

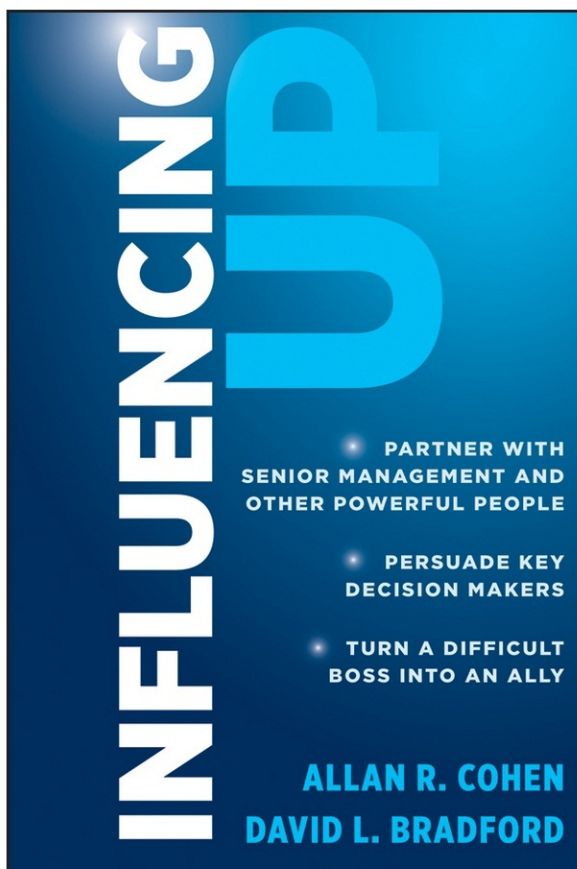
INFLUENCING BOSSES

**PARTNER WITH
SENIOR MANAGEMENT AND
OTHER POWERFUL PEOPLE**

**PERSUADE KEY
DECISION MAKERS**

**TURN A DIFFICULT
BOSS INTO AN ALLY**

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CHAPTER

11

What Do the Powerful Care About?

The bigger the power gap between you and the other person, the less likely it is that you will be able to influence him or her. You need to figure out what you have to offer. If you aren't in a position to know much about what the other party values, you won't know how to appeal to what matters to that person. When trying to see what shapes the powerful person's currencies, your best bet is to try to understand his or her context—even though that world may seem distant and unfamiliar to yours.

This chapter provides some analytic questions to ask to try to determine their world, as well as some generic information about the types of things that relatively powerful people—especially those near the top of their organizations—think about. Of course, you want to test out your assumptions before you act upon them and then fit them to the individual. But you might only get a brief moment with this

person, so the better you connect with him or her—the better your odds for success will be.

Sometimes you can do homework beforehand—whether this includes researching on your own or finding information through other people. But it isn't always possible to be so informed in advance. And if you don't frame a situation as these people see it, it's often impossible to engage in further conversation. That's what makes it so hard to influence relatively powerful people; they know what they value, and do not want to deal with anyone who isn't working from a similar set of assumptions and values. Even if you are doing good work on your level, you must be fully aware of what is on the mind of the person above. Not only do you want to understand that person's world; you must also make sure that you are not acting on something that seemed like a good idea solely from *your* perspective, and missing wider or different objectives. Where you sit shapes where you stand; try to anticipate how it looks from above.

There are several contextual factors that you can use to try to do diagnosis from a distance, all of which are an extension of the influence model introduced in Chapter 4. However, they're applied here to senior people who are even more likely to reflect pressures from external forces—the competition's actions, industry trends, and so on. You should be able to find a good amount of this information in internal documents or via colleagues if the senior person is in your own organization. You may have to work harder at gathering information for someone outside; however, asking around can help you find the answers. One tactic is to see if the person's gatekeeper is willing to talk with you. If you are friendly enough and explain why you're interested, the gatekeeper might just be amenable.

Always keep the following in mind: *in general, people most easily partner with people who they feel are like them.* One starting point to figure out what you have in common is to know what top managers generally value. Despite some variations, a good number of senior managers face similar issues and have similar interests and priorities, including the following:

- **A balance of the organization's costs, growth/innovation, and the building of future capacities.** This is a major task for senior

managers. Overemphasis on any one of these competing areas will eventually harm the organization, although they have differing levels of importance at different times.

- **Major economic forces such as inflation, deflation, interest rates, and demand.** This is less of a concern during good times. However, external economic conditions can have a critical current or future impact on the organization.
- **Innovation, products and processes.** Finding, developing, and growing the products of the future, or inventing and implementing the processes to run the organization is an ongoing challenge. Many organizations are transitioning from selling stand-alone products to developing and selling complete solutions.
- **Overseas competition.** Increasing numbers of companies are discovering increasing direct competition and/or competition enabled by competitors' use of overseas companies, for materials, subassemblies, low-cost, or otherwise unavailable talent.
- **Outsourcing for costs, lowering of capital costs, and search for new markets.** It has become possible to outsource many more aspects of what organizations do; this issue raises a host of questions about costs, transportation time, reliability, and accuracy of communications—and some work is being brought back to the home country.
- **Talent acquisition and retention (workforce demographics issues: aging, skills, women, immigrants, and language).** Even in times of high unemployment, some industries are suffering from shortages of skilled individuals.
- **Sources of supply (oil, rare earths, metals, others).** Sudden shortages or wild price fluctuations can have a major impact.
- **Integrity and ethics, company reputation.** Companies that have ignored ethical and legal issues can wind up with great losses or scandal, with the behavior of top executives themselves under greater scrutiny.
- **Their own relationship to the board, those who finance the organization, the press, industry peers.** Top managers

also are responsible to a variety of constituents who might have conflicting goals and strong ideas about judging company performance. If publicly owned, shareholders and the financial industry can be demanding critics, and share price can be a preoccupation. Private or family ownership has its own demands. And fears about what the press might focus on can also be a big worry.

- **Regulations, Sarbanes-Oxley Act, and health care and other government policies.** Even though clear regulations can make the life of top managers easier, they tend not to like feeling restricted, and the obligations and transparency forced by Sarbanes-Oxley and other government requirements can be very uncomfortable.

Although not a totally comprehensive list, these are the kinds of issues that generally concern senior executives. And because they will surely color what is on the minds of top management, they shape the criteria managers use to judge you. Your awareness of these and company-specific issues will make it more likely that top people will see you as a potential junior partner—one who is aware of the bigger picture.

These kinds of issues also tend to frame the way top managers think about the consequences of their actions. If the financial press is closely watching and judging every penny spent, then loosely promised benefits are not likely to be terribly convincing. On the other hand, it may appear too shortsighted to offer precise, short-term benefits to a group trying to implement a new strategy. This is why you must link your proposal to current strategic efforts or preoccupations.

In short, think about what the audience cares about, and not just about the virtues of your product or idea as you see them.

You'll also want to know specifically the issues that matter to the particular individual or group you're targeting. What kinds of public statements do they make? What do the business press and financial analysts say about them? What is the proclaimed company strategy,

vision, and values aspired to? What are the dominant senior managers' educational and work backgrounds? Based on their records, do you expect them to think about technology, sales potential, costs, brand, or something else first? Will they care more about the risks to implementing your proposal, or the potential gains? Will they care at all whether there is learning involved—or do only results matter?

The following section lists some other areas to investigate that can lead to good guesstimates of what matters to these important people.

Factors in the Organizational World That Shape the Currencies of Powerful People

- Their actual job. What are the specific tasks they are expected to perform (or choose to do)?
 - Do they spend a high percentage of their time in the public eye?
 - Or are they mainly internally focused?
 - Do they spend time talking with and listening to organization members' concerns? If this person prefers to seem “approachable,” he or she will probably want you to use a friendlier style.
- What do the company and industry cultures emphasize?
 - What is considered appropriate behavior? For example, how risk-taking and innovative are people expected to be? Is it essential to follow hierarchy and protocol?
 - Don't stereotype too readily, though; some companies run counter to their industries and value quite different things from their industry practices. Know the specifics of your target.
- What are the powerful party's work surroundings?
 - Does the person work in a closely guarded area with several layers of people to go through in order to gain access, or work in an open area and frequently mingle with employees?

- Are they using honed skills or does the position call for them to do things they have not done much before?
- Have they worked in the same company/organization and industry for a long time or is this a move? Those who have been with a particular company or industry for a while tend to be more set in their ways than those who have experienced discontinuities in their careers.
- Is there a record of what the organization's board wanted when it selected the person for the job? What shortcomings of the previous incumbent were being countered?
- When people are hired at a high level, there are usually public statements from the board or company about why they are enthusiastic about the person selected. Was the board looking for continuity with the past leader or a sharp break? Because incoming executives are always eager to make their mark, they're likely to value anything that can enhance the goals that the board had in mind.
- Are there public speeches, annual reports, blogs, op-ed columns, or other records of this person declaring what he or she values? (Google is your friend in this instance!)
- Most powerful people have extensive public records that can reveal a lot of what they care about. (We will provide further information about this in the next chapter.)

Are You Seeking to Influence People inside or outside the Organization? About One Event, or Multiple Issues?

If you are trying to influence people within the organization about a single change effort, the most powerful currencies are likely to be around the business issues described above. You need to make the best business case—one that takes organizational context into account.

Though you are unlikely to immediately build a *personal* connection, if you can find commonalities or encounter one another doing good work, it might ease the way.

If you are dealing outside your organization, you need to create instant credibility and connection, and often, begin a longer-term, more complex relationship. You might be building a strategic alliance around specific outcomes with a competitor, or working with others in the same trade association. Or you might be creating a consulting engagement. Some kind of a personal relationship may be a requirement. Even something as simple as just making a sale requires credibility and connection.

Neither lower-power insiders nor outsiders should confuse potential connection with the need to do good work. But how the proposed work is perceived is related to the way benefits are framed, and to how the presenter is seen, so understand as much as you can about what the powerful are likely to be thinking. People usually connect and spend time with others who share their values and interests. Don't turn yourself into a chameleon and feign interests that you don't have—that deceptiveness is usually quite transparent. Instead, search for areas in which you naturally have common interests and build on those. The following are some ways to assess what, in addition to their immediate business concerns, may be of importance to people you are seeking to influence.

Tracking Their Habitats

- What associations does the person belong to? With whom does he or she socialize and talk? Remember the adage: “By the company they keep, you will know them.”
- Is the person part of the Chamber of Commerce? A particular trade association? A board member of any charities—that might include other powerful board members? What charity events does the person attend? How about country club memberships? What activities does that reflect: golf, tennis, swimming, boating?

- What about other hobbies? It isn't news that many in business play golf, sometimes quite seriously; others ski, attend film or art festivals, and many charity parties, where attendees buy expensive tickets as part of a quid pro quo arrangement with friends who in turn buy tickets from them.
- How and where people live also helps shape their desires and values. Do they reside in posh suburban homes, or urban buildings? Fancy vacation homes in the "right" spots? Expensive resorts?
- Do their possessions—jewelry, autos, art, clothes, etc.—put them in powerful company?
- You may get a good idea of what matters to the person by checking out these formal and informal "memberships." And, of course, some very powerful people do not associate so much with others like them—which is equally revealing.
- These social forces can help determine what the powerful person cares about, and the currencies to which he or she is likely to be receptive. Although the things that they value may never overtly come up as a topic of discussion, knowing about them can help you converse more confidently. You can also establish your credibility by commenting on their power. For example, an ironic (and complimentary) question like, "How do you pull that off?" can show that you appreciate their strength and skill.
- Table 11.1 is a useful (albeit general) guide for making a quick determination about powerful people. It can potentially help you determine your approach after you have done the kind of diagnosis we are recommending, combined with some firsthand observation. The table represents a series of admittedly slightly stereotyped leader styles and how to respond to each. Keep in mind that these styles are merely hypothetical constructs for the purposes of illustration; they present a more "black and white" version of the shades of gray you'll encounter in real-world behavior.

TABLE 11.1 Powerful Leaders Commonly Encountered in Selling Strategy Consulting

Stereotype or "Dominant Gene"	Defining Characteristics	Vehicles to Connect As Peer
1. Cerebral thinker	Ponders; "See them think"; Requires evidence	Let them "See you Think"; Research, data; Tell the Story
2. Experience-based loyalist	Life work lessons dominate; No "I"s. Rarely manages up; Focus is down; Rarely takes credit	Bring another experience-based person; company focused discussion—not business personal
3. Political survivalist	"I" dominates; Asks for political alliance; Company secondary;	Listen; do not commit to politics; Distance
4. Intergalactic driver	High energy; Idea person; Some ideas good; Evidence of action/results; Great person to be around	Ideas of your own; think alongside and intersect when possible; "Equal" energy;
5. Tyrannical emotionalist	Needs domination; not logical; Can be demeaning	Direct presentation distance; Search for key to settle down; Typically need to exit
6. Analytical follower	Talks in numbers; Lives in his or her calculations; a supporter of the leader	Charts; graphs; research studies; analysis of their operation; numbers
7. Glass half-full socializer (think insurance industry)	Mixes business and pleasure; Always up; Always sees the good; No problems; Opportunity only	Put them in their comfort location; Like to get inside scoop.
8. Conservative historian	"I remember when"; This "needs a lot of input"; "I will get back to you"	Tell a historical story; Indirect presentation; See person last!

Source: Created by Michael May, Accenture, now Babson College. Used with permission.

Although fairly general, the table can help determine powerful people's likely preferred style, telling you a lot about how they may want to be presented to or how they would like to receive proposals.

Use a Powerful Proposal Style Whether Dealing Internally or Externally

Unfortunately, many lower-power people experience fear when they have to impress top management. This usually prompts them to either freeze up and omit vital information, or to overpresent so as to seem as knowledgeable as possible. Yet top managers tend to be very impatient. They want presenters to have done their homework, but they seldom want to hear all the details first. If your assumptions don't make sense to them, all the homework you did is irrelevant.

Consider what Phil Juliano, previously vice president of marketing at Novell, learned about presenting to top managers:

When dealing with a company's CEO, you don't throw a proposed approach without first level setting—that is, reminding the CEO of how you got to the new positioning. You want them to have confidence that you have done your homework. They want to be sure that their organization is solid. Don't share every wart or imperfection; discuss what you learned, document your conclusions, and never hide the data. However, CEOs know there is not perfect science in this imperfect world—so ambiguity comes with the territory.¹

Phil learned, as is often the case, that the technical material so important to *him* in insuring good work wasn't necessarily relevant to the top people. Therefore, proposals to senior managers almost always need to:

- Be concise.
- Start with the conclusions and implications.
- Include the major assumptions behind the proposal.

- This can be challenging for people who find the specifics intriguing, or want senior people to know how hard they have worked. But nothing creates as much credibility as two basic things:
 1. Having a good track record for delivering
 2. Making compelling proposals that immediately reveal their expected benefits

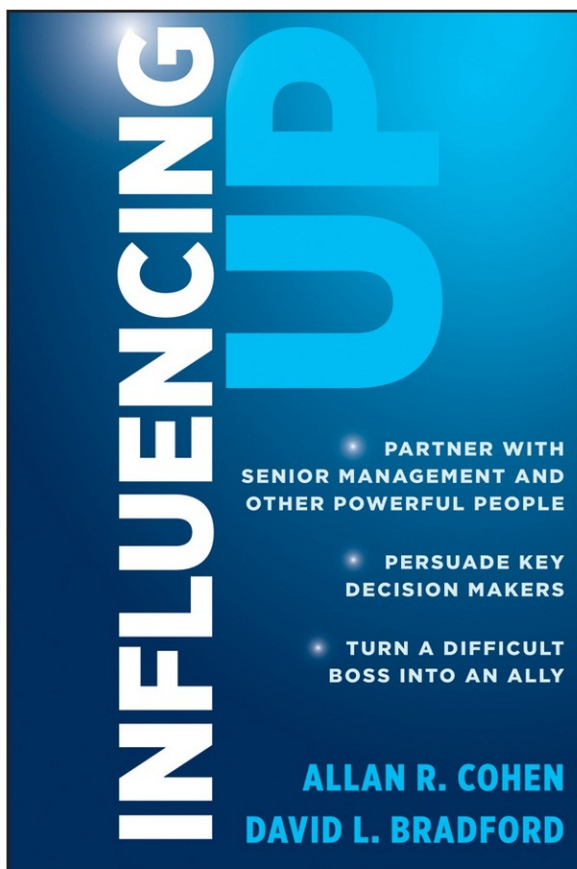
You must always frame proposals in terms of solving organizational problems that powerful people care about. Though this is Sales 101, many specialists and experts don't like to think of themselves as selling.

You'll be even more effective with a positive track record. The executive team often knows less about what is being proposed than you do, so fall back on their general trust of how well you have come through in the past. Of course this is a bit of a Catch-22, because to have a good track record you need to have been supported, and to be supported it helps to have a good track record. However, you can always start on smaller projects, deliver more than is expected, and establish a reputation as someone who values business payoffs more than self-promotion.

If you happen to support something in which you truly believe but don't yet have the internal credibility, try to find credible allies to join you ahead of time. Make sure they have a significant role, because they probably know a thing or two (given their track record)—and give them plenty of visibility. And whether or not you have general credibility or are borrowing it, find ways to link your claimed outcomes to current concerns, strategies, or ongoing efforts. Great ideas that don't seem to connect to what is on the minds of the powerful are too often missed or pushed aside.

We have warned about the danger of being too fearful and not making your strongest case. But it is also an important skill to know when to back off, do more homework, work harder to connect to top management concerns, propose an alternative like a small pilot or entrepreneurial spinoff, wait for new senior leadership—or even when to leave.

Yet however you gauge what powerful people value, none of it helps if you can't get to talk with the people whose cooperation you want. Figuring out how to gain access is the subject of the next chapter.



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