

Member's Quarterly

Fall 2017 Edition

Ask the Expert

Influencing Without Power

Skills you need for lateral leadership



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Q: How do you get people to cooperate when you don't have formal authority over them?

A: This is becoming more and more common in a business environment that has adapted to a down turn in the economy by becoming flatter. But even when the economy had not resulted in leaner organizations, organizations also recognize the need for greater cross functional collaboration to generate efficiencies, reduce duplication of effort and foster innovation.

So, what do you do when the success of an initiative hinges on the cooperation of several people across your organization over whom you have no formal authority? The answer is influencing without power. Some people refer to this as lateral leadership.

There are a few ways you influence without power. Examples include networking, coalition building, persuading and negotiating. Lateral leadership requires less of a "do as I say approach"; instead, it is based on collaboration and meeting mutual interests.

Q: What are those?

A: Networking involves developing a broad range of relationships with the people inside and outside of your organization whose support you need now or in the future. You do not need to know everyone in your industry. However, there are key people who are "connectors" — they seem to know a great number of people and can help you reach into larger networks when you need them.

Coalition building is similar to networking, in that you build buy-in with a critical group of stakeholders and then have them work with you to exert influence with their own network. Determine who is going to be affected by the change or the project you are proposing (your stakeholders). Then work with each of them to build buy-in for your initiative's success.

Persuading and negotiation are tools in your influence journey to help you build buy-in. To get buy-in, it is important to be sure you understand the interests of your stakeholders. What is it that motivates them? What is important to this person or group's success? Will your project contribute to growing their success or meeting a need of theirs in some way? When you are partnering with colleagues, look for mutual benefits and make those opportunities for mutual benefits clear.

Q: How do you deal with resistance?

A: Resistance can be your ally. If a person will engage in a conversation with you about their resistance, you have an opportunity to persuade and negotiate. Generally speaking, a person's resistance often stems from not understanding how his or her interests will be met through your initiative. Sometimes it is useful to do a "gains and losses" conversation. What does she think she will lose if your

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project goes forward? What might she gain? Are the losses real or just assumed to be the case? A conversation like this can give you a powerful opportunity to help your colleague see why he or she should buy in to your project.

Q: What other skills does a person need to be an influencer?

A: Influencers are very good at not making it "all about them". An influencer knows that a team based approach is necessary where power is shared. Influencers are also good at sharing the spotlight and saying thank you. While it is very important that your stakeholders feel that their interests are being met, it is also important that you take time to reward and recognize the support of the people who were in fact critical to the success of your project, and in turn, your own success.

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