



Creating Your Own Influence and Using it Effectively

September, 2002

Lucy Grant is a parent who wants to connect other parents to each other for mutual support. As a parent who is not involved in making policy decisions, she has no official way to get the idea considered and implemented. How should she proceed?

Mary Lee is the Chair of her Interagency Early Intervention Committee (IEIC). She works closely with the Early Intervention team, and does not have confidence in the work that Sue, a Service Coordinator, does. In spite of several coaching efforts, Mary sees no changes in her approaches. She had brought her concerns to the administrator at her fiscal host, and has received no response from him. Mary is extremely frustrated, because she is sure that Sue's approaches will only lead to trouble. What can Mary do?

Theresa McKnight is the Family Support Contact for their IEIC. She facilitates their family support subcommittee and together, they have developed great ideas and approaches they want to try throughout the year. She is repeatedly running into conflicts with Phil Moses, the supervisor of financial services from their fiscal host. Meeting the requirements of the fiscal host is becoming a horrendous burden. How can Theresa resolve these issues?

What's needed to make a positive outcome from these stories?

All these people have important work to do. They want results, or the freedom to move forward in the most productive way, but they are not authorized to give orders to the peers or supervisors whose cooperation they need. They must find a way to overcome whatever reasons these associates—administrators and peers—have for not going along and persuade them to respond. Somehow they have to gain the influence to make things happen.

Effective influence begins with the way you **THINK** about those you want to influence. You have already won half the battle when you can see each person, no matter how stubborn or prickly he or she seems to be, as a potential **PARTNER**. You increase the number of your potential allies by identifying who has a stake in your interest and working at building mutual trust.

It is the process of mutual negotiation that governs influence. Making **EXCHANGES** is the way to gain **INFLUENCE**; and that process leads to **COOPERATION** rather than retaliation or refusal to engage. People cooperate because they see something of value that they will gain in return.

The valuable item may be as concrete as a budget transfer, as intangible as a heartfelt "thank you" or as self-generated by the recipient as a warm glow from believing that cooperating was the right thing to do. But, whenever associates help one another, some kind of exchange always takes place.

While it is undoubtedly true that not everyone on your team is as competent as you would expect your partners to be, nor as dedicated to enhancing family support efforts, assuming that they **ARE** is

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the best way to increase the likelihood that they **WILL BE**.

The operating rules for treating those you wish to influence, whether peers or superiors, as if they are potential partners are easy to specify but tough to carry out. Strive for:

- **MUTUAL RESPECT.** Assume they are competent and smart.
- **OPENNESS.** Talk straight to them. It isn't possible for any one person to know everything, so give them the information they need to know to help you better.
- **TRUST.** Assume that no one will take any action that is purposely intended to hurt another, so hold back no information that the other could use, even if it doesn't help your immediate position.
- **MUTUAL BENEFIT.** Plan every effort so that everyone wins.

How do you establish respect?

Someone has to take the first risks, since it is almost impossible to prove ahead of time that a potential partner will act honorably. If each partner waits for the other to prove his or her trustworthiness, a standoff results. When you are suspicious of the partner's intentions, display a bit more openness and trust than the other shows. This will help you pull the partner along without being too threatening or taking inordinate risks.

It is only possible to achieve outstanding results when all partners feel a sense of responsibility for success. Use the following steps to begin the process.

1. **Assume the other person is a potential partner.** When you need something from someone who has no formal obligation to cooperate, begin by assuming that the person is a potential ally. Assuming the other person will be an adversary rather than a partner prevents accurate understanding and leads to misperceptions, stereotypes, and miscommunication.
2. **Clarify your goals and priorities.** You need to identify what is most important to you. Be clear about just what you require, your priorities, what you are willing to trade off in order to get the minimum you need and whether you want a particular form of cooperation on a specific item or would settle for a better relationship in the future.
3. **Identify the partner's world:** What are their goals, concerns and needs? Put yourself in their shoes. Make every effort to establish what is important to the potential partner so that you can determine in advance something he or she wants.
4. **Assess your resources relative to the ally's wants.** Know what resources you have access to. Because many people underestimate the resources they can muster, they jump to the conclusion that they have nothing to offer. But a careful look at the many things you can do without a budget or formal permission can reveal potential bargaining chips.

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5. **Analyze your relationship with your partner.** Do you have a prior relationship, and is it positive or negative? You will need to pay attention to building the requisite trust and credibility.
6. **Make exchanges.** Offer what you **HAVE** in return for what you **WANT**. Revisit your priorities and determine what you have to trade.

To avoid manipulation, deceit, and cynicism and to enhance the interdependent work of parents and professionals, each partner must strive for authenticity. Authenticity works—it gets issues on the table and builds trust. You will achieve powerful results when you look out for the interests of others with whom you work and whose cooperation you need. Pay attention to their needs, give back something valuable for whatever you get and you will be more effective in achieving results.

Resources:

Cohen, A., Bradford, D., (1991) *Influence Without Authority* New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.

Fisher, R., Ury, W., (1987) *Getting to Yes - Negotiating Agreement without Giving In* New York: Penguin Books

Now, to get back to those scenarios.....

Start with Lucy and identify what might be some next steps to try. Then work through the same process for Mary and Theresa and discuss it with your team. Practice this approach and make it a way of working through your own issues and problems.

1. Who are some potential partners? Whose support and encouragement do you need?
2. What do you ultimately want to happen? Identify your goals and priorities. What are you willing to exchange and what are you not willing to give up?
3. What does your partner need, i.e. issues, responsibilities and concerns? What is their history? Go beyond speculation and assumptions. Do your homework and find real information!
4. What resources (such as skills, connections, or information) do you have that may be of interest to your partner?

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5. What kind of relationship do you have with your partner? Do you have a positive or negative history? Establish a relationship, build on an existing relationship or turn around a negative relationship. Build an investment that is bigger than your own "agenda."
6. What are their priorities? What can you offer that would be valuable to your partner? Show him/her that you are a team player and not only a "one issue person." What trades can be made? What else can you offer him/her?

