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Pride-Based Leadership Series – Part III Mastering Influence: Identifying the Five Levels of Tension

by David C. Miller

Editor's Note: *You can catch up on Parts I and II of this series in the April and July, 2009 issues of The Stepping Stone (available online at <http://soa.org/library/newsletters/stepping-stone/2009/April/stp-2009-iss34.pdf> and <http://soa.org/library/newsletters/stepping-stone/2009/July/stp-2009-iss35.pdf>).*

MANAGING PRODUCTIVE TENSION

Now that we understand the various levels of tension covered in Part II of this series, let's turn to the topic of how to use this information to be more influential. As we've seen, the level of tension can be visually represented on Napier's ChangeGrid. In essence, we need to know how we can move a prospect (i.e., 'prospect' here can mean 'prospect', 'direct report', 'colleague', 'boss' or even 'yourself') from wherever they are on the ChangeGrid to a more ideal location. (See grid on page 5.)

Where is the ideal location on the grid? It depends on the situation. For our purposes here, we can safely eliminate Stress and Apathy as desirable locations,

only because they are far too unproductive. Stress has way too much tension and Apathy has way too little.

The remaining three are useful in their own way:

- POWER-STRESS prompts someone to take immediate action.
- POWER encourages someone to consider their options, look for more alternatives and make decisions.
- POWER-APATHY triggers someone into delegating and deferring to your judgment.

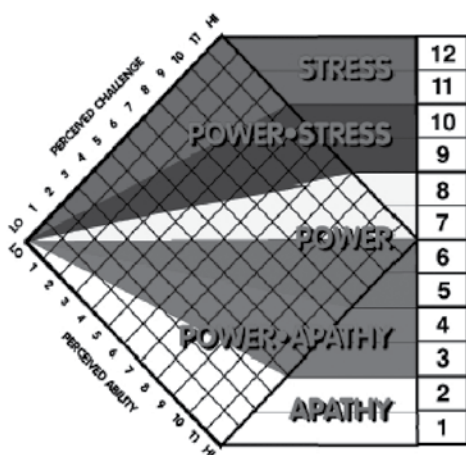
Moving someone around the ChangeGrid requires three elements:

1. Knowing where the person is on the ChangeGrid (i.e., their level of tension),
2. Knowing where you want them to be at the end of your interaction, and
3. Having the skill necessary to manage tension in the direction desired.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 5



The ChangeGrid



Before this starts sounding too manipulative, understand that we don't need to create the tension necessary to influence someone. The fact is that all the tension necessary to influence someone to act is in their situation—and if it isn't naturally there, it will be extremely difficult to get them to buy in to your idea.

Our job is to facilitate the process of helping our prospect first see his or her situation for what it IS and what it COULD BE, then help them identify and eliminate the barriers that are in their way.

Next we're going to look at two sets of ChangeGrid Maneuvers—DownGrid maneuvers and UpGrid maneuvers. DownGrid maneuvers reduce tension, while UpGrid maneuvers increase it. Which set of maneuvers you use depends on where someone's tension is at the beginning of the conversation and where you need to move them to by the end of it.

DOWNGRID MANEUVERS

There are four DownGrid maneuvers. Each one can be used independently of the other or can be combined. For maximum tension reduction, Napier states that these four maneuvers should be performed as steps of a process in the order given.

First: Normalize what your prospect is experiencing. What happens to your level of tension when you realize a situation is far more common than you imagined? Tension goes down. Let your prospect know that they're not the first to experience this problem and that they're not facing it alone.

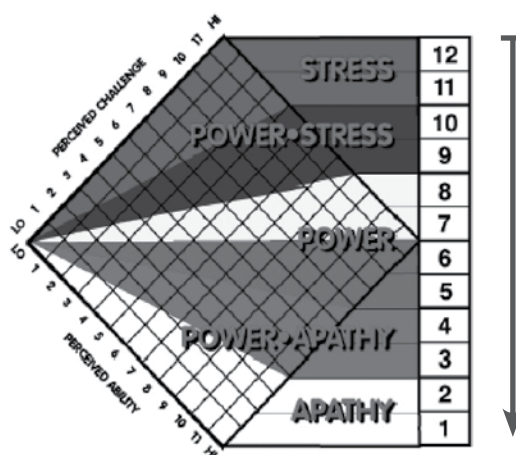
Second: Simplify what your prospect must do. Oftentimes, a good deal of the tension a prospect is experiencing results from looking at their situation in too complex a fashion. As actuaries, we can understand the big picture and break it down. We can offer analysis that brings insight and offers step-by-step solutions. Providing this guidance will enhance our prospect's sense of control.

Third: Restore resources your prospect has forgotten. When tension gets too high—when a prospect is in Stress—they may temporarily lose sight of the resources they have. They forget that they know what they know—that they can do what they can do—and that they've done what they've done. To reduce tension, remind the prospect of the knowledge, skills and experience they already possess.

Fourth: Add resources your prospect does not have. There are also times when a prospect simply doesn't have the resources they need—they're

Oftentimes, a good deal of the tension a prospect is experiencing results from looking at their situation in too complex a fashion.

The ChangeGrid



Downgrid Maneuvers

- Normalize
- Simplify
- Restore resources
- Add resources

missing the knowledge, skill or experience the situation at hand requires. In order to reduce their tension, teach the prospect something they didn't already know—help them develop a skill they didn't already have—guide them through an experience they've never had before. Provide a new report that gives them the information they need to lead.

UPGRID MANEUVERS

UpGrid maneuvers are used to raise tension. Through the UpGrid maneuvers, you create awareness, urgency—and, ultimately, action!

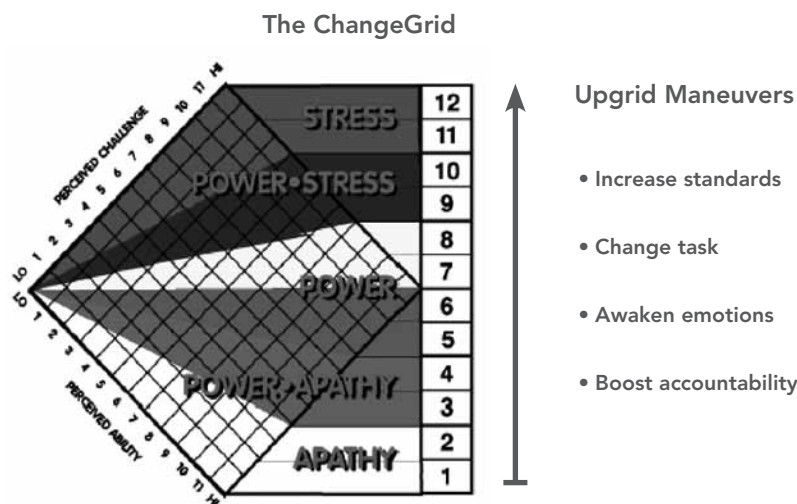
A trip UpGrid is much more difficult to navigate than a trip DownGrid—it's against the natural flow of things. Unfortunately, in influence, it's also the direction you'll need to move your prospects far more often than not.

There are four UpGrid maneuvers, each of which can stand alone or be combined for a better result.

First: Increase Standards. A prospect who's too far DownGrid feels quite content with their situation exactly as it is. To move them UpGrid, help them to establish a higher standard for themselves or the organization—and set goals for reaching those new standards.

Second: Change Task. The prospect that's too far DownGrid has probably been doing things the way they're doing them for a very long time—and may very well be doing things the right way. If that's what the truth is, it's probably futile to attempt to convince them otherwise. You're much better off changing the task at hand to a different area of your prospect's situation where you might have more value to them.

Third: Awaken Emotions. A very effective way to increase productive tension is to help the prospect become more emotionally involved in their situation. By awakening emotions that are further UpGrid than your prospect is currently experiencing, you can increase their level of productive tension. For example, if your prospect is currently in APATHY and you awaken the emotion of pride, their level of productive tension will increase to POWER—and if you awaken the emotions of anger, grief, fear or shame, productive tension will increase even further, perhaps all the way to STRESS. It is CRITICAL that you awaken these emotions through the use of questions, NOT statements or your prospect may anchor those emotions to YOU instead of their situation.



Fourth: Boost Accountability. While this maneuver is most commonly applied in management situations, there are times when you can hold your prospect accountable to a deadline or an expectation you have of them. For example, if you need a particular piece of information in order to determine the best option for your prospect, you can “contract” with them to do their part in order to earn your efforts in return.

KEY CONCEPTS TO APPLYING TENSION MANAGEMENT

Napier’s MasterStream method outlines detailed protocol that influencers can follow to facilitate the proper flow of tension throughout an influential conversation. While it’s outside the scope of this article to cover the MasterStream method in detail, here are a few general guidelines to consider:

- 1. It all begins with rapport.** As we covered previously in this article, you must always establish and maintain rapport with your prospect.
- 2. In order to sell your ideas to your prospect, you must get the prospect to the *Threshold of Activation*.** On the ChangeGrid the Threshold of Activation is located at the highest point of Power-Stress, without going into Stress. In most cases, this will involve using UpGrid maneuvers. The Influential Conversation Model contains many valuable questions that will raise your prospect’s tension. If your prospect says, “They want to think about it and get back to you,” then you know they’re in Power and you need to raise their tension more.
- 3. Once your prospect has accepted your recommendation, you want to perform DownGrid maneuvers to move them to the *Threshold of Delegation*.** This is located at the lowest point of Power-Apathy, without going into Apathy. Why do we want to do this? Now that the prospect has bought into our idea, we want them to delegate the implementation to us, defer to our judgment and move on to something else. If we leave them

up in Power-Stress, they may react to a comment or idea from a colleague and revisit the decision. Bring them down to Power-Apathy by letting them know how you will execute the plan (i.e., next steps).

The key thing to remember about Tension management is that:

People pay attention to where they find their tension.

If you want to be influential, you must pay attention to where your prospect’s tension is and respond accordingly.

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