

How Effectively Do You Influence?

By Manya Arond-Thomas

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Are you aware of your influence effectiveness? Do you know if you are using the most appropriate influence strategies for your role, for your audience, and for the situation? Are you able to use the appropriate influence strategies effectively? These are questions that every leader should address and answer.

We communicate to influence others. We are either on the giving or the receiving end of an endless stream of influencing, persuading, requesting, demanding, cajoling, exhorting, inveigling and manipulating each other to further our ends. Think about how many times a day you request others to do things, seek buy-in to a strategy, encourage greater productivity, suggest how people should think about things, or offer thoughts on attitudes or behaviors others need to change.

While there are a number of relationship management abilities critical for people who want to be outstanding leaders, influence is the core competency in the domain of relationship management according to the Hay Group, creators of the Emotional Competence Inventory.

Influence effectiveness depends on a combination of factors including: choice of influence tactic, your skill at using the tactic, your organizational power base, and your personal power base. There are ten common influence tactics that people can use ethically:

*Legitimizing – referring to or using recognized authority

*Logical Persuading – using logic to persuade the influencee.

*Appealing to Friendship – asking friends for favors or assistance

*Socializing – establishing rapport to find commonalities and to build a connection

*Consulting – presenting a problem and asking for the influencee's input

*Stating – boldly and directly stating what you want, believe, or need

*Appealing to Values – inspiring cooperation by appealing to values, emotions, or feelings

*Modeling – setting an example for others to follow

*Exchanging – giving something of value to the influencee in return for something you want

*Alliance Building – building an alliance of supporters who can help you influence others

Note that there are four common ways that people can and do influence without integrity. These include: avoiding, manipulating, threatening, and intimidating.

We have personality style preferences for how we perceive and process information that predispose us both to use certain influence strategies naturally and to be more receptive to some than to others. However, each influence tactic requires a unique set of skills, which can be learned if you don't come by them naturally. In choosing a tactic, you need to know what the situation requires as well as how and to what your listener responds. For example, does your listener make decisions based on logic or based on people-centered values? Do they value affiliation and a participatory approach or do they respond more to legitimate authority?

Influence skills include a number of verbal skills such as asserting, probing, persisting, speaking conversationally, and willingness to ask for favors. Yet, equally important are non-verbal skills such as conveying energy and enthusiasm, using a compelling tone of voice, using authority without appearing heavy-handed, sensitivity to others' feelings and needs, and building rapport and trust.

As a leader, it behooves you to have an accurate assessment of your influence effectiveness. You can do this best through a formal 360-degree assessment or short of that, ask your colleagues and friends for feedback, both positive and constructive, on how they perceive your influence skills.

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