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Building Influence

By John West Hadley

I've spoken to many groups about how to have truly influential conversations. The first question I've asked each group is: "What should be your goal for that conversation?"

The first instinct of many is something along the lines of: "To influence the other party toward my goal."

Here's my definition: "To help the other person succeed by producing a solution that best meets their needs."

The key to influence is that you need to be focused on helping the other party achieve their goals and solve their problems.

Yes, I'm hoping to also achieve my goal, but to do that I first have to build a relationship, and that comes from exploring what's important to the other person. Think of it from this perspective: Until we have a true relationship that engages me, how invested will I be in helping you achieve your goals?

Time and time again, I've seen how misconceptions about this hold people back in their careers and in attempts to effectively utilize their networks.

When you approach networking meetings in a very direct, straight-line approach toward your goal, you tend to weaken the connection and not get what you are seeking. This happens in so many ways. For those trying to network into a new job, it can lead you to set up the goals for the conversation the wrong way (e.g., to get introduced to someone who is hiring), ask for the wrong things (e.g., job leads), fail to lay a proper basis for the other person to even be able to help you, ask for referrals too early in the conversation, or push too hard on your goals.

On the other hand, when you apply the principle of influence, and really focus on building a relationship, waiting for the point where the other party is truly engaged and starts volunteering ways to help, you end up achieving so much more.

Of course, that's just the tip of the iceberg. For example, if your purpose is to advance your career search, among other things, you need to:

- Avoid the "help me find a job" syndrome.



- Tell an interesting story about what you are seeking and why you'd be an outstanding candidate for that.
- Follow the other party's "tension" and watch for the clues that you still have their interest.
- Ask the right questions at the right times.
- Keep to your promises, those you made to set up the appointment, and any you make during the meeting.
- Show proper gratitude, even if you aren't sure you've gotten that much from the meeting.
- Send thank-you notes promptly.
- Let them know what comes of every suggestion or lead they give you.
- Stay in touch on a regular basis.

All of these help you build more and more influence in individual networking meetings and throughout your network.

Now, consider one of the situations where you would hope to have the MOST influence—a job interview. Here's the conundrum you are faced with:

- When will I have the least influence? When I'm talking about myself.
- When will I have the most influence? When I'm talking about your problems, and showing you how I've solved them (or situations like them) in the past.

The point of the HERO template is to give you a way to tell your story that's interesting, flows and shows the progression in your career, and that leaves the listener with a number of promising places to ask follow-up questions.

- Where does the typical interview start? With a question like, "Why don't you tell me a little bit about your background?"

So as quickly as I can, I need to shift the focus of the interview from me, to you and your problems. How do I do that? One way is a technique I call the HERO story.¹

- **H = Headline.** A one- or two-sentence statement of what you bring to the table at the highest level.
- **E = Experience.** You don't need to say a lot about your oldest jobs, and can combine multiple companies or jobs if they aren't all that critical to your story. Be sure to include statements of results achieved, instead of focusing on job titles or duties.
- **R = Rest of qualifications.** This is where those qualities you bring to the table can be brought into the story, if they aren't already covered in the "Experience" section.

- **O = Objective.** This should be focused on exactly the opportunity you are there to discuss, or on where you want to be headed longer term, and why this job appears to be a great step to get there.

The point of the **HERO template** is to give you a way to tell your story that's interesting, flows and shows the progression in your career, and that leaves the listener with a number of promising places to ask follow-up questions. Done well, it directly addresses problems that may be relevant to the interviewer's operation. The engagement helps with the crucial relationship building, and if you've guessed correctly (based on your prior research) about the sorts of problems that are relevant, you've started yourself well down the path to influence.

I welcome your thoughts on this—drop me a note at *John@JHACareers.com* with your comments. Let me know if this is a helpful perspective, and in a future issue I can dive deeper into building influence! ■



John Hadley is a career counselor working with job seekers frustrated by their search and professionals struggling to increase their visibility and influence. He can be reached at *John@JHACareers.com* or 908.725.2437. Find his free *Career Tips* newsletter and other resources at *www.JHACareers.com*.

ENDNOTE

- 1 You can find more details about this template at *www.JHACareers.com/HEROStory.htm*.