

Management and Performance Associates | June 2014

Do you know who I am?

In some latitudes – and for a long time - this question was the key to opening doors. Although it's still used in some cultures, it's safe to say that its force and effectiveness has been reduced over time as an acceptable approach to obtain results.

Why has using one's authority—as a way to impose power—been losing its strength? There are many different reasons which interact with each other to provoke a change in the custom.

Examples of these forces are: democratization of information, an increasing stimulus for participation, a higher openness to dialogue/questioning/critique, and valuing diversity. The result of these vectors can be clearly seen in the resistance of Generation Y to follow orders and their emphasis on questioning and being heard.

This behavioral revolution has brought a series of challenges as well as the benefit of relationships that are more mature. Influencing has then become one of the most important competencies in order to obtain consistent results and engage staff responsible for implementing decisions.

Some people believe that influencing is the same as persuading; not exactly. Persuasion is just one of the influencing strategies, not a synonym for influencing. Influencing is broader. It's about creating ideas, solutions and decisions. It starts with a dialogue, assuming "all" participants have an open attitude and willingness to be influenced. Therefore it is not a zero sum game. The value of the influencing process lies exactly on the possibility of generating a dialogue in which diverse perspectives are discussed with the potential of transforming all opinions—sometimes diametrically

opposed—in high quality and innovative solutions.

Contrary to power and authority, which expects compliance or resignation, influence involves a conversation in an open environment in order to understand differing points of view and identify the best outcome.

The following are some tips to improve your influencing skills:

1 | Understand the other person's point of view before presenting yours

Actively listen to the idea or position of the person you want to influence. That will give you at least two advantages. The first is to understand the exact extent of the difference of opinion. As the conversation heats up, it may become difficult to realize that our positions are much more convergent than our emotions allow us to see. The second advantage is to capture the language being used by the other party, therefore allowing you to identify which approach might be more effective with this person.

2 | Be alert to the premises behind the other person's positioning

Correct premises lead to correct conclusions. The opposite is also true. Pay special attention to the premises that support the position of the person you are trying to influence. If they are stronger and more solid than yours, well, then changing your opinion might be a good idea. If not, then you have the opportunity to show the fragility of their argument, pointing out their incoherence or irrelevance to the argument. This strategy has the added advantage of increasing your

chances of keeping the discussion in the field of ideas rather than emotions.

3| Assess the history of the relationship

The influence conversation is more rewarding with some people than with others. Assess the quality of your relationship with this person. A receptive approach will be much more effective if the relationship is damaged, regardless of the reason. Show empathy and listen before positioning your point of view or selling your idea.

4| Tailor your language

Sometimes a good idea is not accepted because of the way it is presented. Assess the language which is valued by the person you are influencing. Do they prefer a more direct approach? Do they need more details? Will it help to use metaphors and analogies to describe the essence of the idea? Do they value eloquence as a way to demonstrate confidence? Finally, remember that effectiveness depends on using the protocol of the other party, not yours.

Using influence instead of power presents several advantages:

- 1| It causes **innovation** by considering different perspectives, as we abandon the win-lose mindset.
- 2| It makes it easier for bad news to be processed and transformed into a competitive advantage. The messenger **will not be punished** by bringing bad news.
- 3| It stimulates **constructive criticism**, as we focus on ideas and solutions, not on vanity. The best way to leverage performance and raise the excellence bar is through an open dialogue about learning opportunities while being open to others' ideas.

4| It contributes to building trust and improving relationships. The outcome is not the only thing that matters. The process and interpersonal dynamics that lead to that outcome are also critical. Discussing ideas will increase the knowledge we have about the other person and it is the basis for **mature and respectful** relationships.

See you next time, and in the meantime, enjoy the World Cup!

We welcome your feedback.

To know more of our training programs, please send us an e-mail to:

sergio.pereira@mapa-way.com or
sonia.dondice@mapa-way.com

Visit our website:

www.mapa-way.com