

# FIVE TIPS FOR INCREASING YOUR INFLUENCE AS AN AUDITOR

By Ann Butera CRP, President, The Whole Person Project, Inc.



By definition, influence is the ability to get others to act on your suggestions without pulling rank. Influential people are able to garner support for their ideas. They understand that being persuasive requires more than technical expertise and simply having facts to support a perspective. They are able to communicate their message in as many ways as necessary to appeal to the diversity of their audience. Persuasive people leverage their relationships with others and the information they possess to get others to act on corrective action plans and implement suggestions for increased efficiency.

Influential people do not require a formal title and those with formal titles are not necessarily persuasive within their organizations. You can identify influencers by noticing who people gravitate toward for information during a project or periods of organizational change and unrest.

Also, they project values that are meaningful to those they influence. They identify commonalities with others to establish and build relationships. Then, they leverage these relationships to persuade others and gain agreements.

A manager who is interested in spotting talent on a team will identify an individual's ability to persuade others and nurture it because at the top echelons the ability to influence equates to the ability to get things done.

Are you an influencer? Would you like to be more so? The following five techniques will increase your ability to influence others' behavior.

1. Identify and expand areas of commonality when interacting with others. Take the time to break the ice with the folks with whom you work. During this time, pay attention to their answers to common conversational questions like "How was your weekend?" These answers can provide insight into their hobbies and priorities. To the extent that you genuinely share interest in these areas, your ties to these folks will expand and deepen over time.
2. Pace before leading others. Take the time to understand the other person's preferred communication style and match it. For example, if the other person is a slow, methodical and precise communicator, using overblown or imprecise words, e.g., always, never, and very, will trigger suspicion. Likewise, speaking very quickly to this same individual will engender distrust. Instead, choose your words with care and slow down your rate of speech. Establish this rapport before diving into an explanation of your ideas.

3. Watch your language. Use common, everyday terms to explain technical concepts. Avoid audit jargon, e.g., inherent risk, residual risk, and key control. Be prepared to express the same message in several ways until the other person understands what you are saying.
4. Adapt your communication style. If you are dealing with an analytical person, present your position in a coherent, sequenced manner. If you are dealing with a goal-oriented person, explain how your ideas will enable this person to achieve his or her goals effectively or efficiently. If you are dealing with a people pleaser, provide examples of precedents that illustrate how other departments or teams have successfully implemented your suggestion. If you are dealing with a high-energy strategist, keep your messages focused, concise and simple by limiting the amount of detail you provide.
5. Pull more and push less. Instead of making statements and telling people what to do, use questioning to engage the others. Most people believe “their own baloney”, i.e., if they say it, they own it. This means that if they identify a gap in their process or a breakdown in their process’s controls, they believe these conditions exist. When you deliver the same message and tell them they have a process gap, their typical reaction will be defensiveness and resistance. Consequently, take the time to devise a series of open-ended questions that will lead the people you want to persuade to arrive at the point you want to make. While this indirect approach may appear to be time consuming, it achieves results that are long lasting. As a result of thinking through the answers to your questions, the other people have time to think about the condition you want addressed.

While these techniques may seem both simple and simplistic, they require a great deal of self-control and practice before they become second nature. However, if you make it a habit to apply the five techniques listed above, you will become an influential team member, gaining the trust of your peers and management.



Ann M. Butera, MBA, CRP, is President of The Whole Person Project, Inc., an organizational development consulting and training firm, is a frequent conference speaker, and served as audit committee chair for a financial services firm. Please visit [www.wholepersonproject.com](http://www.wholepersonproject.com) for more information on her consulting and training services. She welcomes your reactions and questions concerning this article, and can be reached at [amb@wholepersonproject.com](mailto:amb@wholepersonproject.com) or 516-354-3551.