

Influencing Resources

The key to influencing conversations may surprise you, especially as in Western culture where the preferred approach is advocacy and asserting your point of view.

It is **Active Listening**:

Active Listening

“Seek first to understand then to be understood”

Covey, Stephen (1999) *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Simon & Schuster Ltd

Listening requires so much more than your ears

Observing:

- Body language, making eye contact, noticing changes in facial expression and tone of voice.
- Consider gender; try not to dismiss another’s approach just because it may be different to your own.
- Being aware and take notice of reactions to what you say and do, and your own reactions - remember it is not a one way process.

Demonstrating

- Making interjections to show that you are listening, just like you would on the phone.
- Taking cultural norms into consideration; eye contact although expected in the UK, may not be preferred elsewhere.

Asking questions:

- Open questions, skilful questioning, probing to truly understand the other’s point of view to reach common ground, or construct solutions together.
- Start your questions with “What, How, When”; be careful with “Why” as it can receive a defensive response.

*****A great resource around questioning is Block, Peter,(2003), *The Answer to How is Yes*, Berrett-Koehler *****

*****Improve your active listening skills. Throw away the paper and pen. Really listen in your next meeting, without relying on focusing on a notepad, What do you notice, the sound of the person's voice, their intonations, their breathing, their facial expression, body language, emotions. Afterwards write your notes; what's different? How much did you recall?*****

If this influencing conversation is important to you, then you need to do your homework.

Resist the temptation to dive in without thinking carefully about what you want to achieve from the conversation.

Ask yourself:

Is this the right time?

What do I want to achieve?

How should I appeal to this person?

Where and when should I have the conversation?

Do I fully understand the context?

What are the limitations of the system?

*****In his book; Stanfield, R.Brian, (2000), *The Art of Focused Conversation*, New Society, offers a model for planning your conversations: Using questioning at four levels.*****

Patience and perseverance

The influencing conversation should be seen as a process, in which sometimes small steps are required to make progress. We've all done it, visited the gym expecting instant results; it doesn't immediately make you fit, but if you persevere, then one day you find that you can run further without getting out of breath. Don't think of influencing as a one off activity.

Timing can also be important. I once had a boss who was diabetic, and it was never wise to have an influencing conversation with him before lunchtime when his blood sugar was low, as I would never get the desired result.

Keep trying, "no" can mean "*not right now*", rather than "*never*".

*****Who do you know who is good at influencing conversations, what makes them good, do they always succeed first time?*****

Self awareness

Understanding your strengths and areas for development, as well as your preferred way of influencing, will enable you to be more aware during influencing conversations. Using personality questionnaires such as MBTI and Insights can help you consider your personality and preferences for behaviour as well as those of others.

Getting feedback from others on their perception of you through a 360° feedback tool can help you to realise your impact on others, and consider being more flexible and adaptable in your approaches when influencing others.

Flexibility/adaptability

If you keep doing what you are doing, you will keep getting what you are getting. If one approach doesn't work, try another. Don't just do the same approach more vehemently

When leaders are coached they often complain of managers who just don't seem to hear. When asked what different approaches they use, it is often the same one, repeated over and over, or louder and louder. Ask yourself about the last time you attempted an influencing conversation that didn't end up in a win-win situation, what approach did you try; did you adapt your style?

Authenticity www.inc.com/articles/2000/07/19634.html

"To be persuasive we must be believable, to be believable, we must be credible; to be credible we must be truthful

- Edward R. Murrow

Influencing is not manipulation; it is about *both* people winning,

*****Do you recall a time you felt manipulated, what happened? Often it is when people have an ulterior motive, or are not honest about their intentions, that influencing is like this. People see through you if you try to manipulate or bulldoze them into something they don't want to do. *****