



COMMUNITY TOOL BOX

Section 6. Influencing People

(<http://ctb.ku.edu>)

Learn how to influence an audience successfully by using our overview of some general ideas behind the science of persuasion.



As leaders, we do a lot. We inspire. We mediate. We decide. We direct. And we do countless other things as part of a day's work. Along with all of this, however, we have another job--one that is sometimes obvious, sometimes subtle--that is always part of what we are doing. That job is influencing other people.

Influence is the ability to persuade someone to think or act in the way you want. This ability is an essential part of leadership. After all, someone who can't convince people of things isn't a leader--no one is following him or her. Therefore, it's important for an effective leader to understand influence. That way, he or she can use this understanding to become even more skilled at getting things done.

Influencing people is something leaders do on many levels with many different people. All of us try to influence almost everyone we meet in different ways--we try to convince people to like us or to leave us alone, to sign our petition or to think about the educational system. Here are some other things a leader might try to convince people to do:

- "Join our coalition"
- "Give us money"
- "Respect our group"
- "Work harder"
- "Stop smoking"
- "Support youth in the arts"

WHAT OTHER IDEAS OR ACTIONS DO YOU, AS A LEADER, TRY TO INFLUENCE PEOPLE TO BELIEVE OR DO?

The influence a leader has extends far and wide--from "average citizens" to other community leaders and possibly, even to other national leaders. It is especially strong within the organizations leaders head or are part of. Volunteers or staff members, for example, may be perfectly willing (or sometimes, grudgingly willing) to do something simply because "the boss said to." While this may or may not be the ideal of most community leaders, it happens all of the time.

These questions of influence--how a leader can *effectively* and *ethically* influence others--is what this section is all about, and we'll look at these ideas at some length in the pages that follow.

We'll start with an understanding of the different elements of influence. Then, we'll discuss some general behavior that will leave you well poised to influence others. These are "preparatory steps" to do even when you don't want anything right now. Then, we'll look at different techniques to influence people that are sometimes useful, and we'll follow that up with a step-by-step list of how to go about influencing someone in a given situation. Finally, we'll end the section with some suggestions for influencing people in more challenging situations.

WHAT ARE ELEMENTS OF INFLUENCE?

At the simplest level, influence is simply the effective combination of three elements:

1. *A communicator* -- the person who wants to influence someone
2. *A message* -- what the communicator wants the audience to do or believe
3. *An audience* -- the recipient (or recipients) of the message. Throughout this section, we will refer to the person or people you want to influence as the audience, even if your audience is just one person.

The *communicator* has a *message* he or she wants understood and accepted by the *audience*. It's pretty simple, and we see it happen all the time.

For example:

- A son (the communicator) wants his mother (the audience) to stop smoking (the message).
- A company (the communicator) wants teenagers (the audience) to buy a certain brand of soda pop (the message).
- A coalition chair (the communicator) wants community members (the audience) to become active members (the message).

So the different parts of influence are pretty simple. The harder question is, how do we make it work? What helps the message get through? What makes influence effective?

HOW MIGHT YOU INFLUENCE PEOPLE?

All three of those elements taken together will decide the overall effectiveness of an attempt to influence someone. The audience (<http://ctb.ku.edu/en/community-tool-box-toc/leadership-and-management/chapter-14-core-functions-leadership/section-8>) (who may or may not consider themselves followers) ultimately determines how well and easily they are going to be influenced. Even if you were born with a golden tongue and have the facts behind you, you probably still won't convince everyone of everything you would like. Remember: it took centuries before everyone came to accept the fact that the world was round.

However, that's not to say that the communicator and the message aren't very important as well. A strong communicator with an important message can win over most audiences. And since this section is written from the community leader's perspective, it will focus most specifically on the communicator and the message--the two parts of the puzzle over which the leader has most control.

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

First, there are some general tips to work on even when you are not trying to influence a specific person to do (or believe) something right now. These suggestions help you form the groundwork for later influence, making future efforts easier and more likely to be successful.

Network

Always look for chances to form new relationships and to strengthen ones that already exist. There are at least two good reasons to do this. First, it gives you instant access to the people you want to influence, or whom you might want to influence in the future. If you don't know personally the person you want to influence, you still may be friends with a friend of theirs who would be willing to put in a good word or set up a meeting.

If you want to influence someone you don't have any connection to, you may be out of luck. You may not even be able to get a foot in the door to see him or her. And it's no small task to convince someone to do something without talking to them.

A second reason to network is that people are always more willing to listen to and help someone they consider a friend or an ally. Even if someone who doesn't know you is willing to talk, he or she probably won't listen as well as they would if you had a strong connection. There is less invested in the relationship.

Think about the following for a moment: you're walking down the street, and someone stops you and asks you to take a pamphlet--the city council is talking about razing a historic building to make room for a new parking garage. "Isn't that terrible," you might murmur, while trying to remember what it was you were supposed to pick up at the store. The activist, obviously very passionate on this issue, talks for a few moments about what needs to be done, and you more or less listen, politely, still trying to remember what you need. "Well, I'll see what I can do," you say in an attempt to escape, and you move on, relieved.

Sound familiar, or at least realistic? Then ask yourself this:

- How might it be different if the activist, instead of being a stranger, is the head of an organization you work with, and who has helped you out on numerous occasions?
- Our guess is the grocery store would have seemed a lot less important.

Understand that credibility counts

Unfortunately, you don't always have the luxury of knowing every person you want to influence. This is especially true when you are trying to influence a lot of people at the same time. The more people you need to convince of something, the less likely it is that you can know all of them.

When people don't know you, it becomes even more important that what they know *about* you is positive. Being *credible*, or believable, to your audience is very important. What gives someone credibility?

The following characteristics help:

- Appearng to know what you're talking about
- Having high status in the community
- Being trusted by the audience
- Being liked by the audience
- Being similar to the audience--for example, expressing opinions and/or values that are shared by the audience

As you can see, these points are interrelated; each of them affects the others. For example, it's much more likely the audience will like you if they feel they can trust you; it's also more likely if you are expressing opinions or values they share. Or, for another example: status and knowledge are sometimes seen as being interchangeable; if someone holds an important position in the community, other people are likely to believe they are knowledgeable, even if that's not the case.

Does this mean you can't appear credible without status or an advanced degree? Certainly not, although those things can help. Take a very famous, very old example: that of Joan of Arc. As a young French girl in the 1400s, she certainly had neither education nor status. But her ability to persuade others was tremendous --as a girl of 17, she successfully amassed and led an army against the English. And talk about influence! She became a saint!

Be trustworthy in your personal and professional affairs

This is related to our last point on credibility, but is important enough to be talked about explicitly as well. If you have a history of honesty and of following through with your part of the bargain, word will get around. People will be more easily influenced, because they can take what you say at face value. They won't be looking for a "hidden agenda."

Remember: the ability to influence others is not a one time event, or even something you work on occasionally. It's not separate from what you do in your "normal" life: how well and easily you will influence others is directly related to how you act all of the time.

Be open to suggestions and possibilities

Being flexible is always a good idea. It's certainly true for times when you are trying to convince people of a certain thing. If you go into a meeting with a hard-line, "we'll do it my way or no way at all" attitude, you may well find yourself leaving empty handed.

But beyond that, try and make it a habit. Make it a point to listen to people's ideas and thoughts and to consider what they have to say. In doing so, you'll become a better communicator, because you'll be able to make connections and specific points to persuade the person you're talking to from things that they have said. What's more, you may get some very good new ideas out of the bargain.

Speak up!

This point is especially important for people who want to influence others in group settings, such as at meetings and forums. To a large extent, how much you say in these settings is related to how much influence you have. You might even call it the "squeaky wheel syndrome." Being shy and retiring --or even quietly confident--simply doesn't work.

Research has shown that in groups (and especially in business meetings), women tend to talk much less than men, and so women should be particularly aware of this. But the point is important for both sexes--while listening is very important, don't let it be all that you do.

Again, be careful that you *do* strike that balance between listening and talking. If all you can hear is the sound of your own voice, you've taken this point too far.

Remember that people hear what they want to hear

That is, they generally won't go out of their way to listen to an opposing opinion. For example, if you give a talk at the public library on how to keep big businesses from coming in and destroying local businesses, who do you think will be in the audience? That's right --local business owners, or people who want to preserve the unique flavor of the town. Other people, such as those who are excited about the possibility of a big department store, or people who simply don't much care, aren't likely to show up.

The lesson here? The people who you really want to reach, whose opinions and ideas are very different from your own--probably won't be knocking on your door. Rather, *you* will need to seek out *them* if you want your voice to be heard.

Don't expect overnight results

Things take time if they are going to be done well, whether we like it or not. Author Stephen Covey writes, "I see people trying to do it all over a weekend--trying to rebuild their marriage on a weekend, trying to rebuild an alienated relationship with their son on a weekend, trying to change a company culture on a weekend. But some things just can't be done on a weekend."

Opinions may take a long time to change. That makes sense--people may have had a lifetime to form them; they usually won't change after a single conversation. Influencing people to change their actions can take even longer. Even if someone knows they should do something, it's not always that easy. Ask any smoker who is trying to quit--change takes time.

Leaders need to remember this, especially leaders in the fields of community health and development work. *It takes time.* Some things it may take a lifetime--or longer--to change. Think of creating world peace, ending hunger, or having a clean environment. None of these will happen overnight. The important thing for community leaders to remember is to keep working at it, and to take pleasure in the small successes we win along the way.

TACTICS FOR INFLUENCING OTHERS

In the last few paragraphs, we've looked at some everyday things you can do to be ready to influence people when the need arises. Now, let's jump briefly to some simple tactics that can be used when that moment does come up. Although it's always helpful to have "primed the pump" as we discussed above, the following tactics are very simple. Many of these can be used even if you've never seen the person you want to influence before--they are simple "street corner" tactics that can stand on their own.

Use comparison.

If everyone else were doing something, would you do it, too? Well, according to the laws of persuasion, you very well might. People like to do what everybody else is doing. If everyone else is signing your petition, passersby will be drawn to it as well. If half the people in town are sporting bumper stickers for your organization, the other half will probably want to know where they can pick up one as well. And so on.

Give something away.

As a small child, you learn that when someone gives you something, you should give something back. If someone smiles at you, you smile back. If someone gives you a Christmas present and you don't have anything for them, you feel bad.

This idea of reciprocity can be very powerful for people trying to persuade others to do something, especially if you want them to donate to your work. By giving people something small, they may feel required to respond, and then think, "Oh, it's something good to support, anyway," and make a nice-sized contribution.

For example, a group trying to raise money for breast cancer research developed a list of potential donors. Then, they sent each of those people 100 personalized return address labels with a pink ribbon. In a cover letter, they thanked donors for past support, asked them to use the labels to support awareness, and (by the way!) if they felt it was worth it, please send a small contribution--whatever they felt the labels were worth. As you might imagine, this campaign was quite successful.

Get people in the habit of saying yes.

Then, make whatever you want to convince people of agree with what they have been saying. Generally, when people take a stand, they want to be consistent. So, if you can get someone to agree on several points related to what you want them to do or believe, it's harder for them to turn you down when you come in for the punch.

Make sense? Steve Booth-Butterfield, an expert on persuasion, explains this idea with the following example:

Earnest Salesperson: "Excuse me, but do you think that a good education is important for your kids?"

You: "Yes, of course."

ES: "And do you think that kids who do their homework will get better grades?"

You: "Yes, I'm sure of that."

ES: "And reference books would help kids do better on their homework, don't you think?"

You: "I'd have to say yes to that."

ES: "Well, I sell reference books. May I come in and help improve your child's health education?"

You: "Ahhh, wait a minute"

INFLUENCING SOMEONE: THE GENERAL APPROACH

The tactics above give you some simple ways to influence people, especially for small or short term ends. But when the stakes are higher, or you are looking for long-term changes, how do you bring that about? One possibility is an approach similar to the one given on the next few pages. As you consider the following points, however, remember that every person and every situation are different. Take these points as suggestions, and modify them to fit your situation.

Decide what you want

This includes deciding what is essential--what you absolutely, positively want to see happen. It also includes what you might be willing to give up. Consider possible compromises that might be acceptable.

Your situation might not have any of this middle ground. For example, you might want people to believe your organization is very important--period, end of discussion. That's probably not something you are willing to compromise on. But in situations where you want people to do something, and not just believe something, the art of compromise can be very important. For example, you might be fund raising for your organization with a goal of obtaining at least \$100 from each donor. However, you would be happy to get a smaller donation as well, or a gift in-kind instead of cash.

Decide whom you want to influence directly and indirectly

This may be obvious--for example, you may want to convince a member of your staff to work harder, and can best do so by speaking with her personally. However, sometimes the people whose behavior or attitudes you want to see changed may not be the ones you are best suited to talk to. Sometimes, it is best to influence people indirectly.

For example, a new pregnancy prevention project in the town of Quinnsville wants teenagers in town to abstain from having sex, and to protect themselves if they do become sexually active. In this instance, however, the project leader may not be the best person to walk into each classroom and talk to the students. It would take too much of her time, and the students don't know her--she lacks credibility with them.

Instead, she might try to convince the teachers and school administrators to enhance the sexuality curriculum. In that way, teachers, who already have a relationship with the students, can teach them necessary information. More work with the students can occur than the director could have ever done on her own--and it can continue well after she and the project are gone.

Start in a friendly manner

By putting people at ease, they are much more likely to listen to your point of view. There are a number of ways to do this, including:

- Praise. Everyone likes to be appreciated. Also, by verbally assuming the best about the other person, you give them something to live up to. You're appealing to their nobler motives. Try starting a conversation by saying, "I've been looking forward to this discussion. You have a reputation as being excellent to work with, (or very fair, or an excellent negotiator, or so on) and I'm sure we can come to an agreement we are both happy with." Chances are the other person will be flattered, and will work hard to live up to the compliment.

Compare that way of starting the conversation with someone who says, "We have to do things my way. I really don't know why I agreed to talk with you -- we've got nothing in common, and I'm certainly not going to change my mind." Whom would you rather work with?

- Be interested in *their* interests. People love to talk about things they enjoy, and rarely get to talk about them enough. By spending a few moments on what your audience enjoys, you will have captured their interest as well as their good will, giving you an excellent atmosphere in which to continue.
- Call people by name. Everyone loves to hear their name--it's most people's favorite word. By using their name, you show people you are aware of them as an individual-- it shows respect for the person. Also, remembering the names of people you don't know well can be very flattering.
- Be careful of criticism. Generally, it's not going to do any good, and it can do a lot of harm. For example, criticism caused the author Thomas Hardy to give up writing novels. If you must criticize, do so gently, and in a constructive manner. You might even try calling attention to your own mistakes first--that way, you're saying, "Hey! We're all human--we're in this together."

Learn what your audience wants and believes

That is, try to understand where they are coming from before you start. Do your research before you meet with them, and ask questions when you are together. Otherwise, your suggestions and ideas might be ignored or understood for reasons you aren't even aware of.

For example, an American health educator working in Sub-Saharan Africa was trying to convince young people to use condoms to protect themselves against the raging AIDS epidemic in their country. Early efforts were politely listened to, but without much success. By chatting with the teens, she slowly understood that ideas of family and of having children before you die were very important to them, and that they were a major block to condom usage. Additionally, a sense of hopelessness came out. "God will take me when He wants me, and that's that," she heard.

After understanding that these ideas were much more a cause of the problem than was simple ignorance, she was able to adjust what she said to address these issues. When she started speaking to them on their terms, her efforts found much greater success.

Emphasize points in common

Try to get the other person in a habit of saying "yes." There will always be differences in opinion on subjects between any communicator and his or her audience. But by focusing on points that are similar, the wall between "us" and "them" becomes lower, and your audience is more likely to see that you are all working together for the same thing.

If you're wrong, admit it

This goes back to what we said above about being trustworthy. If you are discussing an issue with someone and they bring up new information, or a point of view you hadn't considered, don't be afraid to say, "I didn't know that," or, "Well, that certainly changes things." Admitting it when you're wrong gives you greater credibility. You're not a fanatic--you are a reasonable person with whom smart agreements can be made. Even if you lose the day's battle, you've probably created a strong ally for future wars.

Inoculate your audience against counterarguments, if they are likely to hear them

When someone gets a flu shot, or vaccinated against a given disease, what really happens is they are given a weakened version of that illness. That way, their body will be ready to attack the real disease if they are exposed to it.

If you are trying to convince your audience of something that is particularly controversial, it's likely that they will hear arguments to the contrary. Like a nurse giving a shot, you can immunize your audience against that point of view. Simply say, "Other people will tell you X, but this is why that's not true/not the best thing to do/just plain wrong." You have acknowledged other points of view, pointed out their weaknesses, and brought people back to what you believe.

Speak logically and with emotion

Some people will respond best to statistics; others to an emotional appeal. By using both, you will appeal to the largest number of people possible.

Also, using them together is a powerful combination--a one-two knockout that will convince most people. For example, think of an advertisement trying to raise awareness of child abuse. Showing a picture of an abused child, or telling his story will bring about an emotional response in most people. Following that up with statistics--for example, "there are X children in our community who suffer the same abuse," --can be enough to motivate many people to action.

Tell people what they'll get out of it

Explain clearly the benefits of doing what you ask, or alternatively, the disadvantages of not doing it. Most people when asked to do something want to know, "What's in it for *me*?" That may seem somewhat self-centered, but it's a natural question. If you think about it, all of us do things for a reason. There's *always* something in it for us, or we don't do it.

This doesn't mean we (or our audience) need to get money or prestige out of doing or believing something. What we get might be feeling good because we are helping out. Or, we might be avoiding something we don't want to happen. But as simple as it might be, there *is always* an answer to "what's in it for *me*?" And it's an answer that you should give *before* this question is asked.

Use repetition and redundancy

This is what advertisers do; that's why you see the same advertisements over and over again. The more often you say something, and the more ways in which you say it, the more likely people will begin to believe it.

What's the difference between these two terms? Well, *repetition* is saying or showing the *exact same thing* over and over. If you see the same advertisement for McDonalds so many times that you have it memorized, that's repetition. Repetition is helpful because it allows people to see or understand new and different things about the message. The audience can pick up details they didn't catch the first time.

However, too much repetition just becomes annoying. We've all had the experience of really liking an ad or a song, and then having it played so often on the radio or television that we want to scream. There's definitely a point of diminishing returns with repetition that you need to be careful not to cross.

Redundancy can take care of some of this problem. In redundancy, you want to get the same message across, but you are doing so in different ways. For example, if McDonalds is having a sale on hamburgers, they might develop ten different advertisements for that sale. Seeing the same ad over and over is repetitive; seeing different ads for the same things is redundant.

Both of these techniques can be used effectively by community leaders when trying to influence people. For example, if you are giving a talk, you might make your main point at least three times--at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of your talk. And you might make it in different ways throughout the speech. But in almost any situation, remember--*repetition and redundancy can be very powerful tools of influence*.

Don't argue, if at all possible

Generally speaking, you can't win an argument. Even if you win, you may lose. People don't like to be wrong. By arguing, you're telling other people just that--they are wrong. This could seriously harm the relationship, especially if you don't know the person very well.

Sometimes, of course, you will disagree. It's human nature--we won't always see things eye to eye. When this happens, first decide if the disagreement is worth pursuing. Is it really necessary to show the other person they are wrong? If you feel it is, always try to do it calmly and simply, and without making personal attacks.

Make the idea seem simple

The more you ask people to do, or the more drastic the change in opinion you are asking for, the less likely it is people are going to do it. Try to make what you want people to do seem simple and logical. Explain how they can do what you ask with very little change or effort beyond what usually occurs in their lives.

If the change of opinion or action you are working for is complicated, or very long term, break it into pieces you ask people to do. For example, if you want more neighborhood kids to go to college, you might concentrate first on getting them to go to class. Then, they might think about graduating from high school. And as that looks more likely, they might be willing to consider college more seriously. But telling a seventh grader that she can finish college and earn a fantastic salary as an engineer or a doctor may not seem very realistic. Take big ideas one step at a time.

Thank your audience

This is something you should *never* fail to do. Even if it didn't work; even if you felt like it was a waste of time. It's very important that people feel acknowledged and appreciated. Thanking them is a way to keep the lines of communication open for the next time you want to influence your audience.

IN DIFFICULT SITUATIONS

Just trying to influence an open, friendly audience to do something they aren't strongly opposed to takes time and work. Undertaking the logistics of finding the person, deciding how to present your case, figuring out exactly what to ask, and having enough time together to accomplish your goals is already a large task.

Everything becomes much more difficult, however, when you are trying to influence people under more trying circumstances. For example, if you and your audience don't know each other, or (worse yet!) you don't especially like each other; or if you are asking people to do something that will be particularly difficult, or that you know they don't want to do.

When the going gets rough and the stakes are high, it's easy to get frustrated, angry, and in the end, do more damage than you thought possible to a relationship. Is it time to give up? Absolutely not! Rather, it's time to step back, take a deep breath, and remember all of the great tricks you learned about influence. In particular, try to do the following:

Try to keep things in perspective

It's easy to lose sight of the big picture, especially when the situation becomes tense or even explosive.

A young American was traveling in North Africa, and found herself in a bazaar in Casablanca. Having found a pair of sandals to replace the pair she was wearing, she started bartering with the salesman. Considering herself a master bargainer, she took it as a point of pride to get the lowest price possible. But after a few moments, it became clear the shop assistant wasn't going to go any lower, despite her repeated pleas, and she began to get very angry. Just then, she took a moment and thought about the price. She realized that, when she converted the amount from Moroccan Dirhams to U.S. dollars, they had been arguing for ten minutes about the difference between \$3.00 and \$3.50.

Keep your emotions in check

Getting angry, frustrated, or upset won't do either of you any good. The other person will probably just get angry or frustrated as well, or annoyed with the entire situation. Also, and just as importantly, you don't think as clearly when you're upset, and may say things or make decisions that you will later regret. In short--getting upset won't do anyone any good.

If you feel yourself in danger of losing your cool, try one of the following techniques to help yourself calm down:

- Ask if you can take a quick break to collect your thoughts. Or go to the bathroom, or pour yourself a fresh cup of coffee. But if you're afraid of what will come out of your mouth the next time you speak, make sure that you *don't* talk for a few minutes.
- Switch topics. If you are really getting nowhere in your conversation, talk about something else for a few moments. You might go back to something you do agree with, or talk about something completely unrelated for a few moments--the weather, lunch plans, or anything else.
- If you are in a meeting with a group of people, let someone else from your group talk for a few moments while you cool off.

Don't personalize the situation

It's very difficult for people to hear personal attacks without *taking* them personally. And when people are offended are upset, or feel their back is up against the wall, they will be less likely to hear the points you have to make, even if they are completely valid. If you must be critical, be critical of a program or an action, not your audience.

For example, consider these two statements, both given in response to the same problem:

"I disagree with the statement that the corporation isn't really hurting our local environment. Studies show that fish no longer live downstream from where waste from the company is being dumped."

"You are just a bunch of greedy old men who don't care at all about what your stinking company does to our river!"

The second statement riles up your audience, and gives members of the audience the perfect chance to say, "we can't discuss anything with you." Then, they can leave superior--because the communicator, in this instance, was reduced to name calling.

The first statement, on the other hand, gives clear facts that are not so easily ignored, and requires a response from members of the organization.

Understand why people are behaving as they are

A person may be acting in a way that is perfectly ridiculous to you. Remember, though: it's probably not to *them*. The more you can understand their motives, the better you can change your tactics to meet them--and eventually, get what you want.

Change your tactics

If what you are trying isn't working, try something different. Think about magnets--if they are facing each other the wrong way, they repel each other, and you can't put them together for anything. However, if you turn them around, you can't keep them apart.

The lesson here? Know when to change tactics and try something from a completely different angle. If you have been using carefully gathered statistics on child abuse to convince people to donate to your Children's Safe House, try some pictures and stories of children who have come through your doors. If local restaurants are against a ban on smoking sections, despite all of your pleas for better health, show them statistics on restaurants whose business increased when they went smoke-free. Whatever you are doing, try to have many different perspectives in mind when you get together with your audience.

Take a break

Take a few moments to regain composure, or even break for the day. This can help a lot when tension gets too high or discussion has gone on for too long. Both the communicator and the audience can use the opportunity to reassess the situation.

Come back to a point of disagreement

Sometimes, if someone says no to something you find critical, the best thing to do is to go back to some points you have in common, discuss them for a while, and come back to it later. Sometimes, people will change their minds during the course of a conversation; new thoughts will come up, ideas sink in. If it's important enough to you to have agreement on this issue, this tactic can also work to simply wear them down. In the general tips above, we talked about the importance of repetition. This is another way that might occur.

Try to find other people who might be able to influence the person

If you find yourself unable to make any headway, who do you know who might have more luck?

Sometimes, as we discussed above, you won't be the best person to get the message across.

Unfortunately, you might not know that until you are in the thick of conversation with your audience.

However, other people will have more weight with the person or people you are trying to influence.

Find out who the person respects or will listen to, and ask them to try to convince the person.

Consider the use of a trained mediator

If your message simply isn't being accepted and it's very important that you come to an agreement, you might consider the use of a trained mediator. This is a person who's not from your group or your opponent's group, but whom you both trust to be fair. He or she can help both sides agree upon a standard by which you'll judge your resolution. Standards are a way to measure your agreement. They include expert opinions, law, precedent (the way things have been done in the past), and accepted principles.

For example, let's say you're building a new playground for your town's elementary school. You disagree with the superintendent about what kinds of materials you'll use to build the playground. The superintendent wants to use chemical treated wood, but you feel it's unsafe. A mediator might read the current guidelines of the lumber industry and tell you which kinds of wood are considered safe for children. Maybe you and the superintendent will agree to follow the lumber industry's advice--in other words, to use that as the standard.

Of course, there are often many kinds of standards. There may also be a national parent group that suggests certain safety guidelines for playgrounds. A mediator might help you and the superintendent negotiate about whose standard you'll use.

Your mediator could also, for example, run your brainstorming session. Here are some other possible jobs for a mediator:

- Setting ground rules for you and your opponent to agree upon (for example, you might both agree not to publicly discuss the dispute)
- Creating an appropriate setting for meetings
- Suggesting possible ways to compromise
- Being an "ear" for both side's anger and fear
- Listening to both sides and explaining their positions to one another
- Finding the interests behind each side's positions

- Looking out for win-win alternatives
- Keeping both parties focused, reasonable, and respectful
- Preventing any party from feeling that it's "losing face"
- Writing the draft of your agreement with the opposition

Many trained mediators are also lawyers. A list of people with training in mediation can be found in your local yellow pages.

Know when it's time to give up or temporarily retreat

Whatever you are trying to convince your audience to do or believe, there are times when even the most effective leader won't be able to convince them to accept the message. Or, you may be able to convince them, eventually, to do what you want, but at a price tag (in time, energy, or lost goodwill) that is just too high. When trying to influence someone, then, know when to bow out gracefully, and to save your armor for another day.

IN SUMMARY

The ability to influence someone successfully is one of the most important and challenging jobs any leader will face. This section gives an overview of some general ideas behind this science of persuasion. By fully understanding this information, a leader can become very effective in his or her work. We encourage you to think carefully about your use of influence, and to use it wisely and ethically as you pursue your goals.

Contributor

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Online Resource

Steve's Primer of Practical Persuasion and Influence (<http://ctb.ku.eduhttp://www.as.wvu.edu/%7Esbb/comm221/primer.htm>)

Print Resources

Berkowitz, W. (2000). Community and Neighborhood Organization. In J. Rappaport and E. Seidman (Eds) *Handbook of Community Psychology*. New York, NY: Plenum.

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