

EXECUTIVE INSIGHTS



Winning ways

The ability to elicit positive behaviour from your colleagues, regardless of your rank, is an essential part of corporate teamwork

WHATEVER YOUR role and wherever you sit in the corporate hierarchy, influencing other people is an essential skill. Just consider the many situations in which you have to get agreement, change opinions or try to win support.

Perhaps you have to convince the boss to confirm a training course or sign off on a new computer; or persuade the sales team to compile their projections for next year's budget on time; or, if you are a manager, to get subordinates to do what you expect.

The ability to influence is a key aspect of leadership. However, as modern organisations become more flexible, each person's success is linked more closely than ever to skills in influencing and motivating those around them. This is the source of real power in the workplace. Without it, the chances of securing commitment and co-operation are severely limited.

In contrast, if you prove yourself adept at winning people over, the way is then open to achieving your goals, aligning the efforts of others for the best overall results and communicating your vision.

The first step in the influencing process is to understand who else has a stake in what you are trying to achieve. It could be the boss, colleagues, clients, business partners or subcontractors. Each stakeholder will have certain concerns and different perspectives and priorities. Dealing with these requires alternative approaches, and that is where many attempts to influence go awry.

WEEK 8 | Gaining commitment, getting results

If you fail to size up the situation correctly or modify your tactics, you will run into difficulties at some point. Therefore, you must be ready to reassess what is going on and respond accordingly.

The three most common responses to attempts to influence are resistance, compliance or commitment. Resistance, of course, is the least desirable and may come in the form of direct opposition or subtle attempts to undermine. For example, people might initially agree to a request, but then create roadblocks or make excuses, which delay implementation.

Compliance is not as serious but is still a problem. In such cases, people will comply with a request while exerting minimal effort and perhaps disagreeing with the rationale. Things might get done, but more slowly than ideal and with little thought given to doing the job well.

Commitment, however, equals success in any effort to influence. It is a sign that people endorse your strategy and are willing to give full support. This is essential if you want people to take on tasks that will be difficult, time-consuming or present a new challenge.

The best leaders realise that gaining this type of commitment is a complex process that entails logical, emotional and co-operative elements. The most effective influencers know how to use all

three, and which to use when. This is known as influencing with the "three Hs" – with head, heart and hands.

The logical part draws on reason and intellect. It involves presenting a case based on perceived benefits for the organisation and/or the individual. For this, there are certain accepted steps. Firstly, you must give an objective explanation of your reasons in a clear and compelling way. This should be built on factual and detailed evidence, so that the proposal appears both feasible and realistic. Then you should demonstrate clearly why this is the best possible option, showing that you have considered other possibilities.

Finally, you should be able to highlight specific benefits as they relate to such things as gaining visibility, learning new skills or improving work processes.

The emotional part motivates other people to help in achieving your goals by appealing to their feelings. This might be by touching their sense of well-being, belonging or duty, in order to win support.

One common technique is to show how your project matches the other person's goals or values. You can then emphasise the point by describing things enthusiastically and expressing confidence in getting the job done. If you can tie your request to a convincing "vision" of the outcome, so much the better.

The co-operative part, or influencing with the hands, depends on forming a bond through teamwork and the prospect of shared success. Most people enjoy working towards a mutually agreed goal and get a real sense of satisfaction from being part of a well-run team.

To capitalise on this, you should involve them in the decision-making process and see this as a way of removing barriers to success. It is important to allow people to air their ideas and suggestions, and to give each of them due consideration.

Maximising your personal influence is also a matter of understanding your own style and adapting tactics. If you always take the logical approach, you may miss the chance to engage people emotionally. Alternatively, if you keep talking about teamwork and the value of co-operation, people may wonder if you have really thought through the details.

You can always improve your ability to influence by observing the behaviour of people in positions of power. Watch what they do and say and how they create and exploit opportunities to influence.

As you learn new approaches and gain experience using different tactics, you will gain more confidence in your own skills.

David Baldwin and Curt Grayson are faculty members of the Center for Creative Leadership, an educational institution dedicated to leadership training and research worldwide

BOOST YOUR INFLUENCE BY FOLLOWING THESE STEPS

Learning how to influence others is best done by practising different tactics. To get started, use the guide below:

Map it out

- **Set goals** Be clear who you need to influence and what you want to accomplish.
- **Identify benefits and challenges** Think about what can be used to win people over. In doing this, consider relationships, relative positions and internal policies in your organisation, as well as each person's skills and knowledge.
- **Assess tactics** Identify what will be most effective in each

situation. Decide which logical, emotional and co-operative elements are likely to work best. Remember not to rely on just one tactic or line of argument.

- **Anticipate possible responses** Ask yourself how other people may react and what they are most likely to say.
- **Have a backup** If your initial approach does not go as planned, be ready to switch tactics to overcome possible resistance.
- **Make it happen**
 - **Establish rapport** Create an atmosphere that encourages openness and optimism.

Remember that body language and tone of voice also play a big part in influencing.

- **Pick the right time and place** Find a setting with minimal distractions or interruptions if you have something to say.
- **Set the stage** Describe the situation and watch for reactions as you explain the main points.
- **Use head** Have a clear set of tactics in order to effectively make your case.
- **Build agreement** Establish clear steps towards the desired outcome and capitalise on points which have already been agreed.

- **End positively** Express appreciation and restate your willingness to co-operate closely.
- **Reflect and learn** After an attempt to influence other people, it pays to reflect on how things went and what you learned. For example, ask yourself:
 - What went well?
 - What would you do differently next time?
 - What action points did you decide on?
 - What did you learn about your ability to influence?
 - How can you improve your influencing skills?

HRtrends

Customer service is key to survival

In the face of severe competition, Jones Lang LaSalle has launched an in-house training programme for all its staff

John Cremer

THE PROPERTY MANAGEMENT sector is fiercely competitive on price and service levels. Typically, contracts are signed for two or three years and detailed performance reviews may take place as often as every six months.

"That means if we want to renew contracts or secure extra business we have to keep raising standards," said Eric Lee, international director and head of management solutions in Hong Kong for Jones Lang LaSalle. He added that success in the industry depended on how well staff dealt with clients, making customer service a top priority.

With this in mind, the company decided to launch its own "Service A+" training programme. Representatives from nine in-house functional committees devised it and then refined the concepts to cater for needs at all levels of the organisation.

Mr Lee said members of staff ranged from ambitious university graduates to technicians, cleaners and security guards who might not have completed secondary education. "The challenge was to ensure each person had a clear understanding of the principles of customer service and applied them during their day-to-day work. Since this is a 24-hour business, every employee on each shift had to realise the part they could play," he said.

Rather than turn to external consultants, the company trained about 50 in-house trainers, known as "service angels". They were volunteers drawn from different parts of the company and recommended by a supervisor or manager. The basic qualifications were to have more than five years' experience, good communication skills and a broad knowledge of the business. Each took on the role of trainer in addition to their normal responsibilities.

"We felt it was best to use people from within the organisation since they spoke the same language and understood the needs of the business," Mr Lee said.

To equip them, the training and customer service managers first conducted a five-day course. Its purpose was to run through the business advantages of better service delivery and to introduce real-life examples to be used in on-site sessions.

"The aim was to prepare the trainers to instil the right values and consistent standards," Mr Lee said. "We wanted staff in every property we manage to understand the importance of putting clients' interests first."

A typical half-day training session therefore reinforces the principles of customer service and encourages staff to share their experiences. Role-plays, case studies and group activities promote participation and comment.

"Some people may start with the mindset that they are just a security guard and ask what this has got to do with them," Mr Lee said. "However, we want everyone to realise they are in a service business and can always add value. If they do that, even in small

ways, they will make life easier for building owners, tenants and visitors."

One innovation, which led to a special award from the Hong Kong Management Association, has been to use 3G technology in the classes. It allows the training manager to monitor the discussions unobtrusively and subsequently offer constructive suggestions to the trainer.

Mr Lee said there were always areas for improvement. For example, a shift manager might automatically hold the door open and push the lift button for a resident carrying several shopping bags. What made the difference, though, was offering to help carry those bags up to the apartment.

Training or refresher sessions usually take place every three months. However, based on feedback from tenants or general observation, additional workshops are arranged, if necessary. It is then up to individual property managers to maintain a higher level of customer satisfaction.

Jones Lang LaSalle employs about 3,000 staff and manages more than 300 Grade-A industrial, commercial and residential properties across Hong Kong. It is also well established in Beijing, Shanghai

PEOPLE POWER

- A "Service A+" training programme has been introduced to enhance customer service skills
- Classes taught by in-house trainers familiar with the needs of the business
- Focus on showing each employee how to add value, even in small ways
- Innovative use of 3G technology to monitor training sessions

and Guangzhou, and is continuing to expand in second-tier mainland cities. "As far as employees are concerned, if we have good business growth they will have improved opportunities within the organisation," Mr Lee said.

Elsie Hui, the human resources director for North Asia, said a professional development curriculum provided staff with the skills the company required. This covers core competences, as well as market-specific knowledge, IT and language skills.

"Graduate recruitment is one part of the development programme. We look first at our internal resources during the business and management planning process, and then decide how many people to bring in from outside," Ms Hui said.

Since 2001, graduates have had the chance to join a regional programme that includes job rotations between departments and to overseas offices.

"This gives good exposure to other parts of the company and provides an excellent local and regional orientation," Ms Hui said.



Jones Lang LaSalle's Elsie Hui and Eric Lee prefer to use trainers from within the company. Photo: May Tse

QUICKFIXES



With the economy picking up, our staff turnover is increasing. What can I do to keep my employees with the company longer?

This is a widespread problem in Hong Kong and the mainland. The buoyant economy is escalating the war for talent and putting the best candidates in the top demand slot. Since high turnover rates can hurt office morale and productivity, staff retention has become a priority for the human resources departments of most companies.

The first step is to ensure you recruit the right people. Too often, managers are in a rush to fill positions and fail to consider whether candidates have the right skills or will fit into the team and the company culture.

It is vital that employees feel they are being compensated according to market rates. You should let them know they are receiving a fair package through salary benchmarking. You can use outside consultants or conduct your own salary and benefits survey. Many large organisations employ compensation and benefits specialists.

While employees will change jobs for a higher salary, the work environment is often more important than the pay in deciding whether to stay or leave. Surveys show that the relationship with one's manager is the main reason people stay at or leave a company. It is vital to have a positive work environment with an organisational culture that includes values that are held from the top down.

The highest level of staff turnover is among new starters. Consequently, it is important to have an

effective induction programme, so that staff are oriented quickly and made to feel part of the business.

Employees must feel they have the support and resources they need to perform their job effectively. This includes support from managers and co-workers and other departments, such as administration, HR and information technology.

Many companies use training and development as a way to reduce turnover. This gives staff the skills to do their jobs more effectively, and they appreciate the investment the company is making in developing them. Making employees feel valued is an essential part of the retention strategy. Your company should recognise achievements and accomplishments with awards, in addition to sharing positive feedback from customers and clients.

The management must also create a process for employees to give feedback. This could be in the form of question-and-answer sessions or an "open door" policy that fosters two-way communication. Employees would feel more empowered if they were involved in the decision-making process.

Article contributed by James Carrs on behalf of Hudson, which delivers specialised professional recruiting, outsourcing and human resource solutions worldwide

Please write to editor@classifiedpost.com with your questions or input. We appreciate hearing from you.