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From the Editor

The Paradox of Effective Influence

by David C. Miller

Do you have trouble when it comes to persuading senior management on a strategic issue or some other important matter? Does your throat tighten up when you're in the process of making your case to your superiors or peers? Do you get butterflies when you're about to articulate your message? Do you dread having to make a strong business case (especially if it goes against the grain of the status quo)?

It's a common "disease" for executives to experience fear and reluctance when selling their point of view. Just like any entrepreneur or business owner, as a professional employed in a corporation, **you must sell yourself on daily basis in some form or fashion.**

The cure for this disease comes down to **two non-negotiable requirements for being influential and persuasive.** These two things almost seem to contradict each other, but my experience is that if either one is absent, you're missing out on a lot of success that you deserve!

Note: In the balance of this article, "prospect" means "anyone you're trying to influence" (customer, management, subordinates, etc). "Product" means anything you're trying to sell, such as a service, idea, solution, strategy or a real product.

Requirement #1: Absolute Conviction about the Value You're Providing

You must be absolutely convinced that what you're offering to your prospect is gold! This sounds so obvious and simplistic, yet it's a common ailment for professionals to be filled with doubt about themselves and what they're selling. That feeling of doubt is transferred to the prospect—if you're not convinced this is great, why should your prospect?

"Absolute conviction" does not mean that you're "drinking the Kool-Aid" and deluding yourself into thinking that **everyone** needs what you're selling. **It does mean** that you're 100 percent certain that you have something of tremendous value **for the right person or organization.** In other words, you have something that genuinely meets a clearly defined need and you're not apologetic about



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making a case for this solution if it will benefit your organization.

Let's look at an example of someone who depends on selling services to make a living. A consultant named Julie was having a lot of trouble when it came to inviting prospects to move ahead with the sale. When we examined her underlying beliefs, we discovered that Julie had reservations that what she was offering had real value.

Maybe you can identify with Julie—what do you do when you're in this place? Take inventory. **Honestly assess the value your product brings to the prospect.** Write down a comprehensive list. Because we're so close to what we offer, we tend to take it for granted. Get reacquainted with why you started selling this in the first place, and build conviction.

If you have a lot of trouble zeroing in on this, then maybe it's time to figure out how you can significantly increase the value of what you offer. Once you can genuinely get to the place where you're **absolutely convinced that you're bring solutions that offer far more value than what you're being paid** (i.e., that your prospect will receive a substantial return on investment), you will convey your message in a way that your prospect will feel convinced too.

Requirement #2: Complete Detachment from The Results

You must come from a place where you're not personally invested in the outcome. You've completely explored your prospect's needs and presented your solution. The rest of the "result" rests in their hands. **You must come from a place where you're okay with whatever decision they make.**

This sounds contradictory to Requirement #1, in that if I believe wholeheartedly that I have a great solution for the prospect, how can I be detached from the result?

The key here is to remember to "keep it about them." For example, Julie observed that when it came time to making her invitation, **she felt like she was asking the prospect to do her a favor!** She came from a place where she really needed the sale. It became more about her than the prospect. As a result, she found that she was actually repelling sales on a subconscious level!

The ironic thing is that the more detached you are about convincing others, the more convincing you'll be.

The beauty of incorporating both of these requirements into your psyche is that you'll find that **you're having more fun** selling your ideas and bringing value to your organization. What a concept! And in the course of having more fun, you will experience more success! □

Note: This is my last issue as editor of The Stepping Stone. I will be handing the reigns over to the very capable and talented John Hadley. It has been a privilege serving you as editor. Although my role is changing, I will continue to contribute articles to this great newsletter.

All the best,

David C. Miller, FSA

