9 Ways to Influence Without Authority

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A key skill relevant to leaders at all levels is the ability to positively influence people in such a way that others follow and act willingly—as opposed to complying because of the authority factor. Then there are those roles where leaders must “manage” more indirectly. In many cases, as with HR, finance and marketing, where direct report structures differ, this might even be the primary way things get done.

After all, whether or not you are in sales directly, you are selling ideas, opinions and insights daily.

Both an art and a key business asset, influence is essential in all aspects of life, and constantly at play in the workplace. Let’s look at some of the most important things you can do to anchor this core skill set to your business advantage.

1. Understand resistance to change

Everyone has a different tolerance for change. That said, when people resist ideas, the reason is typically made apparent by asking the following three questions:

- Is the problem that you are trying to solve clear to the other party—along with the full implications of inaction?
- Have you been clear about what you want and the specific benefits of doing things the way you are suggesting?
- How much sacrifice or risk taking are you expecting from the other party and what can you do to minimize it or alleviate their concerns?
- When attempting to influence, consider what you might do in each of these three areas.

2. Adapt to social styles

Everyone has a different way of going about the things they do. It is easy to forget that the other party might be hearing something completely different than you think you have communicated. The reason for this again stems from what are essentially four primary social styles:

- **Driver:** Direct, results-orientated
- **Expressive:** Outgoing, creative, social
- **Amiable:** Dependable, easygoing, sensitive
- **Analytical:** Systematic, accurate, structured, logical
Bearing these four social archetypes in mind, how might we better understand our differences in order to find more common ground.

Step 1 is to understand your own biases and to learn how to moderate them.

For example, drivers often have to focus on their listening skills. Expressives may need to focus on providing rationale and embracing the thinking of more logical people, particularly when they see holes in an argument. Amiables may need to speak up and let their thoughts be known and analyticals may need to focus on the personal touch when seeking to grow their ability to influence.

Step 2 is to understand and adapt to the dominant style of the person you are attempting to influence.

Drivers become quickly frustrated with long-windedness or poorly constructed arguments and are best influenced through direct, brief, results-orientated discussions.

- Expressives place a high value on social contact and status. They are best influenced by including them in decision-making while dealing with feelings and showing respect for their own ideas and past actions.

- Amiables place a high value on harmony and avoiding personal risk. When influencing an Amiable, don’t go for the quick “yes”. Show patience, ask for their feelings and show how you plan to manage impacts on people.

- Analyticals become frustrated with ideas that are not thought through properly. When attempting to influence Analyticals, provide hard evidence, do not overstate the benefits and invite their critique – it may just save you!

3. Develop your personal power

There are two types of power in business—positional and personal. While the use of positional power is sometimes necessary, an overuse of it will quickly erode one’s personal power, leading to a dictatorial style of leadership.

Personal power can be developed by focusing in two areas:

- **Relationships**: People tend to have an easier time adopting ideas of people they like. So look for ways to build relationships at every turn. Attend to the little things, apologize to people, don’t forget what you have promised and recognize others for what they do and who they are.

- **Expertise**: Before people will adopt your ideas, they need to believe that you are credible. So do your homework, get the facts, talk to the experts and do whatever you can to learn about all parts of the organization, not just your own.
4. Pass the microphone

We are born with one mouth and two ears – a good salesperson uses them proportionately. If you are doing all the talking, do not be surprised if people do not adopt your ideas. So what to do?

- Use active listening skills. Don’t assume that you know where people are coming from – make it your job to find out and show them explicitly that you understand them (even if you do not agree), which leads to the next point...

- Speak to what you hear. Persuasion typically requires a number of “kicks at the can”, and each kick needs to be better aimed than the one preceding. You do this by adapting your pitch according to what you hear. For example, if they are worried about the investment required, then show how it will lead to a greater return, or find a way that costs less.

5. Appeal to emotion

Logical types often forget that influencing requires more than just a good argument. You need to appeal to a person’s emotions when attempting to influence them. This is not to endorse a strictly emotional appeal, but to encourage a balanced approach that brings genuine connectivity to the table.

- Be authentic: Speak from your heart (don’t read from a script) and don’t hide your agenda (they will “smell” this).

- Use effective body language: Effective eye contact, appropriate facial expressions, posture and even dress can convey more than you think.

- Share stories: Facts and figures aside, stories are what people remember most and create a closer connection in any conversation—especially those in which you are seeking to build support. Avoid relying on generalizations such “customers are complaining” or “employees are unhappy” and tell a real story with real characters to build real support.

6. Stress benefits over features

Go beyond explaining the ‘what’ of your wants and focus on the ‘why’—and the benefits. The language you use is key to your results.

Don’t re-iterate the features and expect people to change their opinion. Instead, keep speaking to “why is that important?” and the core benefits revealed will prove more persuasive.

Be sure to convey benefits that are meaningful to the other party and how your idea will create more value than it costs.

If your idea links to a key organizational strategy (for example “improving customer service”), then make the link explicit—don’t assume others will make the link.
7. Synthesize, synthesize, synthesize

While it is a greater challenge to present a complex idea in a simple fashion it is always worth the effort. Taking the time to synthesize your bigger picture is what it takes to get others to listen. We have all sat down to a meeting where a senior executive began with something along the lines of, “I have one hour and 60 slides so let’s get started.” Two hours later...had your attention waned? Remember to:

- Consider your audience. For example, your staff will probably appreciate details, but your executive team may not.
- Use graphs and pictures wherever possible to illustrate your key messages.
- Avoid wordy slides as this is a recipe for too much talking and poor presentations.

8. Structure your points appropriately

It is important to create a good flow when pitching ideas to others in order to set the scene for maximum receptivity. Points to consider for structuring your pitch:

- Start with something that catches their attention – something you saw or heard.
- Before stating what you want, explain the problem.
- Only after explaining the problem, tell them what you are suggesting. (This order is important, because once people begin to argue your chances of persuading them diminish rapidly. Moreover, they are more likely to argue if they do not understand the problem you are trying to solve).
- Be sure to explain the benefits of what you are proposing.
- Be proactive about communicating the possible downsides of what you are proposing, and what you think can be done to mitigate them. If you don’t do this, don’t be surprised if the other side starts to pick your idea apart for you.
- If you want people do something differently, be explicit and don’t assume that people will magically know what you expected of them.

9. Persist

Persuasion is not a one-shot effort. Be prepared to pitch the same idea on multiple occasions using a variety of means, settings, media and with multiple improvements based on what you hear each time.

And remember...

You may not think of yourself as a salesperson. However, if your role is to influence others in a significant way you need to employ many of the same skills. It is not complicated, but takes mindfulness and careful thought, particularly when under stress and pressure. This approach can greatly increase the odds of getting your good ideas adopted.