Influencing Others Defined:

The competency "influencing others" is a crucial skill for just about every professional in today's highly interconnected business world. In order to achieve business objectives, we frequently need to gain the support, trust or commitment to act from others over which we have no authority to coerce action.

The only way to accomplish these complex tasks is through influence. So a sound working definition of the competency "influencing others" might be:

Getting people to change attitudes, behaviors or mind sets using indirect methods that might include effective listening or negotiation skills.

Influencing others also involves delivering data or factual information in new and persuasive ways as a means of convincing others to take action. In many current or best practices models of leadership, the ability to influence others to take action is viewed as more important than the coercive power to direct people to do things. Sometimes the competency is referred to as "The Art of Persuasion."

We've all seen them. How is it that some people seem to be able to grab people's attention, and almost bend them to their will so easily? All these people do is . . . talk, and we are captivated. We find these people in sales, religion, politics, entertainment and business. Many of them use widely varying presentation and speaking styles, but in the end, these highly persuasive people understand and practice the fine art of persuasion.

Here's a YouTube video on the Science of Persuasion. Just click the image below.

In a Forbes article, Jason Nazar, identified "21 Simple Ways to Persuade People." With all due respect to Jason, these principles are not really all "simple."

Many of them are complex skills that require high levels of emotional intelligence and excellent interpersonal and observation skills. Here are the three broad categories from the article:

Basics
The foundation of persuasion is to understand that persuasion is not the same as manipulation. People resent being manipulated, and in the end that nearly always backfires. The key to persuade people is to talk about things that matter to them. To accomplish this, you should be able to relate to their situation and be interested in the topic.

The Three Drivers That Increase Your Influence

Persuasion researchers have consistently demonstrated that the most successful strategies that influence the decisions and behaviors of others gain their persuasive strength by triggering one of just three simple human motivations:

1) The motivation to make effective decisions efficiently.

2) The motivation to affiliate with and gain the approval of others.

3) The motivation to see ourselves in a positive light.

SOURCE: Steven Martin, Influenceatwork.com

General Rules
There are 10 "general rules" listed. Without going into all ten, the gist of the advice is that focusing on the people you are trying to persuade is crucial. Things like helping others, being sincere, delivering value without assuming what people need, being genuine and building rapport all matter.

Persuasion also requires effective crafting of the message so the tone is appropriate. A rule that resonates as you attempt to get people to act is to communicate a sense of scarcity. People tend to take action if they believe it is a priority to acquire something they want or need.

Personal Skills
The interpersonal skills necessary to be effective at persuasion are consistent with the basics and general rules. To be persuasive, you have to be more focused on others than yourself.

This requires flexibility, being prepared, and handling conflict effectively (remember, persuasion is crucial to leading change, and change and conflict go hand-in-hand).

Development Activities and Suggestions

Presentation Skills

Nothing is as unpersuasive and mind-numbing as a poorly constructed and delivered presentation. Mastery of presentation skills (visual and verbal) should be the "price of admission" for leadership roles in every organization today.

- Read Slideology by Nancy Duarte and Presentation Zen by Garr Reynolds
- Watch – "Death by Powerpoint" at YouTube (it's very funny and a great teaching tool!)
- PRACTICE making visual slides by going over presentations you've delivered before and apply the principles of Duarte and Reynolds.

Communication Skills

One of the most difficult communication skills to master is to take complicated information and distill that information down to its essential points.

One of the most common jabs non-Twitter types make about the information platform is the 140 character limitation. But take the "Twitter" challenge. Try limiting all of your written communications to 140 words. It will take multiple re-writes to communicate thoughts clearly, but it's worth the effort. Mark Twain once said, "I didn't have time to write a short letter, so I wrote a long one instead." It take more time and thought to make complex information clear.

Emotional Intelligence

Start by working to develop a high sense of self-awareness. People high in self-awareness understand what they do well, why they perform well in a variety of situations, and they understand their emotional responses to various stimulations and people.

SUPPORTING BEHAVIOR STATEMENTS

To identify competency skill gaps consider outlining key supporting behaviors that are important in your organization.

You can assign a basic Likert scale to each behavior statement (examples outlined below) and have the employee and the employee's manager rate proficiency.

COMMUNICATION:

Tailor communication to the level and experience of the audience.

Clarify meaning and intent of others' communication when it's unclear.

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING:

Initiates and participates in casual conversation.

Develops rapport with a variety of people.

INFLUENCING OTHERS
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SUPPORTING BEHAVIOR STATEMENTS

Lead by Example

It's true. Actions speak louder than words. So take a daily inventory of situations when your actions had either positive OR negative influence or implications for those around you. For each situation, think carefully about:

Your state of mind (positive, negative, passive, engaged, etc.)
The specific behaviors
The implications for influence on others
Your intentions

For the positive experiences, what can you do to have more of those experiences? What elements could you control? Could you exert more control over your reactions to those elements beyond your control? For the negative experiences, what led to the negative situation? What will you do to change the next time?

After a week or two of keeping a daily journal, you will likely see a pattern emerge. In the pattern, find those things that move you in positive directions and do more of them, and find ways to either eliminate or change your reaction to the negative factors. Repeat this exercise in 90 days and see if you've improved, then ask your team about your behaviors! See if they noticed any improvement, and you might be surprised to learn just how observant the people around us really are.

Recommended Resources from The BizLibrary Collection:
Influencing Without Authority
LEAD NOW: Presentation Skills
Art of Assertiveness
Using Emotional Intelligence: Improving Your Self Awareness

To watch these courses and more within The BizLibrary Collection, request a demo today!

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SELF-AWARENESS:

Identifies personal skill areas to be developed.

Looks for opportunities to learn from mistakes.

EMPOWERING OTHERS:

Allows others to make mistakes and take risks to learn and grow.

Gives others the freedom to have control of their tasks and duties.

Provides guidance and support for others as they take on new challenges.

MOTIVATING OTHERS:

Acknowledge achievements and contributions of others.

Communicates a vision of excellence for others that motivates them to improve.

Encourages others to do their best.

Helps others identify their wants and needs.