

Top 7 sins that limit influence

1. Knowing it all already

Not being open to new ideas, or others perspectives. Not being patient with people as they come on the journey to catch up with your thinking.

2. Brute force approach

Letting frustration, anger or other emotions overcome your ability to think clearly and respond well. Just pushing through the opposition. Keep the 'big push' to be used as a last resort when all other tactics have failed.

3. Speaking too much

Not listening or asking enough questions. Too much 'push communication' (speaking too much) shuts down the dialogue and stakeholders switch off.

4. Over-committing

Immediately saying yes before considering existing workload and competing demands. Taking too much on, then having to apologise or just not follow through.

5. Pushing the agenda at the wrong time

A singular focus on the process, the deadline, the task at hand, without regard for where the other people are at. If they're distracted, you may need to indulge the 'detour' so that it can be cleared and progress can resume. Stakeholders who feel heard and understood will be far more open to listening to your arguments. Some detours will turn out to be crucial foundational discussions, so don't dismiss them too soon.

6. Too worried about what's going on outside the conversation

You might be focused on your todo list, or something that happened earlier that day. If you're distracted you won't be effective in the meeting.

7. Delivering too much information too early

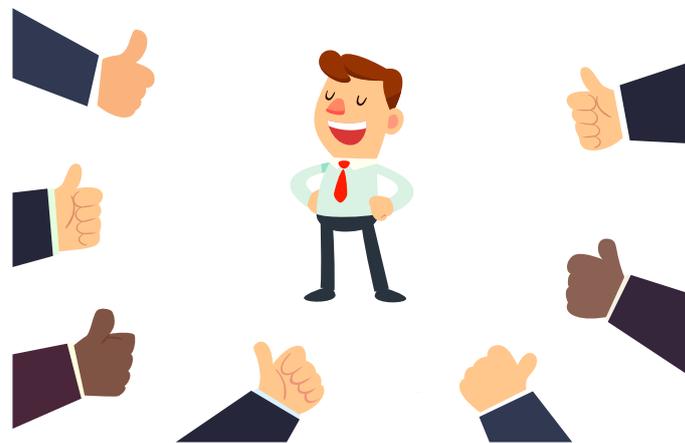
Different stakeholders need different levels of detail at different times. Laying out the details of your position too early can have disastrous effects. It's easy for people to shoot holes in it before it's fully-formed and then permanently disregard it as an option. Focus more on exploring topics together, facilitating a discussion, starting with high level ideas and working into more detail over time. By the end of the conversation you won't have to then 'bring them on the journey' because they were there on the journey with you from the start.



Top 7 tactics for expanding your influence

1. Use active listening

Ask questions, help them explore, paraphrase their main points back to them. When you agree with them, let them know, as you confirm their early beliefs you will be seen as an authority. Make sure stakeholders feel heard and—even better—understood, by tentatively paraphrasing what they're telling you "it sounds like you're facing x and y, is that right?"



2. Be present

Remember your '4 Breaths' and your intentions for the meeting. Allow other thoughts and distractions to take a back seat and really listen to what's being said. Work out what their intentions are for the meeting and the sub-text underneath (hopes, fears, needs and expectations).

3. Say 'yes' to emotions

Then respond from a calmer place. When frustration, embarrassment or other unwanted emotions strike, take a moment to say to yourself "yes I'm frustrated", then remember to deep breath through the conversation. Your calm response will be much more effective than your emotionally charged response would have been.

4. What's useful right now?

Continually tracking during conversations and asking yourself: Is it time to speak or listen? Push for a decision or allow diverse perspectives? Is now the time to tell them how it is? Or ask them a critical question that helps them reconsider their own position? By being open to different ways to get to the same outcome we can find better ways to get to what's correct while maintaining and even building the relationship.

5. Build rapport first

Use eye contact, small talk and friendly facial and body language to make a good connection initially. If this is a newer relationship, ask them about their goals and make your intentions clear. You will gain large amounts of trust when they know what you're trying to achieve and how that aligns with their goals.

6. Be vulnerable

It's ok not to have all the answers right away. It's ok to ask questions. Sometimes we feel that if we ask questions we will look weak. In reality the opposite is true. Asking questions show strength that you're willing to be vulnerable and confidence and security in what you do know.

7. Summarise your recommendations

Try to summarise your communication into 3-4 bullets. Especially for verbal communication or presentations. In a written form try to keep it to 7 max. After that, break the ideas into groups, or nest them inside each other and really challenge yourself to only communicate what the stakeholder needs to know now. If you don't know what they need to know, ask them! And have the detail ready should they then need it. In a written form, appendices are great for having the detail ready for those who need it.