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## FEATURED ARTICLE

### **Tips for Effectively Communicating and Influencing Up**

*By: Rita Allen, President of Rita B. Allen Associates*

It is not a secret that strong communications skills are an essential part of life! Not only will we be more successful at work but at home and at play. Skillful communications is the foundation builder for effectively influencing everyone we encounter.

One such key relationship to highlight is the one with our manager - effectively communicating and influencing up requires careful planning and execution. This is a critical dynamic that is crucial to be an effective leader and impact all levels of an organization and/or all key stakeholders. Whether you work in a service, technology or sales driven organization, our ability to influence is vital to our success. The following tips are strategies for effectively communicating and influencing up, however, could be applied to all levels both internal and/or external to your organization.

*Identify biases, assumptions and hot-buttons of your manager/leader* – Read him/her well; know what kinds of things keep him/her up at night; inquire about past experiences and track record, successes, lessons learned, challenges, concerns and triggers

*Note his/her resistance, issues and concerns and uncover reoccurring themes* - Understand the reasons behind his/her decisions; appreciate the red flags and what they mean to your leader; present alternate options that may alleviate these concerns or themes; be aware of the areas of concern that are continuously raised and be proactive in your approach

*Focus on key issues that resonate with him/her* – Feel their pain; speak their language; be sensitive to the things that matter most; display empathy and concern for what they are feeling and experiencing; don't minimize, avoid or trivialize their concerns; use words that speak to the core of their fears and/or pains; offer solutions that address these areas

*Leverage relationship you've established and nurture it in strategic manner* – Capitalize on the strong foundation that has been built; continue to earn respect and trust; provide support and resources that display your loyalty and collaboration; stay true to your word

*Underscore your credibility and track record* – Play off your contributions and accomplishments; allow your history and credentials to be emphasized; create a strong bond focused around strengths and successes achieved; enhance rewards to be gained; showcase and leverage your value through your success stories as well as lessons learned

*Evaluate and prioritize options when faced with issues/challenges weighing risks & rewards* – Show careful planning and execution with detailed analysis of pros and cons; communicate clearly and concisely options to be considered with deliberate and methodical evaluation of each; spell out risks and rewards of each option; present a clear road map; conclude with a recommendation and suggestions for next steps

*Nail your points* – Be concise, crisp and stay focused on those points; do not stray from your main message; don't allow secondary conversations to distract from the main points; deliver message with ease, confidence and commitment; keep it simple; less is more

*Capitalize on your strengths* – Stay in your areas of expertise and competence; focus on your subject matter expertise; seize opportunities that allow you to shine in your areas of strength; use skills and competencies to address obstacles, challenges or concerns

*Initiate dialogue choosing right tone, right time and right message* – Have a specific and deliberate plan when initiating important discussions; timing is essential and should be selected carefully and strategically; know your manager/leader and deliver message in appropriate tone based on his/her needs and preferences; craft your message appropriately and tailor it to your intended audience; keep your tone neutral, objective and positive

*Never lose your holding power* – Maintain your poise, polish and composure; showing vulnerability is not a bad thing, however, doing so selectively and appropriately is key; exuding the ability to deal with adversity, stress and change is imperative to displaying strong leadership skills as well as to be able to effectively influence; know yourself well enough to be aware of your hot buttons and triggers for stress; develop emotional intelligence competencies – self awareness, self management, social awareness and relationship management; being aware of your own needs is equally critical as knowing your audience

*Gain commitment with confidence and command* – Establish trust, earn respect and gain loyalty; your experiences and accomplishments will represent you well earning a following and commitment; actions speak louder than words as the saying goes – your actions will give greater power to your words; believe in yourself and your manager/leader will as well

*Use your influence wisely across all levels with all contacts and key stakeholders* – Relationships are the essence of a successful career both within your organization as well as

outside of your organization within your industry, field and community; appropriately infiltrating your relationships to help advance the organizations goals takes sincerity and authenticity; identify your key stakeholders and be sure to focus on their needs; communicate with all your contacts as a source of information, resources and assistance as appropriate; be mindful, selective and strategic in your requests; be generous with your knowledge, resources and time; always give back and carry your influence in a manner that leads to win-win outcomes

***Present solutions, solve problems and impact results*** – Maintain positive exchanges; be a problem solver, not a problem identifier; raise issues after you've thought through differing scenarios offering options, pros/cons, and thoughtful solutions ; focus on results and desired outcomes; focus on being a problem solver and truly making a difference, impacting results

**About the Author:**

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