

## INFLUENCING DECISION MAKERS

by Hugh D. Blane

### The Challenge of Influence

Most executives want to be known for doing things well. They want to be known for achieving their goals and for being a “value-added” resource for their company. And yet, most executives today would say that they do NOT have the amount of influence needed to get their job done most effectively.

Executives can expand their sphere of influence by rethinking their beliefs about influence, and by learning specific strategies for cultivating greater influence. Thoughtful and diligent new practices can yield profound rewards, such as: employees motivated more by commitment than compliance, employees and decision makers who are more willing to follow your advice and recommendations, reduced stress throughout the organization, and greater results.

While most executives want greater influence, they too often assume the answer is simply to increase communications: more frequency, more words, and more enthusiasm. And yet, in this increasingly complex world, individuals feel crushed between the employer’s pressure-mantra – DO MORE, DO MORE, DO MORE – and their awareness that influence is granted to others by their choice. That choice is personal — based upon their personal beliefs and perceptions.

Consequently, just as wise executives may seek to become more influential, they will also keep in mind that the responding choice to grant influence will be grounded in the positive behavior and results experienced from the leader. Interactions such as these happen everyday in families, social groups, as well as within the workplace.

### How to Increase Influence?

Growing up, I often heard my mother say:

*“If you don’t know where you want to go,  
any road will get you there.  
You have to make a decision.”*

That truth applies to all of us, and certainly applies to your influence. Using influencing behaviors effectively starts with having clear behavior goals in mind. This essay focuses on two styles for influencing the behavior of others and we call them *Expressive Influence Behaviors* and *Receptive Influence Behaviors*.<sup>1</sup>

### **Expressive Influence**

Expressive influence is grounded in the Merriam Webster dictionary entry for *expressive* —

- 1: of or relating to expression,
- 2: serving to express, utter, or represent,
- 3: effectively conveying meaning or feeling.

At the Effectiveness Institute we adapt this to define Expressive Influence as –

***Behavior that provides people with appropriate Information, Insight and Impact to engage their heart and mind to support you.***

We call the process of Expressive Influence the **4 C's**:

### ***Convey, Convince, Consult, and Commit.***

Influence is often thought of as an expressive activity, typically described as continually sending ideas and information toward others. In fact, effective Expressive Influence requires not only sending information (the “WHAT”) but also the much needed Insight and Impact of a situation (the “WHY”). From early childhood on the question “Why?” remains vital to fully cognizant and productive people.

People practicing the high volume model of Expressive Influence often get described as long-winded. More articulate critics describe them as circular communicators who never get to the point and who use large volumes of words to say very little.

In any interaction where someone perceives you in this way you are having influence...negative influence. In such a case, all the positive intentions imagined are countered by the volume of “what” and the absence of “why.” When your intent falls far short of your actual impact on your audience, credibility suffers and influence diminishes.

Expressive Influence effectively delivered can lead to greater commitment from those whom you lead. This greater commitment rises like a breath of fresh air in situations burdened with uncertainty, ambiguity and indecision. With trust and respect in place, people will listen to you with an openness and receptivity based on who you are and the things for which you will take a stand. Effective Expressive Influence communicates confidence and commitment on your part and allows you to enthusiastically invite people to share in your ideals and goals.

### **Expressive Influence Behaviors**

**Convey:** Conveying behaviors set the context for Expressive Influence. They deal primarily with the “what” aspects of influence and involve transferring, delivering, passing on, and/or imparting essential information surrounding and leading up to the central issue at hand.

**Convince:** Convincing behaviors derive from the Latin word *convincere* and mean to refute, convict, prove; victory in persuasion is the intended outcome. Convincing behavior intends to change someone’s mind, decision, value, and/or behavior. That change will depend upon how well your perspective is communicated and if it is perceived as preferable.

**Consult:** Consulting behaviors follow convincing behaviors in the form of dialog about “how” to implement the newly agreed decision. This shifts the relationship so that the other persons involved can share in creating the new plan. That, in turn, enhances the sense of ownership while still reserving your authority to move forward.

**Commit:** Committing behaviors have a bias toward action, especially by the persons newly persuaded to your idea or plan. Several factors encourage people to take action:

- when a respected person led us to the decision,
- when we believe we made the decision freely,
- when respected people expect us to act and believes in us, and
- when we believe in ourselves.

These four types of expressive behavior depend upon you providing pertinent information, supporting the process by sharing personal insights, and identifying possible impacts on others. Done effectively and with integrity, expressive behaviors can engage the hearts and minds of those you would influence so that they come to trust and believe that supporting you is their best choice.

### **Tips on when to use Expressive Behaviors:**

- You want to ensure others understand the context surrounding the information, insight and impact of the situation as seen by you.
- You have junior level people on your team who have a limited amount of experience and expertise.
- You have a limited amount of time for a decision and mutual trust and respect are already at high levels between all parties.
- You are experiencing high levels of ambiguity, uncertainty and trepidation and want to ensure forward motion and continued results.
- You believe the other people involved prefer Expressive Influence and appreciate you using this style with them.

### **Receptive Influence**

Receptive influence is grounded in the word *receptive*, defined by Merriam Webster as –

- 1: able or inclined to receive;
- 2: *especially*: open and responsive to ideas, impressions, or suggestions.

The Effectiveness Institute we adapt this to define Expressive Influence as –

**Receptive influence behaviors involve engaging others in an authentic dialogue about their beliefs and perceptions in such a way as to mobilize others to commit to your ideas rather than simply complying with them.**

At the Effectiveness Institute we call the process of Receptive Influence the 4-L's:

#### ***Learn, Listen, Link, and Lead.***

Receptive Influence behaviors involve the opposite of Expressive Influence. Instead, learning about the perspectives and ideas of other persons drives the process. Receptive Influence creates an atmosphere of mutual discovery, which leads to development of mutually beneficial course of action.

More specifically, Receptive Influence invites others to contribute ideas, information, and action. Just as there is a tendency to overuse Expressive Behaviors in trying to influence others, there is also a mirror tendency to under use Receptive Behaviors. This tendency is puzzling since, for most of us, receptive behaviors play out very effectively and unselfconsciously through everyday life – in conversations with friends and family, in coaching or counseling sessions, and in intellectual discussions. In truth, but often overlooked, receptive behaviors offer a very effective way to influence others directly.

Receptive behaviors, used skillfully and honestly, can guide you and others toward an agreement, solution, or choice that satisfies everyone. Since the word influence implies choice on the part of the other party, your best influencing behaviors will likely fail with the people you are trying to influence if they perceive that your course of action works against their best interests. One exception would be if you are targeting a negative or vulnerable aspect of the other party.

Authentic Receptive Influence indicates respect for the ideas and concerns of the other persons and acknowledges their autonomy and accountability. As an influencer with your own goals, one indication of your respect for others will be your willingness to give them time to consider and reconfigure their own goals to coincide with yours.

Just as expressive behaviors can be used in a way that overpowers others, receptive behaviors can also be manipulative. The most tempting maneuver – and most easily perceived by your audience – is to declare that you are open and receptive to another person’s ideas, even though your behavior clearly communicates that you have already made the decision. The most generous judgment on such behavior would be to call it incongruent and manipulative. In any case, manipulative abuse of receptive behaviors will surely reduce the credibility of any person wanting to have influence.

Such falsely influenced behaviors rarely work long term, and even if it does work the first time it almost always leaves a negative residual and therefore will seldom work a second time. In short, Receptive Influence must be genuine and non-manipulative. Be honestly neutral and open to the view points of others. Take care that your questions and comments are truly dialogic and are not conveying an underlying pressure to persuade. Receptive Influencers gather, synthesize, summarize, and integrate in positive ways so that all inputs are honored, and likely altered as well.

### **Receptive Influence Behaviors**

**Learn:** Learning is the first step in Receptive Influence behaviors. Learning establishes the topic, the issues, and the questions to be explored. In addition to providing information, learning encourages people to think along new lines, to consider new questions, and to deepen and expand their thinking about specific issues. Authentic learning behaviors create a positive, open atmosphere wherein influence can more readily happen.

**Listen:** The goal of listening is to continue learning by listening to understand, and without a counter response. Listen for the thoughts and feelings being communicated, not simply the words used. Pay close attention to the context as well as the content of the conversation. Be truly curious as to “why” someone thinks or believes what they are conveying to you, but ask the why out of a desire to understand rather than as a challenge. By understanding your audience’s “WHY” you are learning the depth below their present “What.” That insight will inform your own position as well as shaping your strategy for how to effectively and respectfully influence these others toward your goal.

**Link:** Once you have learned about the situation, have listened to how others perceive and believe about the situation, you can proceed to link what you have learned and heard to your own hopes and aspirations for the situation. Genuine learning and listening foster heightened mutual understanding and create an atmosphere of trust and common ground between yourself and these others who have trusted you with their stories. If trust opens us to influence, linking our mutual experiences and understanding is the basis for increasing the level of trust between you and others.

**Lead:** The final step in this process is to lead by example. If your intent is to sincerely learn, listen, and find a common linkage with others, your greatest influence will depend upon how consistently your behavior represents your new knowledge and insight. Leading behaviors also influence others through the creation of a positive expectation toward action on the part of the others. We are more likely to take action when someone we trust and respect assumes we will, believes we can, and role models the desired future behavior.

**Tips on when to use Receptive Behaviors:**

- You want to understand the information, insight and impact as seen by those you want to influence.
- You want to develop enhanced commitment by inviting others to contribute to the decision process.
- You want to peel the onion and understand the root causes of a situation and not simply the symptoms
- You want to affirm your trust and respect for the other persons involved.
- You sense that the other person does not feel appreciated, heard, or valued
- You intend to use the information you receive in ways that enables the other people to do their very best work.

If you want to be an effective influencer, remember these three requirements:

1. Recognize your own influencing behavior preference
2. Respect the influencing preferences of the people you lead
3. Choose appropriately how you will influence, when you will influence, and the outcome you desire.

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<sup>1</sup> These two styles of influence comprise a sub-folder, as it were, of our comprehensive treatment of how to effectively influence people who make decisions, be they colleagues, co-workers, persons who report directly to you, and people in other groups and organizations. At the Effectiveness Institute we call this process the **Four D's of Influence**.