A close-up photograph of a person's face, focusing on the eye and lips. The lips are painted with a vibrant, multi-colored lipstick in shades of pink, orange, yellow, and green. The eye is looking slightly to the side, and the overall lighting is soft and natural.

# Influencing others – a key skill for all

**Much is made of the need to improve our communication and, if we are honest, we can all probably benefit from working at doing so!**

If we want to develop our ability to influence people, we do need to think about where our communication skills can improve. When we have to make presentations, address a group with a specific aim or write a key proposal or email, we might spend time thinking about our message and how we want to convey it. However, for much of the time we tend to communicate from some form of unconscious awareness or autopilot. When it does not work very effectively, how often do we 'blame' the other party for their response – or lack of one? A good message to start to live by is 'the meaning of my communication is the response I get'. It places the responsibility for our communication and influencing effectiveness firmly in one place!

Within our lives, both at work and outside, we are faced with the need to influence others to do something which might require them to change or do something differently. For many of us, this challenge of change involves not only getting some acceptance or buy in, it needs the implementation process to be completed. In this day and age, the ability to influence others more effectively is an essential quality, whether we have authority over them through our position or not. Those in management positions can opt for a 'tell' approach and it might get some results. However, they will be seen as better leaders if they are able to achieve these results through their teams following more

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**"Where we have no direct authority, the need to develop our influencing skills becomes critical if we want to get results through and with others"**

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willingly. Where we have no direct authority, the need to develop our influencing skills becomes critical if we want to get results through and with

“There are various approaches to influencing others. Some put the emphasis on the behaviours, and language, of the influencer. Others take a more ‘scientific’ and structured approach”

others. This applies outside work too, for most of us.

One of the issues which impedes most of us when we need to influence others, is that we do not know how to do it! We might have some awareness of the skills we need to use to communicate more effectively. We may be doing our best to apply them. This does not necessarily mean we are going to be influencing others. When we want to, we might express ourselves clearly, but without using the most appropriate influencing strategy or language, we do not succeed in getting the results we want. This often leads to one of the other classic problems when we feel we are not getting our point across – repeating ourselves, again and again. Why do we feel this will work?

The ability to influence is something we can all improve. There is a proviso to this! We have to be willing to develop ourselves and to change. As we learn more about the different ways in which we can influence, we need to recognise that one of the secrets is to learn to become more flexible in our behaviour and how we want to achieve the results we want. At the same time, we keep our focus on the aims or results we want to achieve.

#### What is influence?

The dictionary states: “Power of producing an effect, especially unobtrusively; effect of power exerted; ascendancy,



often a secret or undue kind.” The key elements are that influence is about getting the results with some degree of acceptance or co-operation.

There are various approaches to influencing others. Some put the emphasis on the behaviours, and language, of the influencer. Others take a more ‘scientific’ and structured approach. My belief is that neither is better than the other, nor do they have to be mutually exclusive. The reality is that the more we can learn and understand the skills and the options, the more tools we have available to choose from.

In my experience, people who are good influencers have characteristics in common, or at least some of them! They have a good awareness of their own style and communication preferences. They are clear and firm about the outcomes they want to achieve and will be flexible in what they need to do to reach these. Finally, they

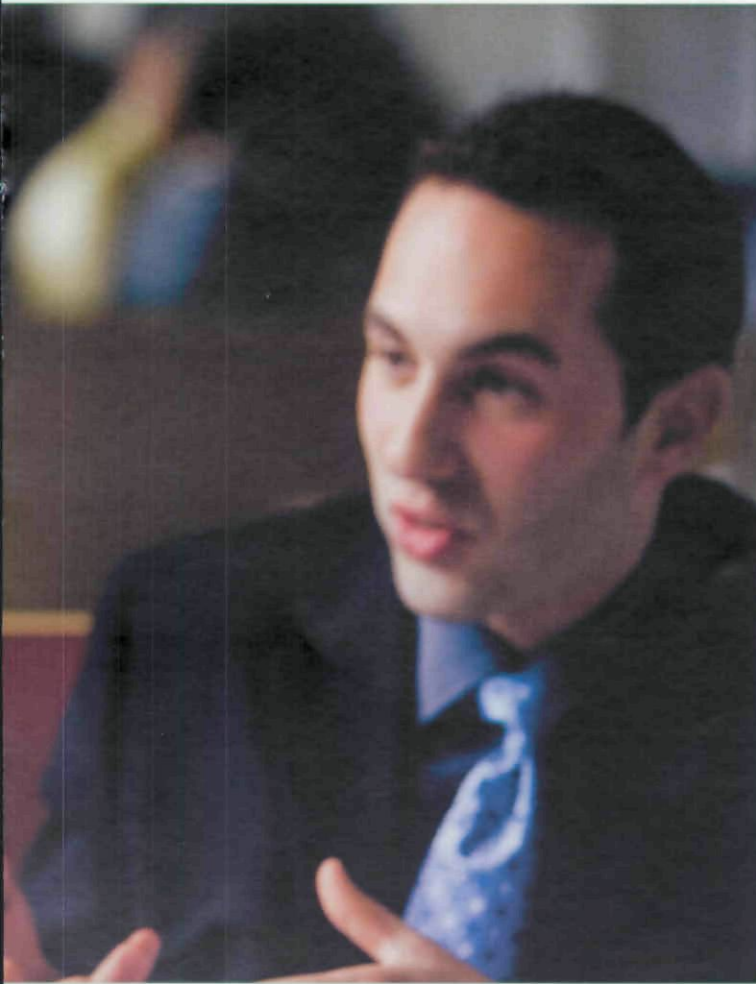
take time to consider those they want to influence and their situation and possible response.

#### Talking tactics

A starting point is to think about our strategy. It makes sense to do this before thinking about our tactics (or behaviours.) An example is shown below, which gives seven choices:

- **Friendliness:** This involves creating a sense of warmth, support and positive feelings between both parties. There is a sense of openness and trust which makes people feel comfortable with the situation and any request.

- **Empowerment:** Allowing others to have a sense of responsibility for the results, building a feeling of confidence and that we have trust in them – having given clear direction. This gives



a good degree of two-way communication and listening to ideas and concerns.

- **Visioning:** Creating an image of what the outcome will be, using elements of common ground where possible and engaging emotions to make an appealing outcome.
- **Building alliances:** Finding common interests and areas where we can offer help or support, before asking for it in return.
- **Expertise and knowledge:** Being the expert, so we can use information, facts and experience to reinforce our message and request.
- **Bargaining:** As it implies – trading to reach agreement. This involves being able to offer some ‘hooks’ or incentives, or even pressure, to encourage the others to move.

(We will suggest later, that it is often more effective to offer our incentive some time before asking for what you want. This is the reverse to a typical commercial negotiation).

- **Positional:** Using legitimate authority to ask for something or to tell people what we need.

### Pushing for an outcome

When we have chosen which of these, or a combination, we feel is most appropriate, think about our outcome. Be clear about this, define it as specifically as we can. What elements of it are essential to have? What parts would we be willing to move from? Now we know what we want – where are the other party? How far away? What might their reaction be to being asked to move towards our outcome? (Remember to think about putting our message across to answer the question from

them, “What’s in it for me?”) Good influencers will always consider the outcome from the other party’s perspective.

There are a number of specific methods of influencing others. One which has been in use for some time is the idea that there are two approaches – ‘push’ or ‘pull’. The ‘push’ styles include persuading or asserting. A factor behind each of these is that they require a lot of energy! Think about having to move something heavy which might also resist and you have the idea. Having said that, there are times when either of these is the best option.

Persuading involves stating our proposition and then offering reasons why we want this outcome. It is most effective when the message is short, factual and logical.

To apply the persuading approach, follow these steps:

1. Think through – structure your approach (make notes to help you!)
2. Explain your aim/outcome
3. Acknowledge any downside (it pre-empts them raising it)
4. Give reasons for the aim/outcome
5. State benefits for the individual
6. Get agreement at the end.

Asserting uses three main behaviours, stating our outcome (clearly!), evaluating and offering incentives or applying pressure. In asserting the expectations, we need to be clear and direct. Give positive and negative opinions, use incentives and pressures as appropriate, do not justify reasons, and do not be aggressive in voice tone or body language.

To apply the asserting approach:

1. Plan what and how – aim to be clear and concise with your message
2. Stay calm and neutral – voice and body

3. State what you want from the situation (using ‘I’ to own it)
4. Give reasons – without inviting a discussion
5. Acknowledge potential impact on the other party
6. Check understanding – get agreement.

### Pulling in the right direction

The ‘pull’ styles include bridging and attracting. These tend to require less energy on our part! To be effective each of these does need us to operate with a high degree of integrity. Any insincerity will be quickly spotted.

Bridging does what it says. It is about building connections and involving the other party in the way forward. The behaviours used in bridging are: empathising, open communication leading to involving and supporting, listening and disclosing.

When bridging you might want to follow this:

1. Think about your aim – and their position
2. State the aim/outcome
3. Show you understand their position and what you are asking them to change or give up (has to be genuine if you are to have impact!)
4. Present your case in a way which incorporates their probable concerns
5. Invite their response and handle
6. Be willing to adapt your position slightly if needed to get agreement.

The second ‘pull’ style of attracting means getting people to see things as a ‘we’ situation. As the influencer, we want to have others share our vision or idea of the outcome. It requires energy and enthusiasm from us and total sincerity and integrity. Whilst it can work with individuals, it can be powerful with groups, even if it is to only start things



moving towards our outcome.

The steps in attracting are:

1. Think about your outcome and create a compelling image of it!
2. Make sure you are positive and enthusiastic about the outcome (and believe in it!)
3. Paint a positive word picture with a lot of good reasons for the outcome
4. Deliver your message with plenty of enthusiasm – and gestures to support it
5. 'Future pace' it by talking as though it is done
6. Keep the balance between enthusiasm and not going over the top!

**“Remember, the secret of a good influencer is to keep the end in mind, rather than the route”**

Although these are shown as being different styles, we may choose to use a combination for certain outcomes or people. Remember, the secret of a good influencer is to keep the end in mind, rather than the route!

#### Developing rapport

Having decided on our strategy and approach, we can help our cause by getting into rapport with the other party. The stronger the rapport, the more probable your success. Think of rapport as being on the same wavelength – and when we have it, we can communicate more effectively. Another feeling which rapport can help create is trust. When we feel we trust someone, we are more open to being influenced.

To begin developing rapport, think about the other party's position and situation. Then we begin to interact, match and pace them. Matching is about being like the other – body language, posture, gesture, voice level and speed of speech to name a few of the characteristics. Pay attention when we are

with people and feeling comfortable and notice how we will often be matching and mirroring without even being aware. Look at others when they are together and pay attention to the 'dance' which happens and how we all mismatch when there is a breakdown in the rapport.

For those who want a more scientific take on influencing, look at the work of Robert Cialdini in *'Influence, Science and Practice'*. He has spent many years researching what influences people and offers many empirical examples to support his case. He has identified what he calls six 'principles' which are used by successful influencers. They will use one, or more, of these effectively to achieve their outcomes.

The principles are:

- **Liking:** People like those who are like them – think back to what we mentioned about rapport.

- **Reciprocity:** People will repay or respond in kind and often feel a sense of obligation when they have received something. They give something in return for receiving – whether in equal amounts or not. You may offer to help someone finish a work project without specifically asking for anything in return. However, if you need to ask for help in a couple of weeks, the other party will be more likely to give it.

- **Social proof:** Human beings are not always as individual as we like to think! Have others like me supported or done this? Peer power can encourage others to follow! Use phrase such as 'a number of your colleagues have...' and we are more likely to get buy-in to your ideas.

- **Consistency:** People will generally support their own

decisions – especially when made verbally to someone else and when committed in writing. Offer reminders of what they have done before which has been successful or effective.

- **Authority:** Establish expertise or knowledge – and people will respond to it. People will feel more comfortable with someone who is confident and an expert. Put forward your case from a position of strength.

- **Scarcity:** When something is thought to be scarce and in short-supply, people want it – they have a fear of missing out! Look for opportunities to make your case with reference to some element of potential loss if things do not happen. 'Only X days to go if you want this.' 'Only five places in the team.' These can be highly effective phrases where we can introduce them.

The issue for any of us when influencing others, is that there is no one right way, nor even a best way. As a recent delegate, who is a very highly qualified and skilled engineer, said to me, "This workshop is great and I am learning a lot. I just wish there was a formula I could take away and use!" I must add, he was smiling when he said it! Alas, I was not able to help. What we can all take with us is an awareness that there are many approaches we can use around a few core principles. Know what is our outcome; what is the other party's position and probable reaction; think about your overall strategy; choose the approach which you feel might work; get into rapport; and then begin to communicate. From here, notice the response you are getting and if it is not what you want – do something else! Change the approach whilst keeping the outcome in mind. ■

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