

RICK'S TIPS

Rick's Tips explores the competencies necessary for successful leadership and provides activities to assist with the development and mastery of these skills.

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INFLUENCING

“Influence may be the highest level of human skills.”

– Anonymous

The ability to influence and persuade outcomes is a competency everyone should master. Whether you are in sales, management, an hourly worker on the shop floor, or a supervisor your ability to influence outcomes is critical. When you need to get something done or a situation resolved, it is easy to do when you have rank and position power. Often, we have neither. We must be able to articulate and express thoughts and ideas. It comes down to our ability to influence our environment. Here are some strategies for you to develop. Master them and you can change outcomes drastically and learn to have more control over your environment.

Positional and personal power do not guarantee that people will be committed to helping you develop and implement your strategies let alone follow you. You will gain leverage to actually exert this power by developing strategies to influence people and interact with them at a deeper level. The people who are seen as most effective in gaining the commitment of others use “*core influencing tactics*”; a combination of approaches including reasoning, inspiring and consulting.

- **Reasoning:** Using logical arguments and factual evidence to persuade people that your strategy, proposal, or request is viable and likely to help the business achieve its goals.
- **Inspiring:** Presenting a strategy, proposal, or request in a way that arouses enthusiasm and appeals to people’s values and ideals.
- **Consulting:** Seeking people’s participation in planning a strategy, activity, or change, and being willing to modify a proposal to deal with their concerns and suggestions.

REASONING

More than likely you are already employing reasoning as a way to influence. You probably refer to data and statistics to provide evidence to show that your plan or proposal is likely to succeed. Examples of reasoning, which has also been called rational persuasion, include explaining the reasons for your request, explaining how the other person would benefit if he or she supported you, and providing evidence to show that your plan or proposal is likely to succeed.

Another aspect of effective reasoning is anticipating people’s concerns and dealing with them directly. Review some possible problems with your proposal and show how they might be overcome. Show how you propose to avoid problems, overcome obstacles, and minimize risks.

Reasoning is used more frequently when people are trying to convince those who are in a higher position on the organizational chart than when they are dealing with their colleagues on the same level or with people who report to them. That may be because people are used to the idea that they have to convince their bosses, but feel that simply telling their subordinates what to do is sufficient. By developing effective influencing skills managers may rely less on the hierarchy and position and more on delegation and on cross-functional teams.

To move toward your objective to be more influencing keep in mind even though reasoning is, in general, one of the most effective ways to influence people, it cannot be relied on as the only way to do so. While logic may be compelling for many people, others are influenced more by appeals to their emotions and values. Gaining true commitment, rather than mere compliance, engages the heart as well as the mind.

INSPIRING

While reasoning appeals to the head, inspiring appeals to the heart. Inspiring aims to develop enthusiasm and commitment by linking your proposals to people's values, hopes, and ideals. Values that can be particularly inspiring include the desire to accomplish something worthwhile, to do something exceptional, or to participate in an exciting effort to make things better.

Inspiring is one of the three core tactics that builds commitment, but it may be the most difficult one to learn to use. You may think, I'm just not rah-rah that way. It's important to realize, however, that inspiring does not need to be done with great fanfare. It can be just as effective in a quiet one-on-one conversation. The more you know about the values of the people you work with, the easier it will be to link their needs and hopes to the work to be done. This brings us to another key point about influencing: Effective influence is built on strong relationships with specific people. Its foundation is trust, which takes time and a series of interactions to develop and grow.

CONSULTING

Consulting is a third strategy you can use to influence and persuade. It can take many forms including asking people to help plan activities that will require their support, presenting your proposal as tentative and asking for suggestions, encouraging the expression of concerns or doubts about your plan, and modifying your plan to address concerns and incorporate suggestions. How you react to ideas and suggestions is key to establishing trust and being influential.

Effective consulting results from a genuine desire for people's input; it should never be used insincerely. The input must be valued and used, or your ability to influence people will diminish over time. When it is done well, it proves to be the most effective and useful approach to gaining commitment. Consulting can be effective in all directions—with people above, below, or at your same level on the organization chart.

SUPPORT TACTICS

There are several other approaches to influence that can be effective in certain situations or when used in conjunction with the core tactics cited (Reasoning, Inspiring, Consulting). We call them "support tactics." Overall, the research indicates that they are less effective than the core tactics, perhaps because they are harder to use well or because they can have more severe downsides. More often than not, support tactics used on their own will lead to compliance rather than true commitment. Support tactics include:

- **Recognizing:** Complimenting people and being friendly and polite to encourage their cooperation.
- **Personal Appeal:** Appealing to people's feelings of loyalty and friendship to gain their support and assistance.
- **Exchanging:** Making an explicit or implicit promise that people will be given rewards or a share of the benefits if they comply with your request or support your proposal.
- **Coalition Building:** Seeking the aid of others to persuade a person to do something, or using the support of others as an argument for why he/she should agree.

RECOGNIZING

Recognition can be a powerful motivator and can include compliments on past accomplishments, recognition of being the most qualified for a task, and expressing understanding and concern for any inconvenience involved with your request. Recognition tends to be underused however, when done sincerely, it can contribute to more positive relationships, help people feel better about their work, and can build your own personal power.

Sincerity is obviously the key here. Taking the time to acknowledge a job well done or to compliment a person on new skills can build a foundation of trust and respect that is important for effective influencing.

PERSONAL APPEAL

Many people occasionally make requests that are based on their friendship with others. If the relationship is indeed friendly, most people are willing to comply with an occasional personal appeal. This approach becomes problematic, though, when such appeals become too frequent or when what the person is asking is not commensurate with the closeness of the relationship.

EXCHANGING

Exchanging is the “You scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours” tactic. Essentially, you offer either an explicit or an implicit promise that the person will get something in return for helping you out.

Sometimes seen as a bribe, in actuality, exchange is often the currency on which many organizations operate. Colleagues helping each other out on a project, covering for someone who is on vacation, and vice versa, your boss extending the deadline on a project so you can focus on a more urgent matter that she would like you to tackle are all examples of exchanging.

The key to effective use of exchange is in the follow-through. When you tell someone “I owe you a lunch” but never buy it, your ability to influence him in the future may be compromised.

COALITION BUILDING

This tactic involves getting the support of a third party. Examples of coalition building include mentioning the names of credible people who support your plan or proposal, bringing someone with more expertise along with you to a meeting, and asking other people to speak out in favor of your proposal.

Used effectively, coalitions can be powerful methods of getting things done, especially if you have little power on your own. However, they can also result in real resistance if they are used covertly. People can easily feel ganged up on and manipulated by this approach. Therefore, it should be used only in an overt way: “Would it be okay with you if I invited Susan to our meeting? She’s a real expert in this area, and I think she has some compelling arguments that you should hear.”

LAST RESORT TACTICS

Finally, there are two tactics that should be used only as a last resort and sparingly. Even when used well, these approaches will likely result in compliance rather than commitment. They often damage relationships and decrease your personal power:

Establishing Authority: Establishing the legitimacy of a request by showing that you have the authority or the right to make it or by verifying that it is consistent with organizational policies, rules, practices, or procedures.

Pressuring: Using threats, demands, intimidation, or persistent reminders to persuade someone to do what you want.

ESTABLISHING AUTHORITY

It's important to use this only if your authority has been questioned. Leading off a conversation with this tactic shuts the door on the possibility of gaining commitment. Even when a request is legitimate, most people simply do not get enthused about work because they are *supposed* to do it.

PRESSURING

At its extreme, pressure could be a threat to fire someone or to go to the boss. However, pressure often rears its head in more subtle ways, such as insistent, nagging reminders, constant monitoring, and sending a copy of a memo to someone's boss.

Pressure can heighten people's resistance and make compliance less, rather than more, likely. It almost always eats away at your personal power and your ability to gain support in the future.

When pressure is necessary, it's important to describe the problem and the consequences of noncompliance very specifically. And then, follow through with what you said you were going to do.

DEVELOPING AN INFLUENCING PLAN

As a strategist, being prepared for a key conversation in which you will try to influence someone is fundamental for success. Whether you assess the situation and develop a game plan beforehand or are responding as you go during a discussion, there are some basic guidelines and questions that will help you understand the situation and decide on a plan of action.

- Be clear about the purpose of your influence attempt—what results you want and how you will know when you have achieved them. Your purpose should be focused and specific and should describe what you want the person to do as a result.
- Analyze the situation and the players as thoroughly as you can. Determine which approaches are most likely to be successful, given your analysis.
- Identify an appropriate combination of tactics to help you get off to a good start and get the results you want.
- Let the conversation evolve; don't stick too strictly to a planned script. However, always keep your purpose firmly in mind.

Finally, effective influence is “NOT” a sneaky, manipulative ploy to trick other people into doing what you want. The best influencers are overt about their desire to gain your support. They will admit that they are trying to convince you and truly believe that you will both be well served by the approach they advocate. If you try to convince others covertly you are asking for trouble.

Using your power and influence to gain support for strategic initiatives is a key to being part of the strategy-making process. The most effective strategists use a combination of approaches to gain support, varying their tactics to suit the specific situation in front of them.

ACTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

- **Anticipating people’s concerns and dealing with them directly:** Review beforehand some possible problems with your idea or proposal and show how they might be overcome. Show how you propose to avoid problems, overcome obstacles, and minimize risks.
- **Use reasoning to influence all levels:** Use the same influencing strategies you use to convince your bosses instead of simply telling your subordinates what to do. Rely less on the hierarchy and position and more on delegation and on cross-functional teams.
- **How do you find out what people’s values are?** Ask them! “What’s most important to you about your job?” or “What do you like best about it? or What do you like least?” Another way is to pay attention to their behavior and find out what gets them excited? How do they spend their discretionary time?
- **Use the itemized response:** After someone offers an idea or suggestion, first tell them what you liked about it. Preserve the valuable parts of the idea so you can build on them. *Then*, if you have any concerns, you can discuss them.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Influencer: The Power to Change Anything](#) by Kerry Patterson

[How to Win Friends & Influence People](#) by Dale Carnegie

[Influence](#) by Robert Cialdini

[Reading People](#) by Jo-Ellan Dimitrius and Mark Mazarella

“The greatest ability in business is to get along with others and to influence their actions.”
– John Hancock