

Influence

Influence [in-floo-uh ns] noun - the capacity or power of persons or things to be a compelling force on or produce effects on the actions, behaviour, opinions, etc., of others:

The ability to influence others is a basic requirement for any leadership role.

Early on in my career I looked forward to finally being promoted up to a role where I could tell people what to do! To my surprise I found that the more senior my role was the more I needed to rely on influence rather than command to get things done.

I found out that

- Over-use of positional authority could lead to resistance – particularly in cultures such as Australia which do not greatly value hierarchical power, and
- In large, complex organisations with matrix structures, joint venture partners and the like that many or most of the key people I needed to work with were outside of my sphere of control



When I looked around me to see what other managers were doing it was clear that not everyone was good at influencing, indeed some viewed it with distrust, seeing it as part of a murky world of politics and trading favours – something to be avoided if at all possible. I decided it would be a good idea for me to become one of the people who was skilled at influencing others.

What are the main influencing skills?

Starting with my own need to understand how to influence people, and then in my later role of helping develop that skill in others, I have tried to understand the fundamental skills that are required of all successful influencers. I am not sure how much of this I was able to take on for myself, but I am sure that these are the keys to being a successful influencer.



Skill 1 - Balancing advocacy and inquiry



From a young age we are encouraged to be good at *advocating* our views (everything from primary school “show and tell” sessions through to convincing our parents to let us go to that concert). When we get to work we are rewarded for being able to present the best argument (in everything from getting a business cases approved through to gaining access to scarce resources).

We are rarely encouraged to *inquire* about and understand another’s point of view, nor are we rewarded for it at work.

What I often saw at work as a result of this were “battles of advocacy” where everyone was pressing their own case and no-one was listening to anyone else (have a look at this somewhat humorous [example](#)).

When everyone is shouting at everyone else there is little opportunity for influencing to take place.

SUCCESSFUL INFLUENCERS KNOW HOW TO TEMPER THE DESIRE TO ADVOCATE THEIR OWN POINT OF VIEW AND INSTEAD SPEND TIME AND EFFORT ON INQUIRING ABOUT THE VIEWS HELD BY OTHERS. YOU CAN’T INFLUENCE SOMEONE IF YOU DON’T UNDERSTAND WHERE THEY ARE COMING FROM

Skill 2 - The Rule of Reciprocity

Two people ask you to give their order priority. If one of them has helped you out with something similar in the past then all other things being equal you are likely to help the person that you “owe” a favour to. This is known as the Rule of Reciprocity.¹

Few of us would argue the truth of this “rule” and we tend to willingly apply it in our personal lives – e.g. if we think we will need to ask someone to pick up our children from school at some stage in the future we generally try and do them some small favour in advance.

I noticed at work however that a number of my colleagues did not adopt that same prudent attitude to “banking” goodwill with others.

1. Perhaps they considered themselves “too busy” or “too important” to invest time and effort in helping others, or
2. They didn’t think they had anything of value they could offer to others, or
3. They thought it was morally inappropriate to “use” people this way and that “a good deed should be its own reward”

If they had seen the first 2-3 minutes of this [video](#) maybe they would have changed their mind about the power of the Rule of Reciprocity.



SUCCESSFUL INFLUENCERS DO GOOD THINGS FOR OTHERS IN ADVANCE TO BUILD A RESERVOIR OF RECIPROCITY THAT THEY CAN CALL ON AT NEED.

¹ This concept is developed at length by Bradford and Cohen in their book Influence without Authority.



There was one final element that seemed to be a consistent factor in people who were successful influencers. It was simply this – the reason they were trying to influence me and others was to achieve some mutually advantageous outcome, there was some “higher purpose” that was being served beyond personal gain.

This changed their approach in two significant ways.

- ***They were open to being influenced themselves!*** They entered a discussion not to “win” but to find the best solution. They were genuinely interested in my position and were even prepared to accept that I might be right, I didn’t have to defend myself with them and I could afford to be open to new approaches. By being open to my views they increased the chance that I would listen to them in return.
- ***They were acting with integrity.*** Neither they or I had any concerns about “trading favours” for inappropriate reasons, we were simply working with each other to get something worthwhile done. The Rule of Reciprocity could be used without concern!

They were the people that I was prepared to listen to because it was not “just about themselves”.

SUCCESSFUL INFLUENCERS ARE SEEKING TO INFLUENCE IN PURSUIT OF A HIGHER PURPOSE THAN THEIR OWN PERSONAL GAIN.

Best wishes for influencing with skill and integrity in the future!

Best Wishes

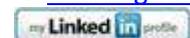
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