

The Art of Influence: Strategies to Bolster Your Persuasive Power (1,091 words)

You can increase your power to influence. Power is something you have, whereas influence is something you do. To be most persuasive you need to develop your power bases, your spheres of influence, your strategy options, and your professional presence.

Develop Your Power Bases: There is more to power than position. Power in organizations has three sources. Positional, Relational, and Personal.

Positional Power is based upon the title you hold in the organization and includes authority, reward, and coercive power bases. The right to give orders, the ability to give people things they want, or the ability to punish people or take things away. Positional power resides in the authority to act and to control resources that others want or need. So put yourself in position for a promotion.

Relational power takes in account the informal power that comes from and through your relationships with others. It is based upon your ability to form coalitions and collaborative relationships. Enhance your relational power by demonstrating leadership, trustworthiness, and concern for the interests of others.

Personal power is generated from within the individual. This power is based on general knowledge, technical competence, and ability to articulate ideas or a vision that others are willing to support and follow. Develop expertise that others value, communicate your ideas and views in compelling ways, and demonstrate focus and enthusiasm.

You can increase your power to influence. Understand your positional power boundaries, support subordinates to get jobs done, and secure and defend your positional power. Form collaborative relationships and build coalitions when necessary. Study your industry and your competition and share your insights and increase your power to influence.

Develop Your Spheres of Influence: The concept of spheres of influence concerns the areas of your career in which you can effectively exert influence. Think of the spheres of influence like a set of concentric circles, in which influence is strongest near the center, and weaker as the distance from the center increases. Your personal sphere of influence is likely to be strong in some spheres, departments, teams, divisions, and weak in others.

Think about your relationships with vendors, suppliers, professional associations, and your colleagues. How much influence do you really have with each connection? The strength of personal influence is a function of two elements: one or another form of positional, relational, or personal power, and the level of the dependencies of others.

You can use what are called the currencies of exchange to expand your organizational influence. These currencies are such things as goods and services, talents and skills, information and knowledge, and resources that are at your disposal, to build influence with others in the organization. Consider the providing technical assistance, the sharing

of information, or the lending of space or equipment as tools to use to assess and assert the strength of your spheres of influence. Think about how you can help others that are struggling with technology. Share information that helps a superior or a subordinate successfully tackle a task. Express public recognition of others' achievements. It really doesn't matter what you do as long as it is valuable to them.

Be strategic in your efforts to extend your influence. Give priority to the spheres of influence that are most relevant to your success. Understand what others want or value. Ask yourself where your influence is most needed and then find ways to create and expand that influence.

Develop Your Strategy Options: There are several strategies you can implement that influence others. Finding a copy of the mission statement or value statement would be a good start.

Use facts and data to make logical and rational presentations of ideas. Solid reasoning is persuasive. Use flattery, create goodwill, act humbly, and be friendly long before you make a request. Friendliness is appreciated and welcomed.

Coordinate support for others' ideas that align with the organization's values and priorities. Be an active participant in discussions. Develop negotiation skills and express the willingness to exchange benefits or favors. Flexibility is a key component for reaching consensus or inspiring compromise.

Build relationships with and gain support from people in the organization that have higher authority. Management and leadership backing can bolster influence. Be assertive in your communication style and openly discuss compliance concerns and issue reminders that keep projects on track. Stay on top of activities.

Assess your position in the organization and consider what rewards and punishments are at your disposal. Be realistic about what you can promise or take away. A little can go a long way. There are many strategies you can use to influence others. Sometimes you just need a list you can trust and the confidence to put ideas into practice. The art of influence does involve a certain amount of soft skills and these soft skills can amount to quite a bit of influence.

Develop Your Professional Presence: Most influential people exude an aura that shows they deserve attention and respect. A few simple strategies can help command positive regard.

Stay current. Stay on top of current events. To be perceived as intelligent, a person must have something intelligent to say. Read, read, read. Read trade journals, relevant newsletters, magazines, and the local and national newspapers. Pay attention to trends and be able to participate in conversations.

Learn the language. Improve your vocabulary. It is impossible to have a polished,

professional image with a deficient vocabulary. Attend a college course or professional seminar on communication skills.

Take a look around. Study positive role models. Every time you meet someone who reflects power and style study that person. How does he or she act? Think? Speak? Dress? What do you notice that will work well for you?

Take care of yourself. Maintain proper hygiene. Bad breath and offensive body odor will be remembered over the positive impact of an expensive wardrobe. Keep a survival kit close with breath mints, deodorant, and some moist towelettes. Make sure you look and smell as good at the end of the day as you did when the day began. These simple strategies will support a professional presence and enhance your ability to influence.

It is often said that you only get one chance to make a first impression, however, you have many opportunities to leave a lasting impression. Put yourself on a professional development plan. Sharpen your skills. Be a role model. Present a professional image. Be professional and be influential.

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