



The Power of Influence
By Paul McKenna and Michael Breen

There's nothing like listening to a good audiotape program on the long commute from San Diego to Los Angeles. I enjoyed this one so much I thought I'd highlight the many gems scattered throughout this four tape cassette program and then my reflections on how they can affect you and managing in the workplace. By way of background, the author's are experienced with hypnosis and nuero-lingustic programming. While I have not tried using the former, I am certainly experienced with the latter. So powerful is the influence of NLP, the first time I used it in trial I received a 1.35 million dollar verdict on a case where defense counsel offered me 15,000 to settle. Once you begin applying this information you will see how powerful it really is.

At its heart, the power of influence is about what goes on in our unconscious mind. When we communicate with someone and supply him or her with information, we are generally looking for some form of response in return. The degree to which this response meets or even exceeds or expectations has as much to do with the unconscious mind as it does the conscious one. In this book summary I will endeavor to add my own insight as to how the *Power of Influence* can affect the workplace.

The authors start off with Aristotle's insight that knowledge can only be gained through logic and reason. The problem is, not everybody is capable of "reasonable" thought. The power of persuasion, which should emphasis a search for the truth, has the ability to motivate people towards right action. Aristotle broke down the art of persuasion into three categories. The first is the ethos or credibility of the speaker. The second factor is the message itself or "logos" which means the word. Certain words trigger certain unconditional responses, which greatly impact on the level of persuasion. The final factors are the emotions of the audience or "pathos". We all know that people who make us feel good about ourselves can in turn get us to do almost anything for them. That is why advertisers try to attach an emotional anchor to any message they present. As we shall soon see, one of the greatest manifestations of "pathos" comes to play in the group setting. Because of the emotional need for conformity, groups tend to think with a single mind. The ability to tap into and persuade the group mind has been the calling card of every famous leader in history.

These three factors, your credibility, the words you use, and the emotions of the recipient should be considered anytime you are trying to influence or persuade another. One note before we move on: many people equate the power of influence or persuasion with manipulation and furthermore consider that to be somehow villainous. The fact is, the power of influence is only villainous if that is the intent behind it.

Sometimes the best form of communication is an indirect one using a metaphor or analogy. As a simple example, if someone is focusing their efforts on too narrow an area, you may bring up the metaphor, “you don’t want to put all of your eggs into a single basket.” The same thing with analogy. If any employee is not producing the way you would expect them to, perhaps you can analogize to a situation in your own work career where you were challenged with productivity issues. Metaphors, stories, parables, proverbs, all are very powerful forms of communication because of the emotions they evoke. It is important to pay attention to the metaphors that you and others use in life. The authors give a classic example of a boss who always used football metaphors in his conversation. The employee had difficulty communicating with his boss until he began to adopt similar metaphors. Not surprisingly, employee’s perceived brilliance increased dramatically as a result of the emotional connection created by use of those metaphors.

What metaphors do you use when you talk about your company or the people in it? What metaphors do those you work with tend to use? What does the answer to these questions tell you about you, your company and your fellow workers? What metaphors, symbols and stories do you want to have associated with your career and your company? One reason brands are so powerful is they hit on all three factors of credibility, words and emotions. Because of this fact, brands are arguably today’s most valuable corporate asset.

The Rule of Reciprocity

Otherwise known as the Rule of Give and Take. By our very nature, humans feel compelled to reciprocate. This law of reciprocity is so ingrained in us that it applies even when we were given something we never asked for and from somebody that we don’t even like. So, the next time you are trying to use your influence in the workplace, before you attempt to receive something ask what you are going to give first. Many times what we have to “give” is really nothing more than a concession. Simply by moving back from an outrageous request, you could give the appearance of having giving something for nothing. This is a very valuable tool in sales and negotiation.

The Rule of Consistency

People are wired to be consistent. When they are inconsistent they are perceived as incredible. This is a tactic I have often used in the trial setting. For example, I will ask a witness a series of yes/no questions so as to anchor their consistent response. Then I will venture into an area where I know that they are lying and you will see the inconsistency in their response. I will certainly make a point of informing the judge or jury of this inconsistency so as to attack the witness’s credibility. This inconsistency can be as subtle as an eye movement or physical gesture.

Let me give another example of how this works. When selling services or a product, one should begin by getting the other person to agree to a set of principles or

beliefs. Get them to agree that if someone could offer a product or service that would be in alignment with this principle or belief that they would be interested in purchasing it. In a sense, you get their commitment to purchase upfront before you ever describe the benefits of your particular product or service. Then, the conversation can focus on getting them to agree that your product or service in fact creates those benefits. Because they have a need to be consistent and will commit to their earlier position, you have a greater chance of selling that product or service.

Another example: the great hypnotists began by asking their subjects to comply with certain simple requests such as sitting down, closing the door, etc. They then find that it's easier later on for them to comply with the hypnotic suggestions. In the same way, if you are doing any form of public speaking or training, you should begin by requesting your audience to do certain simple acts such as standing up and stretching, raising their hand in agreement, saying "yes" at all once, etc. By getting people to agree to relatively innocuous activities upfront, you will have a much easier job of getting them to agree to the more challenging ones later.

Much in the same way, if you are a manager trying to encourage completion of a project, you may want to get your employee to agree to the relatively easy and minor activities first. By "chunking down" the project into more manageable bits you can use this rule of consistency to your great benefit. Instead of trying to drive their commitment to completion of an entire project, drive their commitment through a built up completion of larger and larger parts.

Much in the same vein, I am continually learning that it is much easier to sell a full range of services to a client by starting off with their commitment to a rather minor level of services. It is then much easier to step them up to the next level of service and so on.

This rule can also trap us. For example if we agree to put in extra at work on a project on a number of occasions, it becomes almost impossible for us to then say, "no" to a subsequent request. If you find yourself in such a position, you may want to say something like, "I will do that this time, but I don't want it to become a habit." This is one way you can avoid being manipulated by villainous intent.

The Rule of Social Proof

Otherwise known as "group think" or the "herd mentality." Whether it comes to a decision about what clothing we will buy or whether we will make a donation that Sunday at church, the power of social proof is enormous. As a business owner or manager this is a double-edged sword. You certainly want to create a culture in your organization that is modeled by all of your employees. However, you don't want so much conformist-thinking that people are afraid to be innovative or speak up.

The Rule of Liking

According to the authors, there are a number of components to this rule. The first being physical attractiveness. Very simple, if we want people to like us we have to look likable. This is one reason why attorneys are forever instructing their clients to dress their best when on the witness stand. The second factor is that of similarity. Very simply, we are more comfortable with people we perceive to be just like us. We are not just talking about how they dress, but everything to their tonality to their body language and to even their smell. There is an art to “matching” someone you’re attempting to influence without being obvious about the fact. Again, we can mimic their dress, their tone of voice, their metaphors, and so on. Simply by repeating what you heard someone else say to you, you can use the rule of similarity. This is an essential part of active listening.

The power of praise and complement also evoke this rule. People tend to like us more when we make them feel good about themselves.

We also tend to like things that are familiar to us. This is why it is so important in diversity type training to find the similarities between us as opposed to further exposing the differences.

Pat Wolfe, a brain researcher, tells us that the brain always tries to attach meaning to any new information. It actually looks for familiarity. That’s why it is important as a leader or manager to link new projects and new activities to past experiences. In the same way, the entire concept of change becomes less onerous when it is positioned as being similar to challenges faced in the past. Change also becomes a much easier challenge when we associate celebration and reward.

I had a client who went through an incredible amount of technological change over a three-year period. At the conclusion of which they continued on with business as if nothing special had occurred. I explained to the CEO that if he wanted people to embrace the inevitable next round of change that he should celebrate and reward the challenges just conquered. This way people will associate change with pleasure as opposed to fear. We can always also use the power of association to motivate ourselves to do routine and perhaps even unlikable tasks well. This is no different than a parent making it fun for their child to eat their vegetables.

The Rule of Authority

As Aristotle told us centuries ago, authority equates with credibility. I think one-reason banks have so many Vice Presidents is to generate the appearance of authority and hence add credibility. Again, this power of authority has a built in Catch-22. What you don’t want however is for people to blindly bend to authority. Especially in an era where Tom Peters states that rebellion against authority is a requirement of all progressive organizations. The Culture of Silence, which stymies the workplace, exists in large part

because of our fear of authority. Employees fear speaking up because they fear the ridicule and wrath of those with greater authority.

The Rule of Scarcity

Simply put, people want what they can't have. I have concerns with this rule, especially as it applies to the workplace. A scarcity mentality can create internal competition, which in turn can be more destructive than beneficial to an organization. What you want your employees to do is cooperate with each other, not compete against each other. That is one reason why I am dead against the Employee of the Month award as a motivator. Using the rule of scarcity may be a good idea if you are promoting a product in limited supply, but a destructive one if used improperly with your workforce.

Flexibility

According to the authors, one of the keys to influential communications is the ability to be flexible. For example, if your kid has seven ways of resisting your efforts to get them to brush their teeth then you better have eight ways of responding. Being flexible and thinking out of the box are matters that should be considered before any communication. Realize that this flexibility involves all aspects of communication including the words that are used, tone, physical gestures, the setting, and so on. You have to be willing to test the effectiveness of your communication. Don't assume what works, find out. Be flexible.

Building Rapport

This happens at both the conscious and unconscious level. For example, consciously we can focus on a commonality between us. For example, it may be that we both like to play golf. At an unconscious level we can mimic the other person's physical state. For example if we are trying to communicate to somebody who is standing up, it would be very difficult to build rapport while sitting down. Similarly, if we find that a person has certain physical gestures we might want to match them. For example if they're crossing their legs we might want to cross our legs. If they are leaning forward, we would lean forward. The trick is to build rapport without being obvious about the effort.

Leading

Once you know that you have established rapport you can begin leading people in the direction you are after. For example, don't expect to make somebody who is feeling very stressed instantly unstressed by telling them a joke. Better to try to match their mood and then step them up from it.

Handling Objections

As any great salesperson will tell you, you should be prepared to handle objections to your communication before you ever have a communication. For example, before you introduce an employee survey, it would be wise to deal with the possible objection that in the employee's experience management doesn't follow up on suggestions set forth in the survey. Instead of waiting for one of the employees to say it, you would say something like "I know that many of you have had the experience where you have given input through an employee survey but did not see the follow up expected. That is certainly not our intent with this survey. We are sensitive to this concern, so if you have concerns in this area after the survey, then we want to hear about it." You can also tell them something like, "While there will be a number of suggestions set forth by the employees, please understand that it will be impossible for us to address every one of them. What we will do is form a committee and decide which of those suggestions are of critical importance and we can implement immediately. Once those matters are handled we will move onto the next set of suggestions and so on."

In the same way this technique can be used when dealing with performance issues. Most employees have an emotional objection to being judged. Let them know that it is not your desire to judge them but rather empower them towards greater performance. I attempt to remove potential objections to purchase of the human resources compliance products I have generated by offering an unconditional guarantee. Very simply, if somebody doesn't think what I have provided them is worthwhile they can get their money back and keep the products at the same time. I do the same thing with my consulting and legal services. If a company does not feel that my fees were well earned, then they have the opportunity to set what they feel to be a fair fee. The bottom line is if you deliver on your promises, the risk you face from the potential buyer who is unwilling to pay full value for a good product or service is a much less than the risk of not getting that client at all.

The Art of Reframing

When it comes to being persuasive, this is one of the most powerful things you can do. The authors gave an example of an army recruiter who had the most successful rate for enlisting soldiers in the entire army. When followed around for a day, the researchers realized it was his novel approach towards recruitment that made all the difference. Instead of waiting for potential recruits to come to his office he would go down to shopping malls to other places and seek them out. Knowing their fears, he would reframe the message to challenge them about their fears. He would also use the power of group think. Much in the same way, when recruiting for new hires in this incredibly tight market we may be better off reframing our recruitment efforts. For example you may say something like, "You may be better off working in an environment where your career is already planned out for you by management. In this company how far you go is entirely up to you. That may be scary for people who need more structure."

What are your employee's fears? How can you reframe your efforts to turn those fears on their head? Going back to one of my favorite subjects, performance appraisals, I think this is an area ripe for reframing. As many of you know, nobody enjoys doing the performance appraisal process. Mostly because it is a fear based process. Again, none of us wants to be judged. Particularly if it's in the negative. The reframing that needs to be done is to let them know that it is not about judgment but rather about empowerment. It's not about focusing on what you haven't done well, but what you have done well and can do even better. Maybe it's something to be excited about as opposed to something to be feared.

Reframing is a technique that I have used to settle employment lawsuits. Instead of focusing on the litigation process as an adversarial one, I try to focus on it as a learning experience between two groups of well-intended people who for some reason or another failed to communicate along the way. Nobody is the victim and nobody is the villain. By reframing the matter in this position you are much more likely to obtain an early settlement to even the most intense claims.

One reason that Service Master is the largest janitorial service in the country is because it's owner William Pollard reframed the role of the minimum wage worker. While it may be a minimum wage job, Pollard reframed it. You are not simply vacuuming hallways and emptying trashcans, you are rendering a service with a social and spiritual purpose. It's not is job, it's a calling. Another classic example is embodied in the story "Fish" about the Seattle-based fish company that focuses on making work fun. For their employees it's not about doing a job, it's about having fun. What reframing can you do about your career and your company?

One of my favorite reframes has to do with how we approach problems. Unfortunately, many of us focus on determining what is the problem in a particular set of circumstances and trying to find the solution to that problem. The reframe is to view the problem as a challenge and to determine what opportunities can come out of that challenge. This is an empowering venture not a disabling one.

Any of you who have heard me speak know that one of my complaints with the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act is the very use of the word "Disability." All of us have known "disabled people" in our lives. Those that have been successful despite their disability have not viewed them as such but rather as challenges in life to overcome. Because we get what we focus on, I think our country would have been better served had we reframed it the Americans with Challenges Act.

Asking the Right Questions

One of my favorite teachers, Tony Robbins, states that the questions that we ask ourselves determine the quality of life we have. Similar to the concept of reframing, this is a very powerful form of persuasion. For example, when people come to me and want to tell me how terrible their work experience has been and want to focus on laying blame

on their employer, I will ask them a simple question like, “If you knew your employer didn’t care about you, how come you didn’t quit your job a long time ago?” Simply by asking this question you’ve reframed the entire discussion. You can help the employee to realize that they have a responsibility for their circumstances too. You can help them realize that in a business environment where there is only 4% unemployment, it is they who can call the shots. The point is, the questions that we ask ourselves will guide our thinking.

Personally, if I have gone through a particularly challenging set of circumstances, I won’t ask the question, “Why me?”. Instead, I will say something to myself to the effect of, “That sure was interesting, what can I learn from this experience? Where did I fail to take responsibility? What do I have to do to make sure that I never find myself in these circumstances again? What strategy or tool can I develop to help me in light of this learning lesson?” One of the most powerful questions you can ask yourself and those around you is the “what if” question.

The power of questions is never more apparent than in the litigation setting. Attorneys who know this point of influence can get witnesses to say all sorts of things before they even realize what they’ve just said. As we learned in trial advocacy training, when you ask the right series of questions, you can ask one final question, which gets you the results you are after, regardless of how it is answered.

A case on point. Lets pretend an employee is coming in consistently late. Instead of attacking them with “you this” and “you that” type statements, perhaps it may be better to ask a series of questions such as, “Would you agree with me that this company and all of it’s employees are dependant on each other? Would you agree with me that an employee can’t be of value to the company unless they are at work? Would you agree with me that it is reasonable for a company to expect its employees to show up on time? Would you agree with me that we have a challenge that needs to be addressed and an opportunity for both of us if this challenge is meet?” This type of questioning process creates a safe place for the employee to acknowledge the impact of their tardiness while at the same time empowering them towards change. The “you this” “you that” is fear based and is guaranteed to motivate the employee towards fight or flight.

The other way to set up questions is so that you provide two choices, only one of which would be acceptable. For example, “Would you like to work with me to figure out a way for you to show up on time or would you rather me start the process of placing disciplinary notices in your personnel file?” “Would you like to work on the changes that need to be made to our business operations or would you rather keep things the way they are which will guarantee our demise?”

As pointed out by the authors the questions we ask will alter the other person’s state. For example, instead of asking the open ended question, “How are things going?” which may invite a negative response the better question to ask might be, “What’s the most exciting thing going on in your life right now?” This reframes the inquiry so that

only the positive can be focused on. An especially important question during stressful times.

One place where I think the art of questioning needs significant improvement is in the employee survey process. For example instead of asking an employee a question of, “How do you feel about your job on a scale of one to five?” the better question might be “What could be done to make your job an even more rewarding experience?” Regards the former question, while we may think that we are getting valuable information, the reality is that we are not. The numerical response is nothing more than information clouded with an undecipherable filter. The later question allows people to focus on the opportunities that lie ahead of them and frames the situation as a welcomed challenge as opposed to a potential problem.

I have often had to do this with clients who have come to me in a very depressed mood because of circumstances either at home or at work. While I certainly want to acknowledge their feelings, I really don’t want them to dwell on them at length. Instead I try to reframe their perspective to point out what is going right for them. That they have their health, that they have their family, and so on. Reframing helps us to keep things in perspective. I recently had a woman who called me to tell me about inappropriate conduct going on in her workplace. Apparently she complained about it, felt she was retaliated against and wanted to know what her employment rights were. What I suggested to her was that 1) yes, there are bad bosses out there 2) you have the choice not to work for one 3) if you feel the right thing to do is to “blow the whistle” to an agency, then go ahead and do it, and 4) even though you may have legal rights as a “whistleblower”, focusing on how you’ve been victimized and can triumph over the villainous employer might just not be in your best interest. I asked her to consider just how bad the conduct really is. I offered to take her for a drive through the worst neighborhood in San Diego and asked her how it stacked up in comparison. Perhaps if she wanted to spend her time conquering evil, there was plenty of community-based opportunity to do that. Better than bringing drama into her work life. Finally, I remind her that there are plenty of employers who really do care. That in an era of 4% unemployment her highest and best use would be to add value as opposed to slinging mud in the courtroom. I don’t know what she’ll end up doing but do know that what I shared with her will cause her to reframe her possibilities.

The Power of Repetition

As any advertiser will tell you, a message needs to be repeated in order to be heard. Especially if you want it to be embedded in the unconscious. We are bombarded with so much information today that it is hard to sort through all of it. You are literally competing with thousands of other messages bombarding your workforce every day. That’s why it is important to reinforce your culture and values on an ongoing basis. Efforts change and other corporate objectives need to be continually reinforced. Slogans, stories, and other emotionally based communications can help with this process.

Focus on the Benefits, Not the Features

As any seasoned sales professional will tell you people buy on emotions, not on facts. What is the emotional benefit of what you are selling? Whether it's buying into a training program or relocation to a new job opportunity, people want to feel good about the decisions they make. What are the emotional needs of the workforce? Security? Opportunity? Acknowledgment? All of these and more. For example, money has an incredible emotional attachment to it. It's not so much the dollars, but what they represent. Money represents acknowledgement, prestige, fun and security. How can those very same emotional needs be met in other ways?

The Language of Influence

In the booklet that comes with the program the authors supplied examples of phrases you can use to influence others. I will provide examples of how these might apply in the workplace.

Negation (i.e., don't think of blue elephants) – “I don't want you to focus on how important this job is for your family.”

Tag Questions – (statements disguised as questions) – “Everybody knows we need to change, isn't that true?”

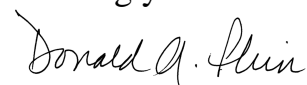
Mind Reading (assuming another's internal emotions) – “You must feel very excited about your promotion!”

Pre-suppositions (imbedded assumptions) – “Before you decide to accept this position...” “Lucky for you...”

Conclusion

This was a great audiotape program. The authors conclude by suggesting we write down 20 statements we can use to advance our careers, etc. I've taken time to write my 20. It's a powerful exercise. I carry them on a piece of paper folded in my pocket. I have five different statements under four different category headings. I know you'll greatly benefit by doing it too! The *Power of Influence* can be purchased by calling Nightingdale Conant at (800) 525-9000. Order a copy for yourself and share it with your management team. Have everyone do their 20 statements and then compare notes.

Wishing you never ending success,



Donald A. Phin, Esq.