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Influencing Others

A session from
Rx Online

Influencing Others

Personally affecting others actions, decisions, opinions or thinking.

Why is this skill important?

People who are good at Influencing Others can see and talk from another person's point of view. They can understand another person's objections and concerns and respond to them effectively. These people have good intuitive insight, role confidence, practical thinking ability and ability to think on their feet. In contrast, people who are insensitive to others and have excessive role confidence may think that other people only want, or need, to hear what they themselves think is important.

The skill of influencing others is one of the most basic and fundamental tools you will have to master as a professional. Influencing others requires an understanding of a structure that was developed two thousand years ago. Originally developed by the ancient Greeks, Influence, or persuasion, involved three components:

1. Ethos – getting the other person to accept you on an open, ready and willing basis.
2. Pathos – getting the emotional engagement and involvement of the other person in your message.
3. Logos – presenting your idea, product, or service in such a way that it makes sense to the person.

Influencing Others, as old as it is, is probably one of the most misunderstood concepts in the world. Influencing Others is not just doing all of the talking. Rather, it is presenting your solution in such a way that it appeals to the value structure, needs, senses and wants of another person. Influencing Others involves doing as much non-verbal communicating and listening as it is talking!

Before you can hope to influence people of the merits of your ideas, of the value of the solutions you suggest or to change their behavior, you will need to work on how to present yourself. In order to be a successful influencer, you must first learn how to present yourself as polite, knowledgeable and assertive.

Even if your presentation skills are excellent, the act of influencing others requires that you have a developed plan for gaining their support and knowledge about what information is important to present. But be warned! No matter how diligent you have been in examining options and preparing a thoughtful presentation of your ideas, you may meet with resistance. Gaining support from others takes time and practice to perfect!

What skills are associated with Influencing Others?

Someone who has mastered skills associated with Influencing Others:

- Utilizes the knowledge of others' needs, wants, beliefs, attitudes and behavior to promote a concept, product or service.
- Builds trust and credibility before attempting to promote concepts, products or services.

- Understands and utilizes compliance-producing behaviors to influence others such as demonstrating authority, being likeable, or creating a sense of obligation through proof of prior compliance of others, limited availability, sampling or giving something away.
- Uses logic and reason to develop rational arguments that challenge current assumptions, attitudes, beliefs or behaviors.
- Identifies and addresses the social, emotional, economic and practical barriers that prevent people from complying.
- Adapts techniques and approaches to the needs and wants of those being influenced.

How do you develop your own skills in Influencing Others?

- Remember that people do things for their reasons, not yours.
- Don't just present the facts. Make sure you give your opinions and perspective on why the idea you are presenting is appropriate.
- Talk of emotion, not just reason. People are rarely, if ever, persuaded through fact alone. Rather, they want to feel comfortable with their decisions and believe that their decisions will reflect well on them.
- Seek feedback from the person with whom you are communicating.
- Constantly monitor the other person's reactions to ensure that your message is on target and being received in the way you want it to be received.
- If you are not comfortable asserting your ideas or opinions, work toward developing your assertiveness.
- Ask people you trust for detailed feedback on your leadership style.
- Be trustworthy and professional in all of your endeavors. If you are thought of as a trustworthy and knowledgeable person, your job in persuading people will be easier.
- Know your audience. Think carefully about whom you will need to persuade. Adapt techniques and approaches to the needs and wants of those you hope to influence.
- Develop your argument ahead of the time you know you will need to present it. Write down two or three key points you hope to communicate.
- Try to imagine what objections others may raise and be prepared to address them in some positive way.
- Show how your concept worked in another setting or helped someone else achieve a goal.
- Be friendly and use appropriate nonverbal communication. Make eye contact, have a serious expression, and speak clearly and firmly.
- Be sure your verbal and non-verbal language are consistent.
- Make your presentation with the idea that the people you want to persuade are your allies, not your enemies.
- Involve other people in the process of planning and developing your goals, and adapt your approach to appeal to the wants or needs of those people.
- Be enthusiastic. If you show your support of an idea enthusiastically, others will be more likely to follow you.
- Be optimistic and positive about eventual outcomes. Celebrate small successes and reward people for their cooperation.
- Support other peoples' ideas and objectives wherever possible. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. If you have supported others in achieving their goal, they will be more likely to want to help and support you in the future.

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Activities

Activity 1: Ask For Honest Feedback

Ask several people you trust at different levels of your organization, for example, management, peers or employees for their feedback on your leadership style.

List the individuals from whom you hope to receive feedback:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Make an appointment with each person to talk formally. Use the following questions as a guide to your discussion. Remember to be open and not defensive.

- How would you describe my leadership style?
- What do I do well in my role as a leader?
- What do others do better? How could I improve my skills?
- Am I properly people oriented?
- Are there any specific situations you thought I handled particularly well?
- Are there any specific situations you thought I could have handled better? What did you think I should have done?
- Do I seem assertive but not overbearing, or am I too forceful in stating my desires and plans?

Activity 2: Practicing Influencing Others

Think of an idea or project you currently wish to execute in the workplace. Then, with that idea in mind, try to answer the following questions before you try to present your idea to the people you wish to convince.

1. Who is your audience?
2. Why would/should the audience agree with you?
3. Why could the audience disagree with you?
4. What is the best method of persuading the audience? Do they prefer to see carefully written persuasive documents, do they like to meet in face-to-face settings, etc.?
5. What is the main point of what you wish to present?

6. What are three points that support your main idea?
7. Why do you believe so strongly in your idea? (list several reasons)
8. How will others benefit from what you propose?

When you have carefully developed your argument, practice presenting it to someone whom you trust and who is knowledgeable about your organization. Ask for feedback and ideas about improving your presentation.

Activity 3: Review of Your Skills

Ask someone you trust to observe you as you present a new idea or project to others. Have the person take notes and give you feedback on how you handled the following:

- Presenting yourself
- Presenting your idea
- Sounding enthusiastic and positive about your plans
- Persuading others that your idea would benefit them or those they serve
- Politely fielding questions and managing disagreement
- Being assertive but not aggressive
- Request feedback on any other relevant thoughts he might have had as he observed your attempt to persuade someone of the merits of your idea or plan

Activity 4: Observing Others

Make a point of observing people in your organization who are particularly good at gaining support and agreement from others.

1. What techniques does each person use to persuade people?
2. How do they present themselves?
3. How do they present their ideas?
4. How do they handle disagreements and conflict?
5. What do you like best about how they present new ideas or programs?