

The background features a complex pattern of concentric circles in shades of red and dark blue. A yellow silhouette of a person stands at the bottom center, with a yellow circle above their head. Two white dots are positioned in the upper left and upper right areas of the composition.

Influencing Up

“

I am not a product of my circumstances. I am a product of my decisions.”

We know from many studies that the key to our enjoyment of work is the sense that we are being listened to, and that we are having an impact on our system. Yet often, we don't feel that we have a say in the decisions made by our senior leaders. Ideas and opinions may seem to only flow downstream, with no room for equitable exchange. In these situations, our own perceived lack of influence can be very disheartening, lead to disengagement, and even a desire to resign.

To counter this negative spiral, learning how to *influence up* is a skill that will give us a greater sense of agency and connection to our work and workplace.

Dr Stephen Covey

What is Influencing Up?

But what does that term actually mean? How do you influence people who have greater hierarchical power than you? Do you simply push back?

Influencing has been described as being able to draw on a range of skills and competences to engage others with your vision and gain buy-in for your ideas. In other words, it requires skill in the art of persuasion. *Influencing up* means applying your persuasive skills to those in a more senior position than you.

Cialdini's *Six Principles of Persuasion* has been a key model for influencing over the last twenty years. More recently though, his work has been built upon by Amanda Nimon-Peters in her *9 Principles of Persuasion for the 21st Century*.

Nimon-Peters maintains that one of the key modes of influence we use in work and life is logic, when in fact that is not a particularly effective method of persuasion. She explains that thought/decisions are a blend of emotion and logic, with emotion being the bedrock. She says: "We treat how we feel about something as a source of information, and it's the source of information that comes first. Emotion predominantly drives decisions."

In her new model, she groups her principles for influencing under three categories: People, Perception, and Behaviour.

People Related Principles – this means who you're interacting with

- Status (where do you rank?) – avoid mentioning factors that reduce your status
- Social imitation (the unseen influence of community) – we mimic the people around us or who we like
- Affiliation – we are more influenced by people we like, rather than dislike

Perception Related Principles – this means how you structure your message

- Value Framing – (because you're worth it) judging in relative terms rather than absolute terms
- Effort – (make it seem as possible for others)
- Reasoning – (how can it be done better?) rational persuasion

Behaviour Related Principles - this means how you behave

- Inertia – (be like water) using the flow of activity to your advantage
- End-Goal Focus – (what you really, really want?) clearly define your outcome and focus on achieving that outcome i.e., don't try and win every argument
- Execution – (the final 100m) assume behaviours that most strongly link to persuasion i.e., standing upright, using familiar words, and speaking in a voice that matches the emotion or the message.

The *9 Principles model* leans on communication, collaboration, and building (rather than borrowing) social capital and is therefore, a blueprint anyone can utilise.

Influencing Up Hacks

When we're applying our persuasive skills to situations though, it's important to remember that we are not trying to assume power over how a person or group thinks and acts. It is much more pertinent to examine our own thinking and behaviour.

Here are some [helpful hacks](#) for developing a better persuasive style at work:

- Look for the synchronicities between your personal goals and the organisation's/leader's goals
- Amplify the work of other people
- Get very curious
- Do your homework – if you are pushing a particular change or idea, how can you present it in a way that minimises risk to your leaders, and removes the effort factor?
- Sit in your leader's viewpoint before you attempt to influence – think about the many aspects of a situation that they might need to consider
- Leave space for negotiation in your own mindset
- Manage your own energy

When we feel we lack voice or influence at work, it can be tempting to toss our hands in the air and decide that decisions are out of our control. But abrogating any sense of agency can be a path to disillusion and disconnection.

On the other hand, by using our knowledge of influencing upwards, we will improve our sense of belonging and engagement at work. It is likely to enhance everything from our tone and physical bearing through to our mindset and attitudes, which will, in turn, only strengthen our capability and lead us to better outcomes. We may not always get exactly what we want, but we can most certainly be part of the conversation.



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