

Heart of Influence

Assertive Communication as a Lifestyle

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Act Knowledge Pty Ltd, Australia

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Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. UNDERSTANDING INFLUENCE	6
2.1 The Universal Principles of Influence	7
2.1.1 The Principle of Reciprocity	7
2.1.2 The Principle of Commitment and Consistency	7
2.1.3 The Principle of Social Proof	9
2.1.4 The Principle of Liking	9
2.1.5 The Principle of Authority	10
2.1.6 The Principle of Scarcity	12
2.2 Influence and Politics	12
2.2.1 Power and Politics	12
2.2.2 Manipulation and Management Theory	13
 Part I: <i>ethos</i>	
3. THE ESSENCE OF WHO WE ARE	16
3.1 Influence and Personality	16
3.1.1 Personality Theory	16
3.1.2 Myers-Briggs as an Example	17
3.1.3 The Value of Personality Theory	18
3.2 Influence and Behaviour	19
3.2.1 Dimensions of Behaviour	19
3.2.2 The DiSC® Behavioural Model	20
3.3 Fight or Flight?	22
3.3.1 Aggressive Behaviour (win–lose)	23
3.3.2 Submissive Behaviour (lose–win)	25
3.3.3 Causes of Lose–lose Behaviour	27
3.3.4 Assertive Behaviour (win–win)	28
4. IT ALL BEGINS IN THE MIND	30
4.1 The Communications Process	30
4.1.1 Communication Loops	30
4.1.2 Behaviour: Tip of the Iceberg	32
4.1.3 The Role of Mental Filters	34
4.2 Filter 1: Metaprograms	36
4.2.1 Internal Representations	36
4.2.2 Behavioural Habits	39

4.3	Filter 2: Values & Beliefs	42
4.3.1	The Origin of Beliefs and Values	43
4.3.2	The Impact of Beliefs and Values	43
4.3.3	The Belief Window	44
4.3.4	Changing Beliefs	44
4.4	Filter 3: Memories, Experience & Past Decisions	45
4.4.1	Conscious and Unconscious Memories	45
4.4.2	Habits and Strategies	45
4.4.3	Cultural and Environmental Factors	46
4.5	Gaining Control Over Thoughts and Actions	47
4.5.1	Making Choices	48
4.5.2	Positive Affirmations	49
4.5.3	Behaviour Preferences	49
4.5.4	Identifying Hot Buttons & Emotional Triggers	50
4.5.5	Confronting Belief Windows	50

Part II: *pathos*

5.	GOOD COMMUNICATION IS NO ACCIDENT	55
5.1	The Story of Demosthenes	56
5.1.1	Demosthenes' Motivation	56
5.1.2	The Preparation	56
5.1.3	The Result	57
5.2	Influence and Communication	58
5.2.1	Effective Communication Strategies	58
5.2.2	The Trust Gap	59
5.3	Towards Positive Communication	60
5.3.1	The Johari Window	60
5.3.2	Utilise the Principles of Positive Communication ..	61
5.3.3	Adopt Appropriate Communications Media	62
5.3.4	Adopt Appropriate Communication Styles	64
6.	LISTENING—THE HEART OF COMMUNICATION	70
6.1	Influence and Listening	70
6.1.1	The Trouble With Listening... ..	70
6.1.2	Why Don't We Listen?	71
6.1.3	Levels of Listening	74
6.1.4	Poor Listening Behaviours	75

6.2	Empathic Listening	77
6.2.1	Establish Relationship	77
6.2.2	Listen With All Senses & Attention	78
6.2.3	Seek Clarification	78
6.3	Asking Good Questions	80
6.3.1	Questioning for Facts	80
6.3.2	Questioning for Clarity	81
6.3.3	Questioning for Motivating	82
6.3.4	Responding with Empathy	82
7.	ALIGNING THE MESSAGES	84
7.1	The Components of Persuasive Messages	85
7.2	The Importance of Nonverbal Communication	85
7.2.1	The Hidden Signals	86
7.2.2	Physiology	89
7.3	The Impact of Delivery	89
7.3.1	Voice Quality and Influence	89
7.3.2	Voice Qualities	91
7.4	Building Rapport	94
7.4.1	Building Blocks in Establishing Rapport	95
7.4.2	Pacing and Leading	97
8.	CRAFTING THE MESSAGE	99
8.1	The Importance of Words	99
8.1.1	Meanings and Misconceptions	99
8.1.2	The Metamodel	100
8.1.3	The Use of “But”	101
8.1.4	Word Checklist	102
8.2	Towards Persuasive Language	103
8.2.1	Positive and Negative Language	103
8.2.2	The Milton Model	103
8.2.3	Create Emotional Word Pictures	105
8.2.4	Characteristics of Memorable Speeches	106

Part III: *logos*

9.	MAPPING THE INFLUENCE LANDSCAPE	110
9.1	What is the Objective?	111
9.1.1	Defining the Required Outcome	111
9.1.2	The Influence Environment	111

9.2	Whom Do We Need to Influence?	112
9.2.1	The Influence Map	112
9.2.2	Identify Key Groups and Subgroups	113
9.2.3	Analyse the Influence Networks	114
9.2.4	Classify Stakeholders as S.O.P.s	115
9.2.5	The Influence/Importance Matrix	116
10.	STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS	118
10.1	How Do I Communicate With This Person?	119
10.1.1	Formal Assessment	119
10.1.2	General Background	120
10.1.3	Metaprograms	120
10.1.4	Influence Styles & Currencies	120
10.1.5	Clarify Connections	122
10.1.6	Maintaining the SCM	122
10.2	What Are This Person's Interests?	122
10.2.1	Map the Stakeholders	122
10.2.2	Identify Perceived Interests	123
10.2.3	Create the Force Field Analysis	123
10.2.4	Assess Alternatives	124
11.	STRATEGIES AND TACTICS OF INFLUENCE	125
11.1	Strategies to Change Perceptions	125
11.1.1	Strategy 1: Changing Incentives	125
11.1.2	Strategy 2: Framing Decisions	126
11.1.3	Strategy 3: Using Social Influence	127
11.1.4	Strategy 4: Quid Pro Quo Negotiations	128
11.2	The Weapons and Tactics	128
11.2.1	Ongoing Dialogue and Interest	129
11.2.2	Individual Meeting	129
11.2.3	Group Meeting	130
11.2.4	Formal Presentations	131
11.3	Strategy Checklist	132
11.4	Conclusion	134
Appendix 1:	The Toolkit	135
Appendix 2:	Resources & References	143

1. INTRODUCTION

Of the modes of persuasion furnished by the spoken word there are three kinds. The first kind depends on the personal character of the speaker; the second on putting the audience in a certain frame of mind; the third on the proof or apparent proof, provided by the speech itself. Persuasion is achieved by the speaker's personal character when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible. We believe good men more fully and readily than others; this is true generally whatever the question is, and absolutely true where exact certainty is impossible and opinions are divided.

(Aristotle)

Life and leadership is about communicating and interacting with people; influencing them, being influenced by them. It's about inspiring people to achieve their vision and objectives as they help us achieve ours. It's about changing people's perceptions and thoughts, their hearts and minds, their behaviour. It's about impacting lives, whether in a business, social or personal sphere.

Some influence happens deliberately. We set out with the intention of moving someone systematically towards specific outcomes we desire. We persuade or coerce people, perhaps even manipulate them, to support our initiatives, to agree with our ideas, to take the necessary actions.

But even when we're not consciously trying to persuade people of something we are influencing them, and they us. As we interact with people we exchange ideas, attitudes and behaviours. We may not be conscious of it, but our whole approach to life either builds or destroys our *influence equity*, our ability to inspire or persuade people, our perceived legitimacy to affect their lives.

We build up financial equity which we can then use to pursue our own goals or support the goals of others. We can use our financial equity for good or evil. In the same way we develop our influence equity, the capability we have to influence people. The more influence equity we have, the greater our ability to impact people. Whether we use it positively or negatively is a question of our own ethics and morality.

2 HEART OF INFLUENCE

Many books and workshops on influence provide a set of tools and techniques for influencing outcomes in specific situations. They provide formulae for building rapport, utilising information processing and communication preferences, and shaping perceptions and interests. These are important skills, and we *will* address them in this book.

But real influence is about more than achieving our own objectives in whatever situation we find ourselves. Real influence is about character and lifestyle; it's about nurturing relationships, earning the respect of people. It's about attracting people to the positive success that seems to radiate out of everything we do. It's about people drawing inspiration from our lives, granting us the privilege of speaking into their lives, because they trust us to look after their interests. It's about living a lifestyle of assertiveness, impacting the lives of others focussed on achieving our objectives and valuing the rights of others to achieve theirs.

Real influence is about having a heart for people.

Heart of Influence provides tools, techniques, and strategies that can be used to influence others towards specific outcomes. But it seeks much more; it's aimed at people who want their influence to be rooted in character, and whose hearts are set on helping other people achieve their objectives.

The heart is a central concept of this book. The title is inspired by the human cardiovascular system. The heart's function is to distribute blood through the body, providing nutrients and oxygen, and removing impurities. It never ceases, beating more than two and a half billion times in an average lifetime, but it needs no conscious intervention from our brains.

The heart picks up oxygenated blood from the lungs and distributes it and nutrients to the body. Our values and character are similarly distributed to our surroundings through our conversation, with no conscious intervention required on our part.

The blood also picks up and disposes impurities from the body. If this fails, the impurities are spread through the body, corrupting the quality of life and bringing illness and death. So too negative communication pollutes relationships and destroys our ability to positively impact the lives of people around us.

The state of our heart determines the well being of our body; our character, expressed in self-image and personal values, determine the quality of our lives, our communication, the trustworthiness of our relationships, and the degree of influence we have.

Like blood flowing through the body, character flows through our communication, bringing life or death, determining the quality of our life, the quality of our influence.

The allegory of the heart is central to the concepts outlined here. We are interested in the foundation skills of character-based influence, rather than what could be construed as short-term manipulation for selfish gain. The skills on their own can be used for whatever purpose we deem fit, dependant only on our own conscience, our heart, and the longterm fruits we wish to bear.

We succeed in influencing when we have a heart of influence, a commitment to promoting the welfare and interests of others. That success is not measured by what we do—it's measured by the fruit we bear, the evidence of lives we've changed for the better.

There are no shortcuts to building true financial equity. And there are no shortcuts to building influence equity. Both require effort.

There is a parable of a two men who built their homes near each other. The first laboured hard to dig his foundation into the rock; the second built his house on the sand. It was much easier, and soon he was relaxing on his porch, shouting mocking advice to his neighbour.

In time, the second house was also completed. From the outside both houses looked very similar and both owners were proud of what they had done. Several months later a violent storm tore through the area, washing away tons of sand. The foundations of one house could not withstand the pressure, and it was swept out to sea. But the house on the rock stood firm.

Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved.

(Helen Keller)

Like the builders, we choose how to build our efforts to influence. We can learn and use all the surface skills—active listening, building rapport, framing interests, etc.—but the key to enduring success lies in the foundations. Are we prepared to take the quick and easy way out, or do we put in the hard work to build foundations rooted in character? The building materials are in this book.

In Chapter 2 we briefly consider the principles of influence. The remainder of the book is then divided into three parts, representing the three components of influence identified by the Greek philosopher Aristotle: character, passion and logic.

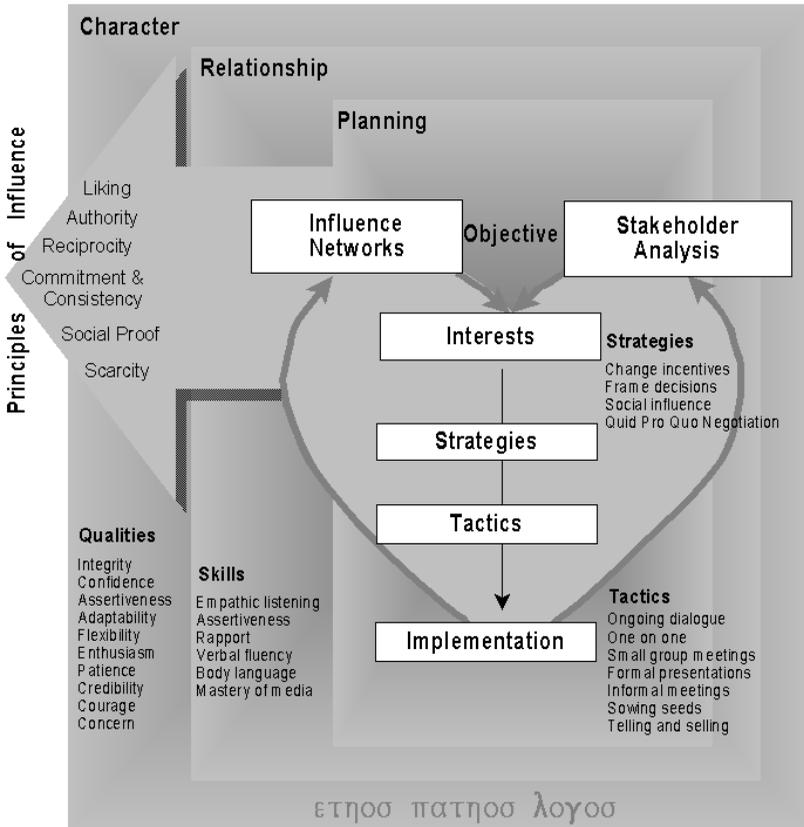
Part I is concerned with the foundation of influence: our *ethos* or character. To be people of influence we must live an assertive, character-

4 HEART OF INFLUENCE

based lifestyle which demonstrates competence, which values and respects people, and which seeks to help others achieve their full potential. Anything less, and our credibility will be questioned.

We need a solid awareness of who we are, what we value, and how our perceptions and thoughts influence our actions and our ability to influence other people. If we don't believe in ourselves, nor will others.

Figure 1: The Heart of Influence



Part II deals with the framework of our building: our *pathos* or passion. It refers to the way we approach life and people. To have a heart of influence means building relationships with others, being enthusiastic, passionate, and positive, encouraging people, listening to them—communicating with them.

Aristotle referred to aligning the spoken message with the emotional component, using vivid, concrete and figurative language, and emotive

examples. Reason, hallmark of the western business world, is not enough; decision-making is not always rational or objective. It involves emotions and trust; consequently we must appeal to the feelings, values and beliefs of the listener(s). But first we must develop a relationship with them.

With a solid foundation and framework in place, we can then move to Part III, the *logos* or logic of influence. In this section we look at the mechanics and process of influence, progressing systematically through the Influence Strategy Model. The model provides a toolkit of questions and checklists to help us define the influence network and develop the Influence/Importance Matrix, the Stakeholder Communication Map and a Stakeholder Interest Assessment. Finally we combine specific strategies into a tactical plan for gaining the support of key stakeholders in specific initiatives. A copy of the Toolkit is provided in Appendix 1.

Appendix 2 provides list of references and additional resources for people wishing to explore any of the aspects covered here in further detail.