

How to Influence Others While Building Trust and Saving Time

Last week a client asked my colleague Matt Beane and me, "**How do you influence someone who has more power and authority than you?**"

Here are three simple and powerful steps you can apply when trying to influence someone. If you follow these simple steps, I can't guarantee that you will change someone's mind, but you will learn more than you would otherwise, you will generate more trust, and you will save time for you and the other person.

First: Ask the person if he is open to being influenced. This may sound strange, but the simplest, most straight-forward way you can find out whether a person is open to being influenced is to ask. To start out the conversation, considering saying something like, "I'd like to talk with you about X because I think there may be some ways of improving the situation that will work for both of us. Still, I don't want to spend your time or mine if you've already decided and it's a done deal. So, are you open to being influenced on this topic or is it a closed topic for you?"

Second: Ask the person what would influence him. People spend hours trying to privately figure out what will influence someone to make a particular decision or to change one. Again, the easiest way to find out is to ask. Consider saying something like, "What would you need to know that would make a difference for you?" or "What would you need to hear that might influence you to change your mind?" In this way, you are being transparent with the person, being curious about what they think, asking them to be accountable for their thinking, and jointly designing the conversation so it saves time.

Third: You also need to be open to being influenced. The conversation needs to be a two-way street. If are trying to influence someone without being influenced yourself, you're not playing fair. Let the other person know that you're also open to changing your views and let them know what would influence you.

It's the same no matter how much power and authority you have. What my colleague and I told our client is that If you're asking someone to be open to changing his views, this approach is the same whether you're talking with someone who has more, the same, or less power and/or authority than you. That's one of the things I like about the Facilitative Leader approach – you can use the same approach across your relationships.

An important reminder: in our experience, you need to use the basic building blocks of our approach for these questions to work. If you're not genuinely curious about the other person's views and transparent about your own, for example, the other person will quickly judge that you're using these techniques "on" them instead of for your mutual benefit. What happens then? Usually, the opposite of what you intended: less trust, wasted time, and decreased likelihood that your suggestions get fair consideration.

- Roger Schwarz

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