

Suggestions for Influencing without Authority

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This document is intended for my clients who are struggling to lead others (often peers) without having or relying explicitly on authority. This document contains a small collection of suggestions, followed by notes from the relevant sections of three books: Paul Glen's Leading Geeks, Michael Watkins' The First 90 Days, and Cohen and Bradford's Influence without Authority.

Suggestions based on my experience and conversations with other coaches and managers:

1. Establish respect and influence will follow.
2. Be transparent. Communicate everything.
3. Have conversations where you add value and contribute.
4. Bring technologists problems, not solutions.
5. Be open-minded and listen to others.

From Paul Glen's Leading Geeks, Chapter 7 on "Providing Internal Facilitation":

1. Technologists do not respond well to centralized authority. They resist control, but welcome facilitation. A leader who openly takes control is resisted. Power is not a way to control them, since their productivity is in thought not behavior.
2. Facilitating can be hard for technologists, because they want to solve problems instead.
3. Establish core values and consistently, repeatedly act in accordance with these values. Don't allow your actions to undermine your words.
4. Create a safe environment for brainstorming and debate. Welcome questioning of decisions and authority. Make it safe for people to speak outside of their role about things that they are passionate about. Make it safe for people to make stupid comments without being considered an idiot.
5. Create forums to encourage the flow of ideas and debate within appropriate groups. The goal is to discover the best idea given the current constraints.
6. "If everyone feels that their ideas have received a fair hearing, whether or not they prevail, they will believe that a fair process has been followed, their ideas have been considered, and a measured judgment has been made. Such a fair process legitimizes decisions in the eyes of the geeks and ensure that the best decisions possible are made."

7. By going through this forum process, the group sees their collective wisdom, not just the leader's. They are more committed and motivated.
8. For conflict resolution, the leader needs to help identify trade-offs and conflicting assumptions. The leader should help the team build its own consensus, not make the decision him/herself. If the conflict is due to personal ambition of one or more group members, the leader needs to re-establish what's best for the group as the basis for making the decision.

From Michael Watkins' The First 90 Days Chapter 7 "Build Your Team", section on "Managing Decision Making":

1. Select (and communicate) the appropriate decision-making approach for the situation: unilateral, consult-and-decide, build consensus, or unanimous agreement (in decreasing order of control).
2. The unanimous agreement approach can often be lengthy, not result in a decision, or result in a suboptimal decision.
3. The consult-and-decide approach is when the leader gets information and advice from the group but reserves the right to make the final decision.
4. The build consensus approach is when the leader seeks information, analysis, and buy-in from the group. Not everyone needs to agree, but a critical mass agrees and the rest can live with the decision.
5. Don't give in to the urge to use a more controlling approach to save time and act sooner. Due to lack of buy-in, you may not actually reach your goal faster this way.
6. Use a build consensus process if you want energetic support from the group.
7. Use consult-and-decide if you are working with a less experienced group. If you take a build consensus approach, get frustrated, then decide yourself, you'll undermine the group's teamwork.
8. Explain to the group what decision-making process you're going to use and why. "More important, strive to run a *fair process*. Even if people do not agree with the final decision, they often will support it if they feel (1) that their views and interests have been heard and taken seriously and (2) that you have given them a plausible rationale for why you made the call you did. The corollary is: Don't engage in a charade of consensus building - an effort to build support for a decision already made. This rarely fools anyone, creates cynicism, and undercuts implementation. You are better off to simply use consult-and-decide."
9. Often you can move between build-consensus and consult-and-decide approaches as you learn more about the issue.

From Michael Watkins' The First 90 Days Chapter 8 on "Creating Coalitions":

1. Leaders often need to influence without authority and need to create coalitions to get things done. Influence networks can help you get support for your goals. Create an influence strategy - identify who you need to influence, who is likely to support or resist you, and who could be persuaded to support you.
2. Invest the time early on in building relationships with people you may need to work with later.
3. Identify informal networks of influence, "the shadow organization." People often defer to people whose opinions they respect on a given issue. "Analyze patterns of deference and the sources of power that underly them." Observe in meetings, see who defers to whom, trace alliance, see who people turn to for advice and who shares information. Identify opinion leaders, "people who exert disproportionate influence through formal authority, special expertise, or sheer force of personality." If you can get these people to support you, others will likely follow.
4. Draw an influence map to show who influences whom for the issue at hand. Nodes in the graph are people, edges are directed (can be bidirectional) and their thickness corresponds to the amount of influence.
5. Try to understand reasons for resistance to your ideas before you label someone an opponent. This understanding will help you create counterarguments.
6. Understand everyone's interests - "try to figure out what *they* perceive their interests to be" (eg, status, money, security, social and professional relationships, challenge, etc.).
7. Are there competing forces that might make people decide to oppose you? "For example, making them see that their interests are compatible with yours would prompt them to support you, but the threat of losing a comfortable status quo might trigger resistance."
8. People may see the choice between two options as between (1) making an uncomfortable change and (2) keeping a comfortable status quo. Can you compensate these people in some way to make change more palatable? Can you find ways to eliminate the status quo as an option? Can you get them to see the options as (1) they can help shape the future or (2) the change can happen anyway? "You figure out how people perceive their choice, and then you craft a mix of push and pull forces that alter those perceptions."
9. You can use both reason (logic and data) and values (and associated emotions) as the basis for your argument. Some values you might appeal to include loyalty, commitment and contribution, individual worth and dignity, and integrity.
10. To avoid delays, try to set up action-forcing events that get people to commit or act. Use timetables, milestones, reviews, deadlines. However,

- "avoid pressing for closure until you are confident the balance of forces acting on people is tipping your way."
11. Another approach is to use "entanglement strategies," which break a big change or decision into several smaller, incremental ones. "Entanglement works because each step creates a new psychological reference point for deciding whether to take the next small step. When possible, try to make each step irreversible."
 12. A related approach is multistage problem solving. Get the group to do shared data collection and recognize that there's a problem. Jointly define the problem and criteria for evaluating alternative solutions. Then jointly evaluate the alternatives. "By the alternative-evaluation stage of this process, many people will accept outcomes they would have rejected at the outset."
 13. Another entanglement approach is to "*use behavior change to drive attitude change*. ... if you can change peoples' *behavior* in desired ways, their *attitudes* will shift to support the new behavior. This occurs because people feel a strong need to preserve consistency between their behavior and their beliefs."
 14. People's influence networks can be both a barrier and an asset. "You can leverage knowledge of influence networks into disproportionate influence on a group with what my colleague Jim Sebenius termed a *sequencing strategy*. The order in which you approach potential allies and convincibles will have a decisive impact on your coalition-building efforts. Why? Once you gain a respected ally, you will typically find it easier to recruit others."
 15. When building a coalition, first approach people who already are supportive of you or have strongly compatible interests, people you have the resources you need to succeed, and people who can enlist more supporters.

From Influence without Authority, by Cohen and Bradford: [Note that this book's focus on give-and-take trading for what you want can be a little off-putting, but it's worth considering for some situations as long as you are keep the long-term best interest of the company in mind, see possible win-wins, and are not being manipulative.]

1. Reasons to use an influence model: the other person is resisting, you don't know the other person and are asking for a lot, you have a bad relationship, this is your only chance, or nothing else has worked. (table 2.2 on p. 19)
2. Cohen-Bradford influence model has 6 stages (figure 2.1 on p. 20): assume everyone's a potential ally, clarify your goals/priorities, diagnose the other person's world, identify relevant currencies for yourself and them,

- understand your relationship and how they prefer to be approached, and finally use give and take (win-win) to influence them.
3. Questions to help identify your goals and priorities: What's primary, what's secondary? Is accomplishing the task more important than the relationship?
 4. "Each person has preferred ways of being related to. Some like you to bring a thorough analysis before you launch into discussion with them, while others would rather hear preliminary ideas with a chance to brainstorm. Some want to see alternative solutions, whereas others only want your final conclusion. Be careful not to relate in the style you most prefer without taking into account the other person's preferences. You will have more influence if you use an approach the other person is comfortable with."
 5. Common influence barriers (from table 2.4, p. 27): not clarifying your goals/priorities, not determining their currencies, determining but not accepting their currencies, not determining how you want to make trades (and making them).
 6. Currencies (what people value and can be traded for) in an organization can be related to inspiration (vision, excellence, moral/ethical correctness), tasks (challenge/learning, etc), position (recognition, visibility, reputation, etc), relationships (understanding, etc), and personal (ownership/involvement, etc). (From table 3.1, p. 38)
 7. From the "Key Concepts for Dealing with Any Colleagues" section (pp. 217-219), to influence colleagues you need to: really understand their situation, be clear about your goals, look for multiple trading options, and tie your request to the person's goals (this lets you then talk about the person's behavior without offending them). "Getting a better working relationship often starts with something specific. After that successful exchange, other currencies you value can follow. ... Although you may want to start with a focus on a specific request, a full understanding of the many currencies the other person values and a sense of the range of responses that will help you can make it easier to find trading possibilities. ... When possible, work from interests, not a fixed position. ... Show how the old behavior is not accomplishing what the other person intends and how he or she could better achieve the goal by doing what you ask." Finally, help your colleagues look good on a regular basis, not just for performance reviews.