## Build Your Sphere of Influence, Part 1

In this issue of PowerTalk, we will look at the first half of a sphere of influence—trust. In the next issue, we will round out the sphere with the second component—the art of persuasion, which cannot be practiced in the absence of trust.

Higher education is typically a collaborative decision-making environment, but sometimes senior administrators forge ahead without having reached a consensus because they know what is right for the institution or there is an urgent timeframe. With decades of experience and hard-won senior leadership know-how under their belt, they prefer to implement solutions quickly ("because I said so") rather than waste time that impedes implementation.

Whether expressed by being directive (power-direct style) or non-verbal cues, this approach can have unintended consequences.  For example, direct reports may become resentful, feeling their advice is being ignored or that they cannot do anything right for the administrator. Rather than candidly sharing vital information and unpalatable truths, they may tell the administrator only what they think she wants to hear. They probably won't admit mistakes in a timely fashion, and they won't be creative for fear of inviting disapproval.

So how can an experienced executive lead people in the direction she knows is best for the campus without alienating her team or colleagues in the process? The answer is learning to influence rather than dictate or delegate at a task level.

### *Influence = Trust + Persuasion*

The Random House Dictionary of the English Language defines the verb "to influence" simply as: "to move or impel a person to some action." The noun "influence" is defined as "capacity or power of persons or things to produce effects on others by intangible or indirect means." Since senior administrators accomplish things through others, influence is clearly a critical competency. But how do you do it?

First, because the ability to influence others depends on a foundation of rapport and trust, it's important to build and nurture relationships. Particularly when you're new to a campus, you need to establish yourself as a trustworthy individual because your team knows nothing about you as yet. Think of the simple form of trust-building that is used by successful leaders to build rapport with staff before they ask them anything. Using excellent interpersonal skills, they first engage

the prospect in conversation to find common ground, and then proceed to find the person's "pain" so they can identify a need their offering can fill.

Similarly, you'll need to build credibility and trust before you can "sell" your ideas to your boss or direct reports. Influence skills are critical when you need to:

- Get people on board for a change initiative.
- Solicit resources for a project.
- Guide a team to see the big picture.
- Make team players out of people who resist your senior leadership or who have other agendas.
- Create positive exposure for your department or team.

In *Trust Is a Competency,* Stephen Covey states that "trust is quite possibly the single most powerful and influential lever for senior administrators and organizations today." Rather than a soft, intangible and illusive social virtue, trust is a critical, highly relevant and tangible asset, argues Covey. He cites redundancy, bureaucracy, politics, disengagement, turnover, churn and fraud among the problems rampant in low-trust organizations. Trust, on the other hand, increases value, accelerates growth, enhances innovation, improves collaboration, strengthens partnering, speeds up execution and heightens loyalty. "In fact, there is no senior leadership without trust," says Covey. He defines senior leadership as getting results in a way that inspires trust, and advises leaders to model trust through character, competence and demonstrated trust-building behavior.

Of course, building trust takes time, but even the simplest actions of creating rapport are a good place to start:
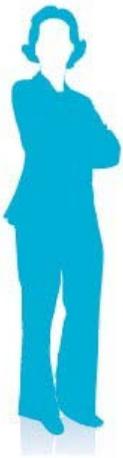
- Connect with people emotionally. Demonstrate that you care about them. Have coffee or a meal with them, ask questions and really listen to their opinions and concerns.
- Invite and seriously consider everyone's input before making a decision. "Leaders are far likelier to make mistakes when they act on too little information than when they wait to learn more," say James O'Toole and Warren Bennis in *A Culture of Candor.*
- Tell the truth, and be consistent in your explanations. Inconsistency breeds distrust.
- Encourage others to tell you the truth, no matter how unpalatable.
- Set a good example by admitting your mistakes.
- Share information freely unless it is absolutely confidential.
- Follow through on promises and commitments.
- Build organizational structures that encourage candor, such as open-door policies.

- Encourage creativity by rewarding people who challenge assumptions.
- Trust others! "Leaders first must trust others before others will trust them," state O'Toole and Bennis.

In a collaborative decision-making environment where consensus is highly valued, trust is indispensable. Remember the infamous race between the rabbit and the turtle? Building trust may take some time initially, but the administrator who makes the effort to do so will ultimately come out a winner along with her team.

*Resources:*

**Trust Is a Competency,** by Stephen M. R. Covey (Chief Learning Officer, May 2008, www.clomedia.com).

**What's Needed Next: A Culture of Candor,** by James O'Toole and Warren Bennis (Harvard Business Review, June 2009, Reprint R0906F, www.hbr.org).

# Build Your Sphere of Influence, Part 2

In a collaborative decision-making environment, senior administrators who want to be heard need to build a sphere of influence. This allows them to move others in the direction they know is right for the institution—gently, without creating resentment.

In the last issue of PowerTalk, we suggested ways of building trust, which makes up the first half of a sphere of influence. In this issue, we will round out the sphere with the second component—the art of persuasion, which cannot be practiced in the absence of trust.

### *Persuasion Tactics Depend on Decision-Making Styles*

Quite a number of articles and books have been written on the art of persuasion. Let's look at just one in some detail, and perhaps you will find it useful. In *Change the Way You Persuade,* Gary Williams and Robert Miller suggest that executives fall into five categories of decision-makers. "In our experience, people can vastly improve their chances of having their proposals succeed by determining who the chief decision maker is among the executives they are trying to persuade and then tailoring their arguments to that business senior administrator's decision-making style," say Williams and Miller. Here are the basics on dealing with those five types of decision-makers:

*Charismatics* make decisions based on balanced information, not just emotions. In your appeals or presentations to them, make simple and straightforward arguments, use visual aids, and use these words: results, proven, actions, show, watch, easy, clear, focus.

*Thinkers* are highly risk-averse and prefer arguments that are supported by data. Give them as much information as possible, incorporating in your presentation words such as: quality, academic, think, numbers, intelligent, plan, expert, proof.

*Skeptics* are highly suspicious of every data point. If you haven't established your credibility before you present a proposal, gain an endorsement from someone the skeptic trusts. Words to include in your presentation are: feel, grasp, power, action, suspect, trust, demand, disrupt.

*Followers* are risk-averse. They focus on proven methods and make decisions based on previous successful initiatives. Words to include in your presentations are: innovate, expedite, expertise, similar to, previous.

*Controllers* dislike uncertainty and ambiguity, so make sure your proposal focuses on facts and analytics. Rather than being pushy, provide the information the *controller* needs and hope that he

or she will agree with you. Words to include in your presentation are: details, facts, reason, logic, power, handle, physical, grab, just do it.

Although Williams' and Miller's research applies to executives, it's likely that your managers and support staff fall into these categories as well. Study the article *Change the Way You Persuade* and give some thought to the decision-making styles of the people around you, as well as your own style. Then, next time you need to persuade someone in order to meet an objective, apply the suggested guidelines and see what happens.

As you hone your persuasion skills over time, don't forget that your way may not always be the best choice. Whatever the problem or challenge, solicit opinions and alternative courses of action from everyone involved. Listen carefully and, when in a meeting, have all participants discuss the various alternatives brought to the table. Don't resist the attempts of others to persuade you; it's a two-way street.

Finally, achieve consensus. Again, the idea is not to get others to agree with you, but to win their support for the solution that has optimum benefits for the institution. Your team may need to "agree to disagree" on some issues, but you can still move forward as long as everyone has been heard. If you remain open-minded and amenable to compromise, you'll create true synergy among your team.

*Resource:*

**Change the Way Your Persuade,** by Gary A. Williams and Robert B. Miller (Harvard Business Review, May 2002, Reprint R0205D, www.hbr.org).