



A key skill for managers and leaders is to be able to influence the people around them, whether that be employees, customers, suppliers or other key stakeholders.

What does 'Influence' mean? Fiona Dent, from the Hult Ashridge Business School, describes influencing as 'essentially an interpersonal and communication skill that largely depends on your ability to interact with others in a way that appeals to them, to gain their attention and commitment'. The old style 'command and control' approach to management doesn't fit well if you note her addition that it is 'the ability to affect others' attitudes, beliefs and behaviour without using force or formal authority'. So influencing is about encouraging people to want to get on board with an idea or approach, rather than manipulating or forcing them to.

Behaviours for influencing - If you want to influence more effectively, assess and develop your skills in the following areas:

Emotional Intelligence - including these aspects <i>(adapted from Goleman, HBR 2000)</i>	Top Tips
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-awareness & self-management – recognise and understand your own emotions and don't allow them to negatively impact others, even when under pressure • Realistic self-assessment – evaluate your own strengths/ weaknesses and maintain high self-esteem and confidence (no rose or grey tinted spectacles) • Motivation - demonstrate drive, resilience and adaptability • Social empathy – be able to put yourself in someone else's shoes and see the world through their eyes, be able to read a room and the politics of any situation, behave in service of others • Social skills - ability to be persuasive, develop others, communicate effectively, be a change catalyst, build and maintain great relationships and work collaboratively. 	<p>If you are needing to influence, take a moment to stop and think about your approach. Start with the end in mind – what would you like the person to Think, Feel or Do on the back of your conversation or presentation?</p>
<p>Ability to quickly build trust and rapport</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do people believe that you are genuinely interested in them? (think curiosity and listening skills) • Do you appropriately share something about yourself, rather than interact in a purely 'transactional' way? • Do they know that you have their best interests at heart as well as your own (think 'Win Win' Stephen R. Covey)? 	
<p>Credibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you have expertise, experience, knowledge in this area? Do they believe you to be honest and reliable? 	<p>Consider your best starting point – to Push your energy and information out, or to Pull the other person's energy and ideas towards you.</p>
<p>Clear and effective communication skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are you fully present when people are talking to you? Do you listen to understand or listen waiting to speak? • Are you able to demonstrate that you have heard and understood the other person's message? • Do you use compelling, clearly understood language when presenting a case? • Do you check understanding and gather thoughts and opinions or plough on regardless? 	<p>Stay alert to how the person is responding and adjust your style and use of energy and information accordingly</p>

Techniques for influencing - Ashridge Hult's 'The Influencing Style Preference Inventory' suggests a Push/ Pull approach to influencing. 'Push' involves a more directive, persuasive, pace setting style. You can use this if you are a credible expert, need swift action, are working with less experienced people, or there is an emergency situation. This may also be used if there is only really one answer or approach, you know it and can prove it's the right way to go. Watch outs – if you do this poorly, overuse the approach, or use it at the wrong time, you may be deemed bullish or domineering. 'Pull' involves a collaborative, consultative and visionary approach, with more asking rather than telling. This is an ideal approach if you need commitment and ideas from others, or where there is no clear answer. Often it is used at the beginning of a long or complex change programme and in circumstances where innovation is valuable. Watch outs – if you overuse this style or use it ineffectively you may be seen as weak or idealistic.