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Each month, this newsletter features a topic related to managing change and improving our work environments. If there are topics you would like to see covered or feedback you have about this newsletter, please submit your ideas and feedback to the following link: <http://www.anneoffner.com/contact.htm>

CHANGING MINDS – ONE STEP AT A TIME

Influencing others is a skill that many of us find challenging. Managers who have developed their ability to influence find it easier to motivate employees and convince their superiors that their ideas have merit. Employees who use their influence skills are able to direct groups of people to meet objectives without any real organizational power to reward those whom they influence.

The ability to influence comes in handy when we know we have an idea or perspective that has merit. In some cases we may need to demonstrate that a particular product or service will benefit a customer or an idea will reduce delivery time or enhance production.

Howard Gardner's book, *Changing Minds*,ⁱ provides an interesting discussion and some guidelines that we can use when faced with this opportunity to influence. According to Gardner, there are seven factors, or levers, we can use when helping someone to consider a change of mind.

1. Appeal to Reason. Use a well-conceived rational approach that incorporates analogies, logic, models or taxonomies to articulate your idea or concept.
2. Do your Research. Collect data or use a more informal review of relevant facts and knowledge that will help your audience

better understand the concept you are bringing to them.

3. Resonate with the audience. The concept must make sense to the individual or group in question. For some, this will come strictly from the reason and research. For others an internal, intuitive sense of whether the argument seems to make sense will guide them. The point is to know how your audience will begin to consider the credibility of what you're saying to them.
4. Gardner also suggests using what he calls Representational Re-descriptions. This means that using various formats to represent an argument or new way of looking at a problem will help reinforce your idea or argument. Use graphs, charts, numbers, reports, or written descriptions.
5. The availability and perceived importance of certain Resources and Rewards will also be important when attempting to change a person's mind. This can act as a positive reinforcement if it aligns well with the previous four factors. It can help to tip the balance toward changing someone's mind. For example, if the person likes your argument and it makes sense to them *and* there is money in the budget, then the change of mind will be more likely.
6. It's also important to consider the context, what Gardner calls Real World Events, when approaching someone to change his or her mind. We don't get to influence others in a vacuum and therefore need to be sensitive to timing and other factors impacting our audience. For example, convincing politicians to develop a new nuclear power plant following 9-11 would likely be called poor timing. However,

firms that provide security technology were well-positioned to influence their customers about protecting corporate assets following 9-11.

7. Ultimately, Resistances become a critical lever in the mind change process. Gardner's book discusses the fact that we develop ways of thinking at a young age that can show up as resistance in our adulthood. What happens is we develop "contents of mind" - ideas, stories, concepts, theories or skills - that reinforce our own ways of perceiving the world. Mind change can occur when we understand these contents of mind and replace them with new content. For example, when we are young we might develop the belief that: "if two events occur in close proximity, the first causes the second". This might play out at work something like this:

"Senior management just announced a reorganization and I heard that Bob lost his job last week, so I guess we're in for some major layoffs."

To be successful in changing the speaker's mind we need to replace the theory with a new way of thinking. For example, a new way of understanding the reorganization might be:

"Bob retired last week after 30 years of service. The reorganization is going to prepare the company to take on the \$20 million gained from the new contract signed last week. We need everyone's expertise, but will be reorganizing to prepare for that."

Gardner's book gives us tools to use when faced with the challenges related to influencing others. As always, it's a good idea to know which battles to fight, so I'll leave you with this quote from his book:

"The trick...is to accept the changes that will happen anyway, acknowledge that certain other changes may be impossible, and concentrate one's efforts on those changes of mind that are important, won't occur naturally, but can be achieved with sufficient effort and motivation."



INFLUENCE AND OD

Throughout my career I've had the opportunity to work with a variety of business line managers and executives. In general, I've found the most effective method of building a credible relationship with these folks has been to demonstrate genuine, discernible value. Most Organization Development (OD) groups I've worked with have found that customers want to work with them most when the OD Department's value proposition is clear.

This seems like a simple concept - yet in recent conversations with clients and colleagues, I've rediscovered this challenge as perhaps a fact of life for service providers. We never get to take a break from demonstrating value, or I'd say, from showing value and *influencing others!*

According to Alan Weiss, value is demonstrated in the improvement that the client experiences relative to the achievement of the stated objectives.ⁱⁱ It can be shown through objective measures such as "20% reduction in turnover", "10% reduction in customer call wait," or "25% increase in customer satisfaction" or in more intangible ways like "enhanced team interactions" or "improved communication".

OD Departments that focus on improving the organizations' ability to assess and solve problems can influence their customers to understand the value provided. Value can be found in outcomes related to services such as teaching a client a new skill or problem solving process, enabling a team to work together effectively, providing guidance in selecting or promoting leaders, or delivering services to a customer which increase his or her knowledge and competence within the organization.

Using Gardner's model, OD practitioners can better influence their customers. Ensuring they have a well-developed rationale for their services is a good start. An OD Department

should exist to support the goals of the organization. A well-developed strategy can provide the rationale for the department's services. It's also important to articulate the strategy and rationale clearly using research and reasoning that will resonate with internal customers and demonstrate potential value. Make sure your research and research is stated in your customer's vernacular. Using a format that will engage customers helps to translate research and better resonate with your audience. For example, a customer who sees Training or Survey Feedback as the primary service of an OD Department might need data and a rational argument that other interventions can help them develop their employees or solve problems that are hindering departmental productivity. A simple pen and piece of paper is one tool many OD professionals use to convey their ideas to their customers. If you draw out your concept and let your customer react and refine your ideas you've begun to engage them in a new way of looking at your value proposition.

Be patient. Build your relationship with your customers. As you talk with them about an idea, concept or program, begin to identify the rewards or benefits for the client. Discuss budget concerns and understand what is most important to the client or client group. Also, be sensitive to the other issues distracting your customer or as Gardner describes, the "real world events" that might be legitimate reasons for delaying a consulting engagement. Finally, as you get to know your customer, you will better understand his or her resistances and therefore learn how to help re-shape the "old thinking" into an OD intervention that will bring value to your customer and the organization.



A FEW MORE THOUGHTS...

While Gardner's model is a helpful guide for the influence process, the following are a few

thoughts that might also help position an OD department to effectively influence their customers.

1. Ensure your OD Department is viewed as a generalist consulting group. Being perceived by specialty can be limiting. For example, if you are seen as "training providers", "meeting facilitators", or "survey gurus" you will find it more difficult to demonstrate value because your customers will want resources dedicated to a limited specialty area.
2. Put your customer's success ahead of your own career. OD practitioners can find themselves in powerful positions – assisting leaders to identify successors, consulting on organizational redesign, coaching top executives, etc. If you provide genuine, discernable value to your customers, your career will also benefit.
3. Learn to influence more than one "boss". Most OD departments have multiple customers as well as a department head who must meet the needs of his or her functional unit (usually Human Resources). Influencing these diverse constituents requires an unwavering focus on your value proposition. To handle this issue, some organizations embed OD staff in the business lines to demonstrate value to their customers and keep other OD staff in HR to lead corporate-wide initiatives.
4. Develop and practice strong consulting skills.ⁱⁱⁱ As a guideline, good consultants generally display skills such as^{iv}:
 - ✓ Conceptual and analytical ability
 - ✓ Self-awareness and knowledge
 - ✓ Deal well with ambiguity and change
 - ✓ Good interpersonal skills that allow them to create and maintain collaborative, effective relationships.
 - ✓ Knowledge and skills to make an organizational diagnosis, problem solve, design and execute an intervention.
 - ✓ General knowledge of OD theory and the accompanying fundamentals of planned change and action research.

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ⁱ Howard Gardner (2004). *Changing Minds: The Art and Science of Changing our Own and Other People's Minds*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press, p. 15.

ⁱⁱ Alan Weiss (2004). *Getting Started as a Consultant*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc., p. 8.

ⁱⁱⁱ For an excellent discussion of consulting approaches see Mahan Khalsa (1999) *Let's Get Real or Let's Not Play*. Franklin Covey Company.

^{iv}Cummings and Worley (1993). *Organization Development and Change*. Minneapolis: West Publishing Company, p. 1.