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What's Your Influencing Style?

in Influencing Others (<https://hbrascend.org/essential-skills/working-with-others/influencing-others/>) by Chris Musselwhite (<https://hbrascend.org/authors/chris-musselwhite/>) and Tammie Plouffe (<https://hbrascend.org/authors/tammie-plouffe/>);

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Effective leadership today relies more than ever on influencing others — impacting their ideas, opinions, and actions. While influence has always been a valuable managerial skill, today's highly collaborative organizations make it essential. Consider how often you have to influence people who don't even report to you in order to accomplish your objectives. Success depends on your ability to effectively influence both your direct reports and the people over whom you have no direct authority.

Have you ever thought about how you influence others? The tactics you use? We are all aware that people use different influencing tactics, but did you realize that we each naturally default to the same tactics every time? Or that the tactics we default to are also the ones to which we are most receptive when being influenced?

It is these preferred tactics that define our influencing style. Analyzing the different influencing tactics (http://temple.academia.edu/stuartschmidt/Papers/526974/Intraorganizational_influence_tactics_Explorations_in_getting_ones_way), researchers have identified up to nine primary influencing tactics (<http://www.jstor.org/stable/256490>). In our quest to further understand personal influencing styles, we did additional research to build on the existing knowledge base. From our research, we've identified five distinct influencing styles: rationalizing, asserting, negotiating, inspiring, and bridging.

You may have an idea what your style is just from hearing these labels, but the most accurate way to identify your style is with an influence style indicator (<http://www.influencestyleindicator.com/>) — a self-scoring assessment that classifies your style based on answers to questions about preferred influencing tactics. But even without the indicator, here are some questions you can ask yourself to begin to understand your style:

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- **Rationalizing:** Do you use logic, facts, and reasoning to present your ideas? Do you leverage your facts, logic, expertise, and experience to persuade others?
- **Asserting:** Do you rely on your personal confidence, rules, law, and authority to influence others? Do you insist that your ideas are heard and considered, even when others disagree? Do you challenge the ideas of others when they don't agree with yours? Do you debate with or pressure others to get them to see your point of view?
- **Negotiating:** Do you look for compromises and make concessions in order to reach an outcome that satisfies your greater interest? Do you make tradeoffs and exchanges in order to meet your larger interests? If necessary, will you delay the discussion until a more opportune time?
- **Inspiring:** Do you encourage others toward your position by communicating a sense of shared mission and exciting possibility? Do you use inspirational appeals, stories, and metaphors to encourage a shared sense of purpose?
- **Bridging:** Do you attempt to influence outcomes by uniting or connecting with others? Do you rely on reciprocity, engaging superior support, consultation, building coalitions, and using personal relationships to get people to agree with your position?

While answering these questions, take your style a step further. How often does it work for you? Are you more successful with certain types of people? Have you ever wondered why? Since there are five different influencing styles, using only your preferred style has the potential to undermine your influence with as many as four out of five people.

Gaining awareness about our own influencing style and those of others is especially critical in light of today's fast-paced and stressful work environments, and here's why: When we are operating unconsciously out of a preference (our style) and not seeing the results we expect, we actually have the tendency to intensify our preferred behavior — even when it's not working!

If your individual success depends on gaining the cooperation of people over whom you have no direct authority, this should concern you. The way to begin to increase your odds of influencing more people is to learn to recognize and use each of the five styles.

Becoming aware that there are influencing styles other than yours is a good start. To further increase our influence, you must learn what each style sounds like when it's being used effectively and ineffectively. Gaining this awareness will help you recognize when the style you're using isn't working and how to determine one that will.

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What's your influencing style? And what are you going to do about it?

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