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# Negotiating by influencing people

Sean McLoughney discusses the skill of negotiation and influencing people and how this skill can be improved by investing a little time in preparing your approach.

Negotiating and influencing people is something you do as a manager every day on some level with a variety of different people. Negotiation is an essential part of business life; you negotiate better deals with clients, improved terms with suppliers and additional resources for your team.

One core element of negotiation is your ability to influence and achieve better long-term outcomes. It is a valuable skill that will help you gain support and commitment for your plans, tasks and business goals. Developing your influencing skills will help you to deal with difficult negotiating situations and the different types of people involved. There is no one correct way to influence people because people are complex. It is a skill that requires constant learning and fine tuning.

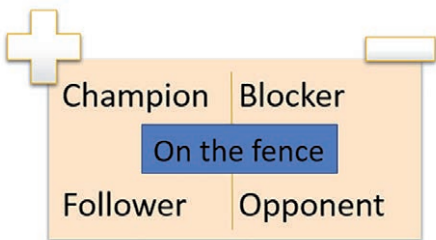
Influencing draws on a range of interpersonal skills and behaviours such as your ability to inspire, listen, communicate (both verbally and nonverbally), persuade, create confidence, empathise, display patience, adapt, probe and build trust. You may have all these skills and use them effectively in various situations but still find influencing people a challenge. The question now becomes how do you deploy these skills and what is your plan when it comes to influencing someone. Choosing and using the appropriate skills and influencing style to suit the various stakeholders is vital for achieving your desired outcome. Also, having the self-awareness and confidence to adapt your approach to suit the needs and demands of each situation is a skill in itself.

Having the skills is one thing but having a methodology is something else. A well thought out methodology will give you a consistent approach which will improve your ability to negotiate and influence. A great place to start developing your methodology is by reflecting on these five questions:

## Who are you negotiating with and trying to influence?

The quote “change is the only constant in work” has been attributed to many people over the years. In your managerial role the task of negotiating with people to change is a familiar challenge. As you prepare business plans and goals for another year, one of your goals will require you to plot a successful course of action through a change management initiative. Some of you may be undertaking a large change such as a merger or moving location, while others will have to implement a number of small changes. Executing these changes successfully will require you to negotiate with and influence a variety of stakeholders.

Start by completing a stakeholder analysis as part of your plan to influence the change. Plot all the key stakeholders using a simple grid system.



**Champions** – these are the people who will support you during the change process. They fully understand the key drivers of the change initiative and more importantly they agree with the change. It is essential that you leverage their support to influence other stakeholders. Keep them regularly updated through open and transparent communication. Seek suggestions and ideas from them to show that you value their support.



**Followers** – these stakeholders have a low understanding of the reasons that are driving the change but are willing to go along with it. They are unlikely to cause you problems during the process. However, it is prudent to spend some time influencing them by improving their understanding and maintaining their positive mindset. Encourage them to ask you questions and explain the compelling reason for change and why you must move forward.

**On the fence** – these people haven't made up their mind yet. They could become an opponent if they feel ignored or if you underestimate their potential resistance to the change. They need to be influenced by seeking clarity on their key concerns and then addressing these issues. Go beyond explaining the need to change and focus on the benefits that are meaningful to them.

**Blockers** – this group of people generally show resistance due to both a low understanding and a low acceptance of the proposed change. Don't assume you know why they are resisting the change. Focus your attention on active listening and identifying their real concerns and issues. Engage with them early and empathise with them. Explain the positives of the change from their perspective.

**Opponents** – finally this group of people have a high understanding but low acceptance for the need to change (because they may lose out or not benefit from change). It is essential that you influence these people early in the process as they could start to influence others to resist your proposed change. Be proactive in communicating some of the possible downsides of the change and then how you propose to mitigate them. This will help you to build some trust with them. Check the validity of their issues with them and counter through facts and supportive data. Explore how working together you might overcome some of the concerns.

This analysis of key stakeholders can be used in a variety of negotiating situations including influencing clients to avail of more services from you, attempting to get information from other departments to complete a report or encouraging a poor performer on your team to improve their performance.

## **Why do you need to negotiate?**

The second thing to consider is why are you trying to influence this person. What is the purpose of the negotiation? What are you trying to achieve? I tend to write this down so that I won't deviate from the message if I am trying to influence someone and the situation is stressful or tense. It also forms the basis of my compelling story which should catch their attention. I list the benefits and personalise them in a meaningful way to the other party. When you are negotiating it is important to establish as much common ground as possible and focus on why they will benefit from your proposal.

## **How will you negotiate and influence them?**

Most people have a preferred influencing approach. However, depending on the situation your preferred style might work or might fail to have the required impact. People who are great at influencing understand that to be effective you need to adjust your approach depending on who you are attempting to influence and why you need to influence them.

Essentially there are two broad approaches to take; the push and pull style. The push approach is more appropriate if you do not have room to manoeuvre and is best used where there is a power base. It is likely to secure low commitment because of the low involvement from the other party. Some of the techniques you can apply include proposing ideas and suggestions that are backed up with logic and facts. You would also state recommendations and sometimes use incentives.

Alternatively, you could use the pull style which is useful in many situations regardless of power and is more effective in long term relationships. However, it requires time to plan and in most cases, takes longer to execute. You involve the people you are negotiating with and solicit their ideas and views while highlighting common ground and beliefs. Share your vision with them.

Remember, before you decide on an approach establish the who and the why as they feed into the how.

## **When is the right time to negotiate with them?**

One of the major barriers to effective negotiating is timing. Trying to influence people when the timing is wrong can be very negative. Check their availability and if there is a timing problem highlight the sense of urgency around the need to deal with the situation. Start the negotiating process by ensuring everyone is fully engaged and ready to discuss and listen.

## **What is a successful outcome for me and the other party?**

Stephen Covey wrote "begin with the end in mind" and this is a good approach to consider when negotiating in a difficult situation. Describe what a successful outcome would look like. What is your "walkaway" position? What are you prepared to concede during the process? What is the ideal "win/win" outcome? It is important to understand what success looks like and what you aren't prepared to accept.

Negotiating is a core business skill required when dealing with a variety of complex and difficult situations. It is a skill that can be improved by investing a little time in preparing your approach. Answer these five simple questions and greatly increase the chances of successfully negotiating with someone by influencing them.