

# Learn to be more influential

Boost your ability to communicate ideas that move people to action

LAST week, we looked at overcoming the second mental barrier to innovation – the lack of time. The final article in this series today tackles the third mental barrier to innovation – the lack of influence.

Innovation requires the ability to spread the word and communicate ideas in ways that call others to arms.

## What it means to have influence

To find out, observe a person who has influence and you will probably see:

- Someone whose words are listened to willingly and actively by others;
- A consummate communicator who gets his message across with clarity;
- Listeners who quickly come to understand the importance of his message;
- Others around him who have a sense of urgency; and
- Supportive people taking appropriate and timely action.

Influence is an ability to get things done, typically with the help of others. It is an ability to move people in a given direction.

It is both a connection and capability that hooks into and affects the emotions of others in positive and meaningful ways.

Influence shapes your ability to get the job done and relies on four mental cornerstones:

### 1 Play to your strengths

Strengths help establish your credentials, and credentials can be very influential. They open doors for you long before you knock, allowing you to achieve things in much reduced time frames.

Develop key strengths that can help you become more influential, such as:

■ **Communication.** Many people listen to US President Barack Obama not simply because of his content, but because it is he who is speaking. Find ways to develop your communication skills through a lot more practice plus a little training.

■ **Centrality.** By playing a more central role, you will be seen as more influential. Find ways to align closer to organisational goals and be more accepting of responsibility. This will raise your centrality as well as your status.

■ **Expertise.** Find and become known for an area of expertise. For instance, you could become the “go-to” person for designing presentation slides or spreadsheets.

### 2 Have a passionate conviction

Influential people have a conviction that shines through their message with both clarity and feeling. They communicate with zeal, intensity and passion for their subject.

When listening, you feel that the message is not only important to them, but it has even more meaning to others.

### 3 Operate with visibility

No one takes action when unaware of both message and messenger, so influence requires you to have a level of visibility.

Influential communicators thus place themselves in positions where they can have some visibility. They don't shy away in the darker recesses of their organisation. They are confident when talking through their message with others.

They know that by increasing their visibility, it improves their

centrality too. They make their message actionable, and visibility and centrality give them the confidence to ask assertively for what they need.

### 4 Patience to listen

Though we think of influence as being an outward process, great influencers have fantastic listening skills.

They listen with a passion that shows others they really care. They understand the power of reciprocation, knowing full well that it will encourage others to listen in return.

By showing respect for other viewpoints, they know they are also coaching others in how they can listen to the voice of influence at some future point.

## Communicate with influence

Influence, then, is all about getting your message across and is one important part in your strategy to become more innovative.

Innovation starts out with a small, innovative seed of an idea.

Through the creative application of time, that seed is nurtured and begins to germinate.

During the influence stage, that

seedling breaks out, bursting forth its shoots. And with the right conditions, it slowly starts to take root.

All your contributions help, no matter how small, so working on a few new personal skills is a great place to start.

Innovation is a great journey, and bolstering your soft skills is a fantastic first step.

Embrace it in the spirit espoused by Virgil a few thousand years ago: “Fortune favours the brave.”

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People tend to listen to an influential person willingly and actively.