

# 4

## *The ten influencing skills*

*You're gonna reap just what you sow!*

Lou Reed

### The influencing model

In this chapter, you'll find an overview of the ten influencing skills, the dynamics behind them and how they are done. You will get answers to the following questions:

- What influencing skills are there?
- Which behaviour belongs to each skill?
- When do you put the 'I' at the centre of your focus and when the 'other'?
- What intensity lies behind the skills?

I have placed these aspects in a model: the Influencing Model (page 23). It helps to place the skills in a logical, comprehensible way. Below is an explanation of the model.

#### *The process*

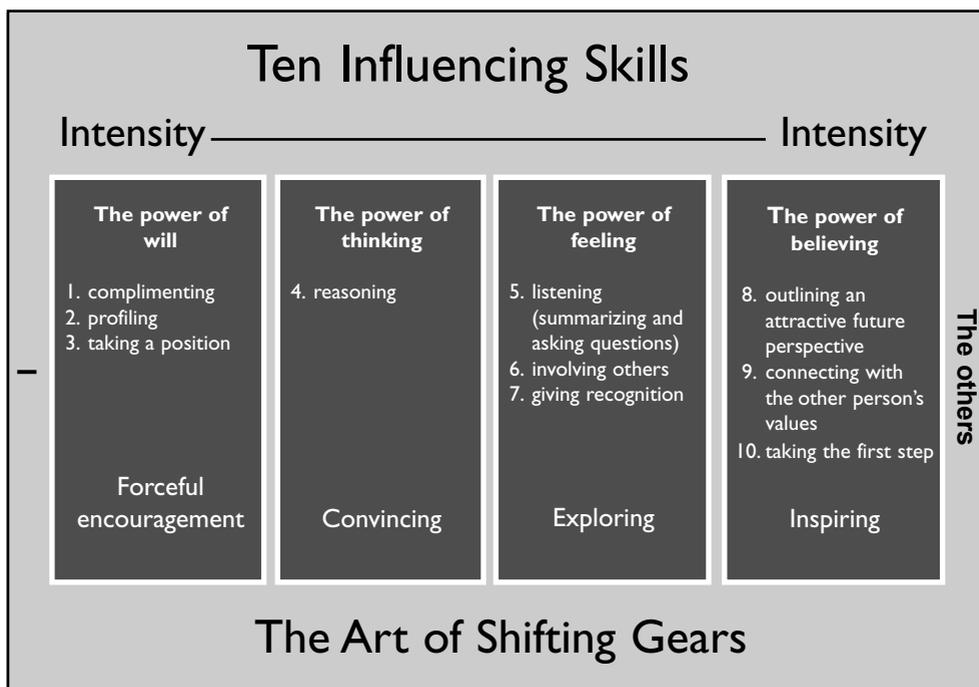
The process is about communication between you and the other person. Communication is an art, as is influencing.

#### *The focus*

Departing from 'what I want' to 'what do others want/need?'

#### *The intensity*

Most intensive and powerful when expressing 'what I want' are the skills Complimenting, Profiling and Taking a position. The dynamics here can be called 'forceful encouragement'.



The intensity is a little less when I use Reasoning: still more focused on the task than on the relationship, but less coloured by personal norms and values than forceful encouragement, the dynamic here is ‘convincing’.

The skills of Listening, Involving the other person and Giving recognition to the other person are also less intense but focus more on the relationship. The dynamic here is ‘exploring.’

The intensity and power increases again when you Connect with the other person's values, Outline an attractive future perspective and indicate how you are going to Take the first step. Here there is a strong focus on the interest of other people rather than on the task itself. The dynamic here is inspiration.

Both your goal and the situation in which you operate determine how intensely you want to influence others and what dynamics you are going to use. In other words, how much room do you allow yourself and how much room is there for the other party?

*The power that you use*

The power of will, the power of thinking, the power of feeling and the power of believing are the sources you use to have influence.

*A summary of the ten influencing skills:*

The power of will:

- 1 Giving compliments
- 2 Profiling
- 3 Taking a position

What you do is: forceful encouragement, in an assertive approach

The power of thinking:

- 4 Reasoning

What you do is: convince, in a persuading approach

The power of feeling:

- 5 Listening (summarising and asking questions)
- 6 Involving others
- 7 Giving recognition to the other party

What you do is: explore, in an involving approach

The power of believing:

- 8 Outlining an attractive future perspective
- 9 Connecting with the other person's values
- 10 Taking the first step

What you do is: inspire, in an inspiring approach.

The following points describe each of the ten influencing skills – both the goal you want to achieve with the skill and what you actually say or do when using this particular influencing skill.

## The power of will

### I COMPLIMENTING

*You are everything and everything is you.*

Marvin Gaye and Diana Ross

#### *Goal*

The other person feels supported by your compliment and feels motivated to show this desired behaviour again.

### *Situation*

The issue at hand is of great importance to you. What you want is leading here and you put a lot of energy into it. The compliment is real and sincere.

The pitfall when giving compliments is that if you overload people with compliments or do it too often, they might start to feel uncomfortable. Even though it is a powerful and positive instrument, do not over-use it.

### *Behaviour*

Motivate, emphasise what people are good at doing.

In general, giving a compliment is most powerful when it is meant as a true compliment, one without a hidden agenda on your part. In the context of effective behaviour, you therefore focus on the desired effects when you give compliments strategically. Mind you, it's important that the compliment is sincere and not just a trick.

Food for thought: Think back to a situation in which you received a true compliment. What effect did it have on you?

Let's remember not to be stingy with giving compliments; they are not only a warm and pleasant way to influence each other, but also truly build credit in working relationships.

## **To give compliments**

Northern Europeans in particular sometimes have a reputation for being reluctant to give compliments. Some managers tell their employees that they get paid to do their jobs well and that they will get feedback if they do not perform according to the company standards (read: will be criticised or reprimanded). These managers should not be surprised if their employees start complaining after some time that they are only getting negative feedback. Obviously, this is not motivating at all. You have missed the opportunity to influence here, to reward and appreciate an employee. It is almost impossible to overestimate the effect of complimenting.

## **To receive compliments**

Compliment: 'That is an excellent piece of work. Very well done!'

Response: 'Oh, it was nothing, really.'

Another compliment: 'That's a nice suit you're wearing.'

Response: 'Oh, it was on sale and I got it really cheaply.'

Do you recognise these? This behaviour looks like genuine modesty but in fact you are rejecting the compliment and – implicitly – also its giver. People often tend to explain themselves after having received a compliment. When you do this the effect, however, is that you do not seem grateful. And that is exactly what you are supposed to be: grateful. Just say ‘thank you’.

A compliment is a gift. Unwrap it and be grateful. Allow the giver of the compliment their moment and you influence them. Show your gratitude for the compliment and the person giving it.

It can be a strategic choice to give a compliment if you want an employee to continue showing the behaviour that you appreciate: ‘It was fantastic, the way you dealt with that project last year!’ This also reveals that you have faith in the employee which encourages and motivates. You hope that the message comes across and might add ‘It would be wonderful if you took the responsibility for another such project’. You say it in a forcefully encouraging way because you would rather not start a discussion or hear objections. Non-verbally, you show that you are taking it for granted that the employee will go for it; do not wait for an answer. If he or she feels motivated to do the task, and is prepared to put aside objections (if any), you have reached your goal. In the case of serious objections, you have to switch to a more involving approach by listening and asking questions to find out the nature of the objections and explore what the employee needs to take up the project anyway.

Example: ‘How you managed that project last year was really top quality. You have motivated the project members, you met all the deadlines and the presentation of your end results was truly inspiring: there is only one person here that can do that and that’s you!’

Food for thought: Over the next two weeks, give at least three compliments to three different people and observe the effect on them. Also, give a compliment with the aim of encouraging the other person to display the behaviour that you appreciate again. See if that works for you. If you give a compliment, how does that affect you? And what are the effects on the other person?

## 2 PROFILING

*True colours...*

Cyndi Lauper

### *Goal*

Others cannot ignore your strong profile and are persuaded.

### *Situation*

It is urgent and important for you to show your true colours (your capabilities, norms and values) and demonstrate that you have a clear, firm profile.

Potential pitfalls when profiling yourself too strongly are that you reveal an inflated ego and talk down to people as if you were up in an ivory tower. You emphasize your knowledge and experience to such an extent that you come over as a know-it-all. Other people feel there's little room for them to take their own decisions and fear that you are underestimating the situation or the effects on them.

### *Behaviour*

Show who you are and what you stand for. Research has shown that this leads to behaviour fit for managers. For a consultant, too, it is not only necessary to formulate significant questions but also to show:

- that you have ideas and opinions of your own
- that you undertake action based on your analysis
- that you can reach goals based on your convictions, and
- that you have a clear perception of your role.

Examples: 'I have listened carefully to your plans for the reorganisation and, based on my experience and convictions, I have to admit that this is not the right approach: it is essential to involve your stakeholders in drawing up plans.'

Al Gore has stepped out of his own shadow by profiling himself as the advocate for improving our environment by making his film *An Inconvenient Truth*.

Food for thought: For your next meeting, prepare a point on the agenda that is really important to you. Show the members of the meeting your expertise and knowledge. Try this on a friend or partner and ask for feedback on how strongly you come across in profiling yourself in this way. After the meeting, look back on the effects. Did you reach what you wanted to reach?

### 3 TAKING A POSITION

*But if you go carrying pictures of chairman Mao you ain't gonna make it with anyone anyhow.*

The Beatles

#### *Goal*

By taking a position in an assertive way, you make the other person change their position. Mind you, this is not the same as taking a stand and supporting it with arguments. That will be discussed in the next section on Reasoning.

#### *Situation*

Here it is important that you are firm in taking a position – for example, because people tend to like you, but do not always really hear what you have to say.

The pitfall is that if you do this too forcefully you might seem rigid and inflexible. People generally then feel resistance and respond with a ‘no’ whatever your proposal.

#### *Behaviour*

You take a (firm) position and do not want people to discuss or start a debate on the issue. Often, taking a position is confused with Reasoning (see the next point). When you reason and use arguments to convince or persuade the other party, you welcome your opponent’s counter-argument because you need it to sharpen your ideas. When you choose to take a position, you do not want to hear counter-arguments. You want the other party to do what you want through the force of your willpower. The language you use in this approach is clear and firm:

- ‘Experience has taught me ... and that’s confirmed by research.’
- ‘Absolutely!’
- ‘No doubt about it!’
- ‘I refuse to let this happen!’
- ‘If we don’t do it now, the project will fail!’
- ‘This is what our target group wants.’

Example: In a meeting, you feel that your colleagues are tending to opt for Plan A. This would mean defeat for you because you are opting for Plan B. Arguments have been put on the table, and simply repeating all the arguments is useless. It is time to take a firm position: ‘Plan A will be an absolute disaster, we can only reach our goals by implementing Plan B. And we have to do it now.’

Food for thought: Force yourself to take a position on an issue and refrain from giving arguments or explaining yourself. There will be a moment of silence after you do that. Simply wait for the reactions. If none are given, ask for one. It can feel awkward to take a position like this, so if you want to do it, prepare yourself mentally. Ask for feedback afterwards. What was the effect of your action on the other people? And what effect did it have on you?

These first three points dealt with the skills Complimenting, Profiling and Taking a position. They are grouped together in the Asserting Approach.

## The power of thinking

### 4 REASONING

*Reason to believe...*

Tim Hardin

#### *Goal*

The other party feels persuaded to move in your direction despite their own point of view because they are convinced by your arguments. If not completely convinced, they will take your arguments seriously and take your points of view into consideration.

*Empirical research has shown that arguments in a debate are effective when they are brought forward with audacity, clarity and resolve.*

Dutch journalist Paul Witteman

According to clients and participants in our educational training, this statement is true. No doubt the power of thinking, the rational mind, is the key in this approach, but it means more than just being a sharp debater. You can win a debate if you present the sharpest arguments, but apparently the debater as an individual also plays an important role. If you believe in what you say it has more impact than if you argue for the sake of arguing. Authenticity is more important than being quick-witted. In your work environment, there is no room for behaving as though you were indulging in a recreational debate. Besides having good, logical arguments, it is also valuable to maintain good relationships. Nevertheless, the art of good argumentation can enhance your influence.

### *Situation*

You work in an organisation in which logical argumentation and persuading based on reason is valued highly; this is often the case in a scientific or technical environment. Your proposal is not accepted just because you are pleasant to work with; you will have to argue decently and thoroughly to convince others and reach your goal.

A pitfall when reasoning is to generate too many arguments or to keep repeating the same ones. Often, people focus on the content too much and lose perspective on the dynamics in the interaction, the communication between them and the other person – for example, listening behaviour or resistance by the other person.

### *Behaviour*

In the organisational context as described above, discussions are welcome, even necessary, to persuade others. So you come up with logical arguments and oppose the arguments of other people. You present facts and figures, repeat your message, provoke responses and show a focus on your goals.

Example: 'My major arguments for introducing result-oriented management are these. First: the need to define clear and specific targets. Second: to encourage the personal development of our employees; I will return to this later. Also, I think it's important that we are clear on the agreements we make, both on a team as well as on an individual level, because it helps us to be clear on task descriptions. What's more, these agreements will contribute to our overall motivation. If people commit to mutual agreements they bear the responsibility, and will feel obliged to be proactive when they anticipate that they won't be able to meet expectations. Then there's still time to offer coaching as a means to help them meet their expectations and realize their (company) goals after all. So, in order to grow as an organisation, I think it's essential to make agreements on results as well as invest in personal development.'

Analysing what the speaker does here:

- he or she presents the two strongest arguments
- in the middle, a few more are offered
- and the speech concludes with the two arguments that are personally the most important.

### **Effective reasoning**

Some more tips for effective reasoning:

- Start by giving your two or three most powerful arguments, then follow them with others, but close again with the two or three arguments you used in your opening. They will stick.
- It helps when you support your arguments non-verbally, perhaps by counting them on your fingers, and have a firm physical presence.

- Argue firmly, but do not become rigid and inflexible.
- Show that you have looked at the issue from several angles.
- Admit it when the other party scores a point: ‘You have a point there, but let me show you another side...’
- You consciously respond to the other person’s arguments – firstly, because you do not want to cling to your own frame of reference; secondly, to show flexibility in the debate from arguing to counter-arguing.
- Use arguments, not knives.
- Separate people from issues.
- Take the floor but also give room to the other person.
- Explain yourself or your arguments if necessary.
- Focus on what is actually being said, not on your own interpretation of it.
- If you hear a false line of argument, mention it.

### **Reasoning in the context of work**

At work, when you are confronted with a difference of opinion and you want to discuss this, you may want to win the argument, but you also want to retain a good working relationship. It is not effective if you completely over-power the other person. Preferably, consider the following professional way of structuring your confrontation:

#### *Confrontation*

You establish the fact that there are differences of opinion and come to an agreement about the way you want to exchange arguments with your opponent.

#### *Opening*

Make clear that you are going to argue the pros or the cons. It is more acceptable if you are open about it and say things like ‘Do you mind me playing the devil’s advocate on this?’ or ‘Do you mind if I show you the other side of this argument?’ The effect will be that you create a psychological contract on your intention to explore the pros and cons instead of seeking a personal attack.

#### *Reasoning*

You exchange your arguments, using the tips mentioned above.

#### *Closure*

Make sure you agree on the outcome of the discussion. Ask check questions, not on the content, but on the process. For example:

- What did this exchange of arguments amount to?
- Where do we stand?
- How can we proceed, knowing where we stand?

Using this structure, you can argue firmly while at the same time you keep the working relation intact.

Differences between reasoning and debating: Roderik van Grieken, CEO of the Dutch Debating Institute in Hilversum, says ‘The goal when debating, other than when arguing, is truth-finding. Reasoning in an organisational context is used to exchange opinions and ideas to come to well-balanced decisions.’

Food for thought: Argue your opinion on a current topic to a friend, using the tips mentioned above. Ask for feedback on how effective you were. What was good and what points for improvement are there?

When reasoning, you try to persuade or convince the other party by using (rational) arguments. Unlike the assertive approach, you invite discussion, even if this is only done for the sake of being able to counter-argue.

## The power of feeling

### 5 LISTENING, SUMMARISING AND ASKING FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

*Come talk to me.*

Peter Gabriel

Note: from here on, Listening, summarising and asking follow-up questions will generally be abbreviated to LSQ...

#### *Goal*

To give the other person the feeling that you are sincerely interested in them, which often leads to the other person being interested in your ideas and motivation.

#### *Situation*

You need the other party to create consensus. It is therefore essential to know what's on the other person's mind and in their heart. You have influence when you are truly interested in the other person.

The pitfall when using the power of feeling is to exaggerate empathy and lose yourself in the other party's experience, instead of switching to your own opinions and feelings.

### *Behaviour*

You place the other party at centre stage and make an effort to find out what is important and of value to them. You pose questions from a position of genuine interest.

### *Listening*

Active listening entails a lot. It is an attitude which means opening yourself up to the other person and being curious. Non-verbally, you show active listening by establishing eye contact, nodding and humming ('hmm-hmm') to encourage the other person in telling their story. You show that your attention is focused on them and that you have time to listen. You do not interrupt; you do not 'steal' the story by saying that you recognise it and then taking over. The other person remains centre stage.

### *Summarising*

You can greatly influence a conversation by giving a good summary and then asking follow-up questions. Summarising has two functions:

- checking: 'Did I understand you correctly?'
- directing: 'If I understand you correctly, you're mentioning three issues. I would like to know more about the second one.' Here, you are already asking the follow-up question.

### *Follow-up questions*

Just like a journalist, you ask follow-up questions because you want to know everything. Your attitude is one of genuine curiosity. You might say 'I get it' but (non-verbally) the message is 'tell me more'.

Example: 'I have the idea that you're not thrilled about this proposal. Is that correct?'  
If this is confirmed, then 'Can you tell me why not, or explain your objections?' After getting the answer, 'Right, I understand what you mean and can imagine why. What can I do to remove your objections?'

Food for thought: Practise LSQ in your private life. Observe what the effects are. Do you get more information than you expected? Does the other person reveal more than you hoped for? If so, you are using LSQ effectively.

Watch an interview on television with this LSQ focus and monitor the interviewer. When do they do a good LSQ job, and when not? What are the effects on the interviewee? Also watch out for the effect of closed questions (yes/no questions); usually they do not gain a lot of information. Please realize that this is a complex skill and take some comfort in the fact that there is room for improvement – even for professional interviewers.

## 6 INVOLVING THE OTHER PERSON

*Ik kan het niet alleen.*  
(I cannot do it on my own.)

De Dijk

### *Goal*

You want to invite the other person to contribute because you need their knowledge and/or commitment to reach a consensus.

The pitfall when involving others is not being clear as to who takes the final decision.

### *Situation*

As a manager you are asked by your superior to implement a particular procedure. You are sure that your employees will object to it because they cannot see its merits and also because it will take up valuable time. It is impossible for you to refuse this assignment but you are afraid that your employees will do so. You involve them in this problem by being honest and saying that you are not happy either, and ask them to think about the questions of what this implementation might bring in terms of advantages for your department, and what possibilities can be seen when you do implement the procedure.

### *Behaviour*

You explain your dilemma and invite the others to respond to this. You ask the other people to co-create and sum up the pros and cons. You openly appreciate their contribution and take their ideas seriously. You can even put the issue on the table and say that you do not have the solutions, thus making the other people co-owners of the problem. You can even give the others an important role in the decision-making process.

When you realize that you cannot solve the problem on your own, you can influence others by giving them a true sense of co-operation. You trust the other people, and one possible effect of that is that they trust you in return, or at least feel flattered that you value their opinion and/or assessment of the situation.

Examples: 'I've come a long way in writing this report but I think it's important that you also have a good look at it and add your ideas. After all, you have to work with it, so you're entitled to influence it by sharing your ideas. Also, I have to admit that I'm not 100% sure about this. Think along with me here.'

By disclosing a problem or dilemma you have, you invite a response from the other person: 'I understand the problem; to be quite honest, I was also wondering about it...' or

'Now that you are being so honest about it, I must admit that I can also see the positive side of it' or maybe 'I would get extremely nervous if that happened. Do you see that?'

Food for thought: If you are inclined to withdraw and wrestle with difficult issues on your own, experiment and share your inner struggle with someone close to you. With your next (business) plan or project, force yourself to share your ideas with a colleague before you finalise the plan. Be aware of the effect that it has on the other party; you can ask them afterwards what being involved by you meant to them.

## 7 GIVING RECOGNITION TO THE OTHER PERSON

*This is a man's world, but it would have been nothing without a woman or a girl.*  
James Brown

### *Goal*

To feed self-esteem in other people and make them feel important, so that they are willing to see it your way.

### *Situation*

After involving another person by looking into a problem or an issue together, you show recognition for their contribution.

The pitfall when giving recognition is that you profile yourself too little. You value the other person too much and minimise your own contribution.

### *Behaviour*

You give credit to the other person's contribution. If people get the feeling that they are important and that their contribution counts, it often leads to commitment – and therefore your influence increases. You reward and recognise the other party's contribution to your goals by explicitly thanking them for:

- thinking along
- the suggestions they have made
- the commitment shown
- the critical questions, if any, that they have raised.

Example: 'Thank you for your part in writing this plan. You have been able to make these plans far more applicable and practical than I could have done. I suggest we include your name on this as co-author.'

Food for thought: Pay attention this month to the positive contributions people make that go beyond what is expected of them. Do not take them for granted (as you usually do?), but explicitly mention the contribution and your appreciation of it. Of course, you will pay attention to the effect this has on the other person.

What you are doing when you use the influencing skills Listening, summarising and asking follow-up questions (point 5), Involving the other person (point 6) and Giving recognition to the other person (point 7) is exploring all possible actions in terms of co-operation. Whereas your will and thinking power is more task-oriented, the power of feeling is central here, and is relationship-oriented. Empathy is the key.

## The power of believing

### 8 OUTLINE AN ATTRACTIVE FUTURE PERSPECTIVE

*Somewhere, over the rainbow, way up high,  
there's a land that I dreamed of, once in a lullaby.*

*Rufus Wainwright*

#### *Goal*

Generate new energy by taking others along in your vision of the future on a realistic route, while at the same time showing the first concrete step to be taken.

#### *Situation*

You have done everything you can to reach your goal but it seems as if the other party is tiring of the subject; all the arguments are well known. Daily pressure leads to tunnel vision and it seems impossible to think in the long term. What is necessary now is new energy – by influencing in a surprisingly fresh way.

The pitfall when outlining an attractive future perspective is that you can lose your perspective on reality and become impractical.

#### *Behaviour*

Outline an attractive future perspective and paint a picture of a situation you really believe in. Use a metaphor, give an example, cite a parallel, paint a picture. A picture says more than a thousand words and is easier to remember than words alone.

Link this future perspective to the interests of others. People only start to move when they believe that there is something in it for them. Then let others take the first step – after you have shown what the first step to realizing the dream could be.

The renowned management guru John P. Kotter supports this approach. In his book *Leading Change* he describes the importance of having a vision and believing in it, in communicating it and in generating a short-term success.

Examples: ‘This morning, when I was on the train I got this idea: our HR department will change from a leading department to a more consulting department in a year. Instead of writing and improving policy on paper, we will offer our clients – because that’s what our colleague departments are – useful information and the methods and means that they need.’

Or think about the legendary words by Martin Luther King – ‘I have a dream’ – and Barack Obama’s ‘What we need is hope and change.’

Food for thought: Leave the work pressure where it is for a moment. Try to avoid thinking in problems but visualise what the ideal situation might look like in a year.

## 9 CONNECTING WITH THE OTHER PERSON’S VALUES

*Baby, you can sleep while I drive.*

Melissa Etheridge

### *Goal*

The other party shares your vision because they can see what is in it for them.

### *Situation*

You have been inspiring in communicating your vision. People start to get enthusiastic. Now it is important to feed enthusiasm and translate it into action. That will only succeed when others see that your vision is really profitable for them.

The pitfall when connecting with others is that you identify with their interests to such an extent that you lose sight of the overall vision.

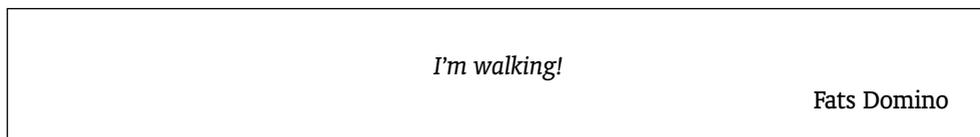
### *Behaviour*

To avoid the cynical attitude of people saying ‘dream on’ and disconnecting themselves, you have to make it crystal clear what the interests of other people are when working on your future perspective. Keep ‘what’s in it for them’ in mind.

Example: If you know that your team values co-creation and innovation highly, make sure that you mention these elements explicitly in your inspiring presentation.

Food for thought: Put yourself in the other person’s shoes – what would be important to you and inspire you to start moving?

## **10 TAKING THE FIRST STEP**



### *Goal*

Generate a short-term success and give the other party the feeling that they can truly contribute to your vision, and also have the power to influence it.

After having taken the first step, Kotter argues that it is of great importance to reward new and effective behaviour. In the eight steps he describes in *Leading Change*, the goal of making the first concrete step is to generate a short-term success. People start to believe that the idea can work. Giving recognition and Involving the other person also help.

It goes without saying that the intention when using this influencing style is that you motivate people to show this effective behaviour again, just as in Complimenting (page 24). It’s not just about people following your dream; it’s also about being able to sketch a realistic route. Knowing the nature of the first step is a condition for beginning to believe that the goal is attainable.

### *Situation*

You see enthusiasm in the other party because of your vision. They see the advantages in embracing your future perspective. It is important now to move on and put your money where your mouth is: take a first concrete step to prove that your dream will work.

The pitfall when taking the first step is to be too hasty and drown in practicalities, thus losing your perspective on the dream, the end goal.

### *Behaviour*

To make sure that your dream is experienced as realistic, desirable and attainable it is necessary that your audience is clear on the first step to take. This is exactly what Kotter calls essential too: generate a short-term success. The behaviour that has made taking the first step possible, and which might even have led to the first real success, has to be rewarded. It will provoke the same kind of successful behaviour.

Example: We are inspired by the government to use energy-saving light bulbs as a first step on our way to addressing the planet's serious environmental problems. The reward is that we feel we have contributed to a world-wide problem, instead of feeling powerless in facing such an immense task.

Food for thought: The power of believing and the inspiring approach have been described in point 8 (Outlining an attractive future perspective), in point 9 (Connecting with the other person's values) and point 10 (Taking the first step).

Think of a goal that you want to reach, one where you realize that others might not be too open to your ideas – for example, because too many arguments have already been exchanged. Try to present your goal with these four elements:

- 1 Outline an attractive future perspective.
- 2 Use a metaphor or paint a picture.
- 3 Connect to their values.
- 4 Make clear which step can already be taken.

It's essential here that you absolutely believe in this future goal. Paint your picture and do not allow interruptions by discussion. Try to generate new energy for the subject.

There are two secrets to using all of the skills mentioned effectively:

- 1 If you use a skill, be consistent and use it purely: do not mix styles initially.
- 2 If you use a skill and it does not have the desired effect, switch to another style.

Last but not least: Do nothing.

*Let it be.*

The Beatles

There are ten influencing skills, but there is one more option: do nothing.

## DO NOTHING

Sometimes you influence a situation by not using any of the skills but by making a strategic choice to do nothing. Silence can be powerful and some situations do not require action. So you do not do anything – but you *do* make a conscious choice to Do Nothing.

### *Situation*

- There is too much tension, the negotiations are at a dead end, the time is not ripe yet.
- It is high time that you put your ego aside and gave the floor to another person.
- You want to show that you are flexible enough to give up one of your points (maybe to score later on, on another subject).

### *Behaviour*

- You remain silent...
- You go away...
- You avoid the conflict...
- You change the subject...
- You use humour...
- You give the floor to someone else.

Example: 'I'm getting the feeling that this isn't making you happy. You know what I'll do? I'll withdraw my proposal. Let's get some coffee.'

Food for thought: If you find yourself getting over-agitated or too fanatic about the subject, ask yourself whether it is really worth your while. Is doing nothing an option? And is it, maybe, much better than pushing the point any further?

## Switching between the ten influencing skills

If you feel that an influencing skill is not being effective, do not persist in using it but switch to another skill – one that works.

This sounds easier than it actually is, because first you have to be aware that the skill you are using is ineffective. That implies a raised level of consciousness and self-awareness. It is complex to move from empathy to taking a position, from arguments to inspiration and back. In one conversation, in one meeting, you switch skills in minutes, sometimes even seconds, in order to be effective. This is a form of communication excellence that you can learn, but it takes time and a lot of effort.

Here are some examples.

- 1 'In my opinion we must raise our budget for this project!' Taking such a strong stand has a counter-effect on the general manager, who immediately resists the idea. You switch to Listening, summarising and asking follow-up questions: 'Under what conditions would you be tempted to consider this proposal?'
- 2 The other way around can also be effective: you start with a question, but if you notice that the other person is not particularly excited, you switch to Outlining an attractive future perspective: 'Imagine that this project generates more income and more company pride in six months...'
- 3 A fairly common situation: you Take a position. You notice that it has an influence, but more is required. You switch to Reasoning because you feel that logic and arguments are necessary to convince the other person.  
Position: 'This project is definitely going to generate more revenue.'  
Arguments: 'Our clients are asking for this product, our colleagues cannot wait to start offering it and, what is more, we're beating the competitor because we're the first on the market with this development.'
- 4 Option 2: you start by Outlining an attractive future perspective. You feel that it generates energy but some people are still sceptical and need more, so you switch to Taking a (firm) position. Perspective: 'Imagine this – in six months this project will generate more revenue, new customers and much more work satisfaction for our colleagues!' Position: 'If we do not do this, our competitors will!'

Food for thought: Think back on a business conversation or a negotiation in which you did not manage to influence the other party. In hindsight, can you see an opening now in which you could have switched to another influencing skill? In your next encounter, switch to another influencing skill at least once when you feel that you are not being effective enough with the one you are using.