five competencies that leaders we work with seek to improve.

Here's everything you need to know to develop these necessary skills:

Ways to Influence Others

In general, there are two ways leaders tend to express influencing behaviors. The first is to position the “inclusive” (or feminine) expressions of the “WIIFT” (What's In It For Them) with stakeholders. This allows them to gain agreement from others and alignment with a goal.

Those leaders who use this expression of influencing present their ideas to others with a focus on what it means for them, not the leader. This approach is more collaborative and takes other's needs into consideration. Our own research found that most people find this form of influencing others more effective.

The second expression of influencing others that leaders tend to use is more of “directive” (or masculine approach). It involves positioning the merit of their ideas and leveraging their authority. This approach focuses on clarity of the message and gaining buy-in in part through the leader's positional power. Our aforementioned research found the key to this expression is to be confident in your position and to ensure others clearly about the idea's positive points.

The “Science” of Influencing Others

Be an Expert in Your Subject

Being influential is about providing clarity and direction. However, you can only be as influential as your knowledge, insight, and the sense of direction that you possess. This is your authority on the matter.

Become masterful at the areas in which you plan to exert influence. Even if you are just trying to get someone to follow another expert, do your homework and be an expert on why that person should be followed.

Employ Reciprocity

People are more likely to listen to you if they feel you've done the same for them. It's the Rule of Reciprocity and it causes humans to acquire a sense of obligation to return favors to those who've helped them before. This sense of giving back, in kind, comes from an authentic place, it is not contrived and is almost impossible to resist.

Reciprocity is instinctive. Paul Seabright, Professor of Economics and author of *The Company of Strangers*, says it is part of our "inherited psychology." Likewise, persuasion experts Robert Cialdini and Steve Martin say that reciprocity is a fundamental human nature and is prevalent in every human culture and ethnicity.

When someone gives us something, we want to repay the debt; it doesn't matter if the person in question is a family member or a complete stranger. This is particularly important when you're trying to get people to listen to you. In fact, a 2016 survey on leadership from Dale Carnegie Training found that in the USA, nearly 90 percent of employees said it's important or very important that their leaders truly listen and respect their ideas.

Following the Rule of Reciprocity, if you can show people you're willing to hear what's important to them, they'll listen to what's important to you.

Here are some things you can do to show people that you are open to their ideas and opinions and willing to be influenced:

- Ask questions, both for clarification and to explore. Don't ask questions with a mindset of disproving or challenging. Allow yourself to be curious, and where there is a challenge, approach it as exploration and discovery, not as an argument.
- Speak up and support other's ideas and initiatives whenever you can.
- Show genuine interest in other people. Build relationships.

Invite people to ask questions. Doing so helps them gain clarity and gives you the opportunity to address incorrect information they might believe about your position.

Not everyone will agree with you. While you want to be open to the information and arguments others bring, you should stand firm in your conviction. If you change your position often, others won't know what your position really is. People won't see you as a leader who has clarity of purpose and direction, but rather someone who is uncertain and indecisive.

The “Art” of Influencing Others

Acknowledge the Emotional State of Others

When looking to influence another person, you need to be aware of and acknowledge the emotions that you see, feel from them, or anticipate they will experience. Are they anxious, frustrated, or concerned? Are they excited, happy, or sad? Unless people feel heard and acknowledged, they're won't be influenced.

In fact, a 2017 survey from Businessolver found that 82 percent of employees view empathy as a key way to have influence.

Focus on empathy and meeting the needs of the other person and the situation. Check in with the other person to acknowledge, inquire, and clarify. You can also connect emotionally (if appropriate).

Ignoring others' emotions will cause people to see leaders as uncaring and only concerned about their own welfare, yet digging too deeply can be inappropriate and intrusive. Learn to balance this based on circumstance and audience.

Find Common Ground

Identify something that you have in common with the person or people you are trying to influence. This will go a long way in opening them up to hearing what you have to say. For others to support your position they have to be willing to listen to you.

Finding common ground might not be directly related to the topic. For example, if someone is trying to convince another person to give them a job interview, they might try to leverage the fact that they both went to the same college. This can open a conversation that could lead to an interview.

The next time you want to influence someone, try this:

- Get clear on your position.
- Identify one or two areas where you share common ground the person you are trying to influence.
- Use your common ground to open communication and begin your influencing effort.

Determine What's In It For Them (WIIFT)

Common ground builds a connection between you and the other person. However, you will need to highlight what's in it for them if you want them to change a behavior or belief. What do they care about and how will you or your ideas positively impact that?

To do this, you need to show you understand their point of view. In fact, the aforementioned Dale Carnegie Training study found that 80 percent of employees said it's important for a leader to see their point of view. However, just 62 percent of leaders did that consistently.

To achieve this consider the following qualities:

- Acknowledge the other person's interest and how your idea relates. For example, a goal they have and how what you are asking can help them achieve it.
- Pay attention to their reaction. Ask probing questions to explore how they feel and what they're thinking.
- If you can't identify a link between your idea and what's in it for them, ask them for one. For example, "How do you think this idea could support your goals?"

Get Evidence

People change their minds when they experience -- either firsthand or vicariously -- a reason to change. Firsthand experience is not practical in all of the situations that you will be trying to influence others, but you can find a real-world story to help others understand.

Be prepared with evidence to support your position. Don't rely solely on what you've generated to convince the other person. Find experts and benchmarking data from sources that confirm your research or perspective. Use anecdotal evidence as well.

Use Vivid Language

When you relay your evidence, do so in a way that resonates with your audience. Evidence alone is not enough, context matters. Telling real stories is great because people can connect with that. People remember stories. They aren't likely able to regurgitate facts and numbers, but they can certainly retell stories. Use metaphors and analogies that help other people see the same thing in a different context. This allows them to be less attached to their current position and understand that the position they are holding doesn't make sense.

Influence Up

Quite frankly, senior leaders are busier than you. They have many things on their plates and numerous people vying for their time and attention. When you approach a senior leader, what you communicate is critical in order to influence them. This requires confidence to take the lead and take initiative based on your expertise.

Given the positional power, this can feel different and even intimidating. We often expect our bosses to “just know” because they are the boss. That is not always the case. You will sometimes have more expertise than your boss in certain areas, and you must keep that in mind when influencing up.

You Were Hired to Contribute Your Expertise

Influencing up can be challenging for a lot of people. It doesn't have to be, though, if you follow these steps:

- Recognize that you are in the role you are in because of your expertise.
- Come prepared with a reason, a plan, and your request.
- Recognize that, with a few exceptions, senior leadership will acknowledge the value of your effort and will not dismiss it if your intent is positive -- even if the idea is not a fit.
- Know what you want to do, to happen, or to be different as a result of your influence.
- Help senior leadership link what you want to organizational goals.

About Skyline Group

Skyline Group is the leading provider of scalable leadership solutions. We are revolutionizing the leadership development industry with our C4X coaching platform. C4X is the only coaching solution that gives you the ability to develop all of your leaders consistently and systematically from onboarding to executive development. C4X combines a flexible technology platform (integrated assessment, content, metrics, and coach management system) with the personalized impact and connection of 1:1 coaching. Learn more at www.SkylineGroup.com and www.C4X.com.

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