Influencing Change Without Authority

Finding strategies that work!
Influencing change in areas we don’t manage is a core capability of successful leaders in all organizations. However, cross functional specialties including Safety, Human Resources and Risk Management tend to be constrained from creating their greatest level of value because of the natural barriers found in traditional organizations.

Change

“There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things.”


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Dylan is Managing Director of The Redlands Group, with more than 15 years of expertise as a business owner, vice president safety, not-for-profit board leader and international keynote speaker.

The Redlands Group provides client focused solutions that meets your health, safety and risk assurance needs. The team has the expertise to deliver results from executive level strategy development to front-line staff training; right sized for your organizational needs.
Effective leadership today relies more than ever on influencing others — impacting their ideas, opinions, and actions. While influence has always been a valuable managerial skill, today’s highly collaborative organizations make it essential. Consider how often you have to influence people who don’t even report to you in order to accomplish your objectives. Success depends on your ability to effectively influence both your direct reports and the people over whom you have no direct authority.

Have you ever thought about how you influence others? The tactics you use? We are all aware that people use different influencing tactics, but did you realize that we each naturally default to the same tactics every time? Or that the tactics we default to are also the ones to which we are most receptive when being influenced?

It is these preferred tactics that define our influencing style. Analyzing the different influencing tactics, researchers have identified up to nine primary influencing tactics. In our quest to further understand personal influencing styles, we did additional research to build on the existing knowledge base. From our research, we’ve identified five distinct influencing styles: rationalizing, asserting, negotiating, inspiring, and bridging.
You may have an idea what your style is just from hearing these labels, but the most accurate way to identify your style is with an influence style indicator — a self-scoring assessment that classifies your style based on answers to questions about preferred influencing tactics. But even without the indicator, here are some questions you can ask yourself to begin to understand your style:

- **Rationalizing:** Do you use logic, facts, and reasoning to present your ideas? Do you leverage your facts, logic, expertise, and experience to persuade others?
- **Asserting:** Do you rely on your personal confidence, rules, law, and authority to influence others? Do you insist that your ideas are heard and considered, even when others disagree? Do you challenge the ideas of others when they don’t agree with yours? Do you debate with or pressure others to get them to see your point of view?
- **Negotiating:** Do you look for compromises and make concessions in order to reach an outcome that satisfies your greater interest? Do you make tradeoffs and exchanges in order to meet your larger interests? If necessary, will you delay the discussion until a more opportune time?
- **Inspiring:** Do you encourage others toward your position by communicating a sense of shared mission and exciting possibility? Do you use inspirational appeals, stories, and metaphors to encourage a shared sense of purpose?
- **Bridging:** Do you attempt to influence outcomes by uniting or connecting with others? Do you rely on reciprocity, engaging superior support, consultation, building coalitions, and using personal relationships to get people to agree with your position?

While answering these questions, take your style a step further. How often does it work for you? Are you more successful with certain types of people? Have you ever wondered why? Since there are five different influencing styles, using only your preferred style has the potential to undermine your influence with as many as four out of five people.

Gaining awareness about our own influencing style and those of others is especially critical in light of today’s fast-paced and stressful work environments, and here’s why: When we are operating unconsciously out of a preference (our style) and not seeing the results we
expect, we actually have the tendency to intensify our preferred behavior — even when it’s not working!

If your individual success depends on gaining the cooperation of people over whom you have no direct authority, this should concern you. The way to begin to increase your odds of influencing more people is to learn to recognize and use each of the five styles.

Becoming aware that there are influencing styles other than yours is a good start. To further increase your influence, you must learn what each style sounds like when it’s being used effectively and ineffectively. Gaining this awareness will help you recognize when the style you’re using isn’t working and how to determine one that will.

What’s your influencing style? And what are you going to do about it?

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How to Influence Decision Makers

by Marshall Goldsmith

NOVEMBER 5, 2007

“The biggest challenge that I face at work is not managing my team. It is dealing with my boss and upper management. Any suggestions?”

Every decision in your company is made by the person who has the power to make that decision — not necessarily the “right” person, the “smartest” person, or the “best” person. If you can influence the key decision makers in your organization, you can make a positive difference. If you cannot influence decision makers, you will make much less of a difference. Once you make peace with these facts, you will become more effective in influencing up.

The following suggestions do not come with a guarantee. When you don’t have the power to control outcomes, you won’t always win. They are intended to improve your odds on successfully making a positive difference.

• When presenting ideas to upper management, realize that it is your responsibility to sell — not their responsibility to buy.

In many ways, influencing up is similar to selling products or services to external customers. They don’t have to buy — you have to sell. Any good salesperson takes responsibility for achieving results. No one is impressed with salespeople who blame their customers for not buying their products.

While the importance of taking responsibility may seem obvious in external sales, an amazing number of people in large corporations spend countless hours blaming management for not buying their ideas. We can become disempowered when we focus on what others have done to make things wrong and not what we can do to make things right.

• Focus on contribution to the larger good — not just the achievement of your objectives.

An effective salesperson would never say to a customer, “You need to buy this product, because if you don’t, I won’t achieve my objectives.”

Effective salespeople relate to the needs of the buyers, not to their own needs. In the same way effective upward influencers relate to the larger needs of the organization, not just to the needs of their unit or team.

When influencing up, focus on the impact of the decision on the overall corporation. In most cases the needs of the unit and the needs of the corporation are directly connected. In some cases they are not. Don’t assume that your managers can automatically make the connection between the benefit to your unit and the benefit to the larger corporation.

• Present a realistic cost-benefit analysis of your ideas — don’t just sell benefits.

Every organization has limited resources, time, and energy. The acceptance of your idea may well mean the rejection of another idea that someone else believes is wonderful. Be prepared to have a realistic discussion of the costs of your idea. Acknowledge the fact that something else may have to be sacrificed in order to have your idea implemented.
By getting ready for a realistic discussion of costs, you can prepare for objections to your idea before they occur. You can acknowledge the sacrifice that someone else may have to make and point out how the benefits of your plan may outweigh the costs.

You may have spent years in developing your functional or technical expertise. My hope is that by making a small investment in learning to influence up, you can make a large and positive difference for the future of your organization.

Have a question you'd like to me to address? You can submit it by either adding a comment to this post or by e-mailing it to askthecoach@hbsp.harvard.edu

Read all of Marshall Goldsmith's Ask the Coach posts

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Marshall Goldsmith is recognized as one of the world’s leading executive educators and coaches. Dr. Goldsmith’s 30 books include What Got You Here Won’t Get You There and MOJO.

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Congratulations—you’ve been asked to lead a change initiative! But there’s a catch—its success hinges on the cooperation of several people across your organization over whom you have no formal authority.

If you’re like most managers, you’re facing this sort of challenge more often these days because of flatter management structures, outsourcing, and virtual teams. For those reasons, a greater number of managers now need to get things done through peers inside and outside their organizations. In this age of heightened business complexity, moreover, change itself has grown increasingly complicated. A majority of change initiatives now involve multiple functions within and even between companies, and many such efforts encompass an entire firm.

New kinds of partnerships and alliances have emerged as well, and they require managers to exercise influence over peers from the other companies. Santa Clara, Calif.-based Applied Materials, for example, has 800 engineers and other employees working inside Intel, collaborating daily with their Intel partners to develop successful new products.
In such circumstances, command and-control leadership—the “I leader, you follower” approach—doesn’t get a manager very far. Jay A. Conger, professor of organizational behavior at the London Business School and formerly the executive director of the University of Southern California’s Leadership Institute, points out that managers and executives at all levels must use a more lateral style of leadership.

**Why lateral leadership?**

Lateral leadership, Conger maintains, counts among a manager’s most essential skills, and comprises a constellation of capabilities—from networking and coalition building to persuading and negotiating.

Though honing these skills takes time and patience, the payoff is worth it. That initiative you’re championing will stand a far better chance of being implemented quickly. You’ll gain access to the resources you need to carry out the effort. You’ll see doors swing open freely to the key players whose cooperation you need most. And perhaps most important, you’ll achieve the central purpose of managerial work: getting things done through other people—and catalyzing valuable change for your organization.

**A constellation of capabilities**

So how do you begin mastering the skills that constitute lateral leadership? Conger recommends focusing on four closely interconnected and mutually reinforcing capabilities:

**Networking.** Cultivate a broad network of relationships with the people inside and outside your company whose support you need to carry out your initiatives. If networking doesn’t come naturally to you, create a personal discipline through which to acquire this capability. Conger maintains that “certain people are portals to other people—they can connect you to more and bigger networks. You need to build relationships with these individuals in particular.”
**Constructive persuasion and negotiation.** Too many managers, Conger says, wrongly view persuasion and negotiation as tools for manipulation. But conducted with an eye toward mutual benefit, they can vastly enhance your influence.

To make persuasion and negotiation constructive rather than manipulative, view the person you’re dealing with as a peer instead of a “target.” Take courses and read books on these subjects to hone your skills. And find a seasoned colleague within the company who can serve as a confidant and brainstorming partner.

**Consultation.** Take time to visit the people whose buy-in you need. Ask their opinions about the initiative you’re championing. Get their ideas as well as their reactions to your ideas.

Too many managers, Conger says, rush to define a series of steps that they believe constitutes the right way to carry out their initiative. They then circulate around the company and try to impose their solution on others—mistakenly believing that they’re engaging in productive consultation.

The result? Resistance and bickering over process details. “You’ll get far better results,” Conger says, “if you commit to and advocate the desired outcome but invite peers to participate in defining the process for achieving that outcome.”

**Coalition building.** It’s a fact of human nature that several people who are collectively advocating an idea exert more influence than a lone proponent. For this reason, coalition building plays a vital role in lateral leadership. By building coalitions, Conger explains, you gather influential people together to form “a single body of authority.”

To assemble a powerful coalition, begin by asking yourself who’s most likely to be affected by the change you’re proposing. Whose “blessing” do you need—whether in the form of political support or access to important resources or individuals? Whose buy-in is crucial to your initiative’s success?
The challenges of lateral leadership

Though lateral leadership consists of several concrete, interrelated skills, many managers cannot easily master those capabilities. For one thing, Conger points out, they’re often so focused on their own functional silo that they don’t know who beyond their own internal group should be included in their networking and coalition-building efforts.

To combat this “functional focus,” take time to find out who makes things happen in your organization. Whom do people go to for advice and support? And who tends to throw up roadblocks to new ideas and changes? You won’t find the answers to these questions in the organizational chart. As Conger says, you gain a sense of these things through informal contact and casual get-togethers with colleagues throughout the company.

In addition to focusing too closely on their own function, managers experience intense pressure to grapple with what they see as responsibilities more urgent than building relationships. After all, many of them are rewarded for producing concrete, short-term results, Conger notes, whereas investments in lateral leadership “capital” can take time and patience—and often the dividends don’t come until much later.

So how do you reconcile the need to produce in the short run with the equally important need to lay the groundwork for productive collaboration in the long run? Conger recommends dedicating a specific amount of time each day or week to sharpening your lateral leadership skills. For example, commit to having lunch each Thursday with a different person inside or outside your organization whom you don’t know well but who may play an important role in a project you’ll be leading.

Conger also recommends getting to know influential people before starting to work with them on a project. For instance, suppose you’ll be leading a project that will involve managers from several other functions and you’ve scheduled a formal kick-off meeting in a
month. Seek out those managers in the weeks leading up to the meeting and ask them for their thoughts about the upcoming project.

**Creating the right environment**

Considering the increasing need for lateral leadership—and its unmistakable benefits—you might assume that companies are moving energetically to train managers in this important area. But, Conger notes, that isn’t the case.

To be sure, many firms offer courses on influence, circulate articles on various aspects of lateral leadership, and establish mentoring programs designed to help managers identify and access “portals” quickly. But formal training and mentoring efforts can have mixed results, Conger warns.

Why? “Successful lateral leadership grows out of positive chemistry between people. You can’t predict or control the natural affinity people have for one another—that glue that makes relationships of mutual influence possible.”

Rather than “matching people up” through a formal mentoring program, companies have far more success by creating opportunities for people to mingle—and then letting them forge mentoring and networking relationships on their own. Conferences, seminars, and company-sponsored social events provide opportunities for people to get to know peers with whom they might not otherwise interact.

Chemistry becomes even more important, Conger adds, in virtual teams. In these increasingly common work groups, members have few chances to meet face to face and engage in the “sizing up” that humans do instinctively. Without these nonverbal exchanges, people can’t build the trust that makes lateral leadership possible. Thus, people on virtual
teams must be particularly intentional about their networking. Face-to-face meetings—even if they require expensive travel—are often well worth the cost. Lunches, coffees, and other casual social gatherings can further cement working relationships.

As the business landscape continues to shift, companies will need managers who can exercise lateral leadership with increasing skill and confidence. But because many firms still don’t invest explicitly in cultivating this talent throughout their workforces, managers would do well to take the initiative themselves.

*This article appeared in the December 2003 issue of Harvard Management Update.*

**This article is about STRATEGY**

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Proper questioning has become a lost art. The curious four-year-old asks a lot of questions – incessant streams of “Why?” and “Why not?” might sound familiar – but as we grow older, our questioning decreases. In a recent poll of more than 200 of our clients, we found that
those with children estimated that 70-80% of their kids’ dialogues with others were comprised of questions. But those same clients said that only 15-25% of their own interactions consisted of questions. Why the drop off?

Think back to your time growing up and in school. Chances are you received the most recognition or reward when you got the correct answers. Later in life, that incentive continues. At work, we often reward those who answer questions, not those who ask them. Questioning conventional wisdom can even lead to being sidelined, isolated, or considered a threat.

Because expectations for decision-making have gone from “get it done soon” to “get it done now” to “it should have been done yesterday,” we tend to jump to conclusions instead of asking more questions. And the unfortunate side effect of not asking enough questions is poor decision-making. That’s why it’s imperative that we slow down and take the time to ask more – and better – questions. At best, we’ll arrive at better conclusions. At worst, we’ll avoid a lot of rework later on.

Aside from not speaking up enough, many professionals don’t think about how different types of questions can lead to different outcomes. You should steer a conversation by asking the right kinds of questions, based on the problem you’re trying to solve. In some cases, you’ll want to expand your view of the problem, rather than keeping it narrowly focused. In others, you may want to challenge basic assumptions or affirm your understanding in order to feel more confident in your conclusions.

Consider these four types of questions – Clarifying, Adjoining, Funneling, and Elevating – each aimed at achieving a different goal:
Four Types of Questions Achieve Four Different Goals

Choose the right one to steer the conversation where you want it to go.

**VIEW OF THE PROBLEM**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wide</th>
<th>Adjoining</th>
<th>Elevating</th>
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<tr>
<td>Narrow</td>
<td>Clarifying</td>
<td>Funneling</td>
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**INTENT OF THE QUESTION**

- Affirm what we know
- Discover something new

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Clarifying questions help us better understand what has been said. In many conversations, people speak past one another. Asking clarifying questions can help uncover the real intent behind what is said. These help us understand each other better and lead us toward relevant follow-up questions. “Can you tell me more?” and “Why do you say so?” both fall into this category. People often don’t ask these questions, because they tend to make assumptions and complete any missing parts themselves.

Adjoining questions are used to explore related aspects of the problem that are ignored in the conversation. Questions such as, “How would this concept apply in a different context?” or “What are the related uses of this technology?” fall into this category. For example, asking “How would these insights apply in Canada?” during a discussion on customer lifetime value in the U.S. can open a useful discussion on behavioral differences between customers in the U.S. and Canada. Our laser-like focus on immediate tasks often inhibits our asking more of these exploratory questions, but taking time to ask them can help us gain a broader understanding of something.

Funneling questions are used to dive deeper. We ask these to understand how an answer was derived, to challenge assumptions, and to understand the root causes of problems. Examples include: “How did you do the analysis?” and “Why did you not include this step?” Funneling can naturally follow the design of an organization and its offerings, such as, “Can we take this analysis of outdoor products and drive it down to a certain brand of lawn furniture?” Most analytical teams - especially those embedded in business operations - do an excellent job of using these questions.

Elevating questions raise broader issues and highlight the bigger picture. They help you zoom out. Being too immersed in an immediate problem makes it harder to see the overall context behind it. So you can ask, “Taking a step back, what are the larger issues?” or “Are we even addressing the right question?” For example, a discussion on issues like margin decline and decreasing customer satisfaction could turn into a broader discussion of corporate strategy with an elevating question: “Instead of talking about these issues
separately, what are the larger trends we should be concerned about? How do they all tie together?” These questions take us to a higher playing field where we can better see connections between individual problems.

In today’s “always on” world, there’s a rush to answer. Ubiquitous access to data and volatile business demands are accelerating this sense of urgency. But we must slow down and understand each other better in order to avoid poor decisions and succeed in this environment. Because asking questions requires a certain amount of vulnerability, corporate cultures must shift to promote this behavior. Leaders should encourage people to ask more questions, based on the goals they’re trying to achieve, instead of having them rush to deliver answers. In order to make the right decisions, people need to start asking the questions that really matter.

Tom Pohlmann is head of values and strategy at Mu Sigma. He was formerly Chief Marketing and Strategy Officer for Forrester Research, and previously led the company’s largest business unit and all of its technology research.

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This article is about COMMUNICATION

Related Topics: DECISION MAKING
JANET KIRBY  2 months ago

I recommend the book Humble Inquiry the Gentle Art of Asking Instead of Telling by Ed Schein. Asking the right questions is only a part of the art.

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