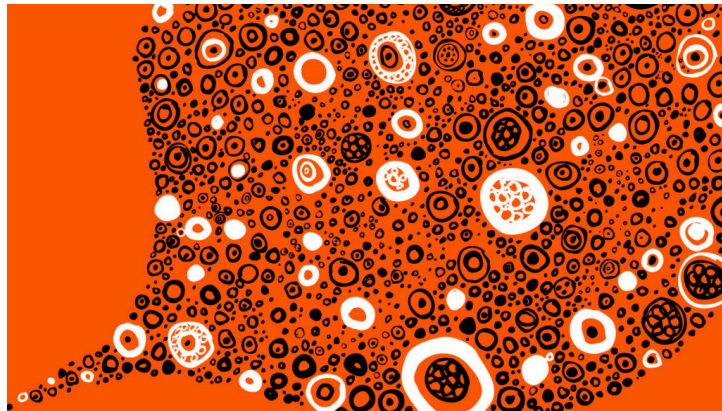


How to Increase Your Influence at Work

by Rebecca Knight

February 16, 2018



lok fung/Getty Images

Summary. To be effective in organizations today, you must be able to influence people. Here are some tips on how to position yourself as... [more](#)

To be effective in organizations today, you must be able to influence people. Your title alone isn't always enough to sway others, nor do you always have a formal position. So, what's the best way to position yourself as an informal leader? How do you motivate colleagues to support your initiatives and adopt your ideas? How can you become a go-to person that others look to for guidance and expert advice?

What the Experts Say

Having influence in the workplace has “clear value,” says Dorie Clark, author of *Entrepreneurial You*. “You get more done and you advance the projects you care about and are responsible for,”

which means “you’re more likely to be noticed, get promoted, and receive raises.” But gaining influence in the modern workplace is difficult, according to Nick Morgan, author of *Power Cues*. “It’s never been harder to influence others, because they’ve never been more distracted,” he says. “Information overload and the pace of our digital lives have [led to short attention spans].” And yet, “it’s more important than ever to be able to command influence, because of the increased pressure on getting results.” It all comes down to your approach. Here are some tips.

Build connections

It’s not quite a junior high school popularity contest, but “at a fundamental level, one of the reasons that people do things for you” — support your idea, or approve your budget — “is because they like you,” Clark says. You don’t have to be “the awesome-est person in the room” or make sure “everyone is blown away by your charisma.” You just need to have good rapport with your colleagues. This won’t translate directly into influence, of course, but it does “make it more likely that others will at least hear you out.” So, work on cultivating personal connections with your colleagues, and allow them to get to know you. “That way, they won’t impute negative intentions or motives to you.”

Listen before you try to persuade

The best way to prime colleagues for backing you and your agenda is to make them feel heard. Start by giving them your undivided attention in one-on-one situations. “Most of us walk around with a running to-do list in our heads,” Morgan says, and it shows. We’re fidgety, preoccupied, or ready to reach for our phones. Instead, you should “practice the discipline of focus.” To do this, “turn your body toward the other person, freeze in place, and listen.” Clark agrees: “A big part of workplace resentment is people feeling disrespected and that their voices aren’t being heard.” So, ask colleagues for their perspectives and advice.

Mind your body language (and your tone)

People are constantly assessing whether to trust you or not, Morgan says. “[We’re] hardwired to be asking the question, ‘Is this

person a friend or foe? Is this person trying to undercut me, or are we on the same side?” Your body language is critical to conveying the right message. Standing up straight with your shoulders back helps you come across as confident and commanding; slouching and looking down at your feet has the opposite effect. “When you adopt a certain [slumping] posture, you think in subordinate terms and you talk in subordinate terms, and it increases the likelihood that you’ll be seen as less authoritative,” Morgan says. Say, for instance, you have a meeting with a colleague you don’t know well from another division. Morgan suggests signaling that you are a friend by keeping your arms uncrossed, your hands by your sides, and “your torso open and pointed at the other person.” He also advises “pitching your voice a little lower than you normally do” in order to connote power. “This is useful to work on because it counteracts the effect of nervousness, which tends to push your tone higher.”

Develop expertise

Another way to increase your influence at work is to “be seen as a recognized expert” within your industry or organization, Clark says. This won’t happen overnight, but you can take steps to develop business-critical expertise and knowhow. She suggests “immersing yourself in your topic area” by regularly attending industry conferences, enrolling in a class or specialized certification program, or taking on a leadership role in a relevant professional organization. “Those are visible and public signs” that you are staying up-to-date and informed, she says. Don’t keep your knowledge under wraps. “Blogging about your subject on LinkedIn or for your company newsletter” is another way to show what you know.

Map a strategy

When it comes time to leverage the influence you’ve built to promote a particular initiative or idea, be strategic. Clark recommends creating a “power map” to guide your campaign. “Create an org chart of decision makers related to your issue,” she says. As you go through the levels, “ask yourself, ‘Can I influence this person directly? If not, whom can I influence who can

influence that person?” Then begin to think about how and when you will approach these various colleagues. “War-game the situation,” she says. “Who might be threatened by your plans, and how can you bring them over to your side?” You’re not scheming; you’re strategizing.

Give people what they want

You can increase your influence on a particular issue by authentically framing it as a benefit to the people you want on your side. Consider each stakeholder’s needs, perspectives, and temperaments. “Do your homework to find out what they need to hear and what will capture their attention,” Morgan says. For each person, “make sure you’re answering the question, ‘What’s in it for me?’” He also recommends talking about how an idea will “benefit the organization” as a whole. “Use the word ‘we,’ as in ‘We’ll see value,’” he says. Clark concurs. “If your proposal is fundamentally self-interested, people won’t line up.”

Principles to Remember

Do:

- Cultivate personal connections with colleagues so they assume positive intent when you attempt to influence them.
- Make it clear to your colleagues that you value their opinions.
- Take steps to develop expertise by attending conferences or taking on a leadership role in a professional organization.

Don’t:

- Worry that your attempts to gain sway are manipulative. You’re being strategic.
- Slouch as you talk. Standing up straight with your shoulders back helps you come across as confident and commanding.

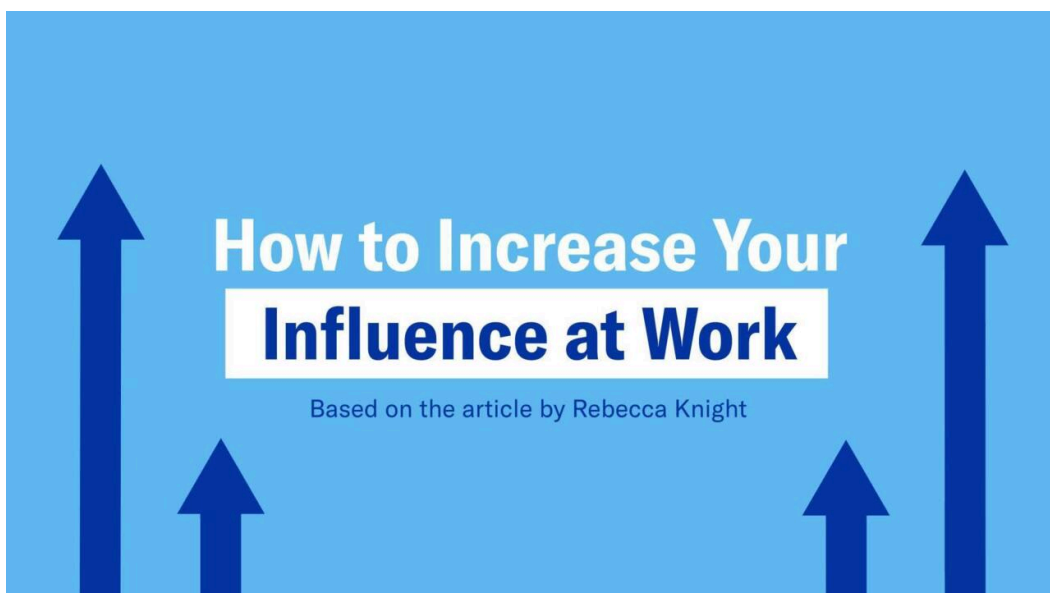
- Use “I” too much. In your quest for influence, talk about how your ideas will benefit the entire organization and how “we” will see value.

Case Study #1: Stay current and build relationships with your colleagues so that you understand what motivates them

Marcy Shinder, chief marketing officer at Work Market, the New York City-based firm that helps businesses manage their freelancers and consultants, was working on establishing herself as an influential member of the team before she even started the job.

Before her first day of work, she arranged to meet several colleagues for informal coffees and lunches – one-on-one meetings that were “more personal, less structured, and allowed us to establish rapport.” “I went in with a listening agenda,” she explains. “I wanted to learn: What are their goals? What is important to them? What do they think is working at the company? And what do they want me to accomplish?”

Marcy made sure her body language conveyed that she was fully focused on these conversations. She sat up straight, made eye contact, and looked open and engaged. “Body language is so important — we coach salespeople on it,” she says. “I tried to listen with intent.”



Those early meetings allowed her to understand the perspectives, personalities, and motives of her colleagues, which proved to be useful when she recently had an idea to revamp the company's website and needed their support to move forward.

Thanks to those early one-on-one conversations, she could customize her pitch to each individual. For example, with Stephen Dewitt, the CEO, she talked about the company's vision. With Jeff Wald, the president and COO, an analytic thinker, she started with the metrics. And with the chief customer officer, she focused on the customer side.

"It is the same story, just with a different emphasis," she says. Her efforts paid off. The new Work Market website will go live this spring.

Another way Marcy increases her influence is by staying up-to-date on industry trends and news. "I spend 25% of my time talking to customers, other chief marketing officers, people on boards of companies, potential customers, and mentoring young people," she says. "By doing that, I stay informed and I have a finger on the pulse of what's happening beyond the four walls of this company."

Case Study #2: Create a message that resonates, and forge a path for others to become proponents

George Gallegos, CEO of Jitterbit, the data integration software provider based in Oakland, California, is not a top-down leader. "It's not 'my way or the highway,'" he says. "I want people to feel that they have a voice and are part of the decision-making process."

In 2011, when Gallegos first started at Jitterbit, the company had about 50 customers. George knew the company's future was in the cloud, but "it was a new territory, and it was going to be a challenge," he recalls. "It required engineering resources being

diverted and getting investors comfortable with that, and we had to make sure marketing could figure out how we were going to reposition ourselves.”

George began strategizing about how he would win support for the change. The toughest sell was going to be “Jeff” — Jitterbit’s senior technology leader — who was skeptical of the cloud.

George reflected on Jeff’s personality in order to craft a message that would resonate with him. “I knew he was passionate about customer success and that — like me — he hated losing,” he says. “So I knew I had to give Jeff visibility into the challenges we were facing” by maintaining the status quo.

George brought Jeff to a two-day pitch meeting with a potential Jitterbit client. “I brought him into the trenches, and I let him get bloodied up with me,” George says. “I wanted him to feel the customer’s pain.”

Jitterbit had its first cloud-based release in 2012. Today the company has 50,000 customers.

RK

Rebecca Knight is a journalist who writes about all things related to the changing nature of careers and the workplace. Her essays and reported stories have been featured in The Boston Globe, Business Insider, The New York Times, BBC, and The Christian Science Monitor. She was shortlisted as a Reuters Institute Fellow at Oxford University in 2023. Earlier in her career, she spent a decade as an editor and reporter at the Financial Times in New York, London, and Boston.

Recommended For You

PODCAST
How To Make the Most of Your Work Day (from Working It)



The Necessary Art of Persuasion



Understand the 4 Components of Influence



How to Work with Someone Who Isn't a Team Player

