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Building More Influence

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I started part one of this series¹ by sharing my definition of the goal you should have for any conversation where you want to achieve true influence:

“To help the other person succeed by producing a solution that best meets their needs.”

In part one, I spoke primarily about how to apply this to networking, and then touched on interviews. In part two,² I did a deeper dive on applying the concepts to the interview process, and a widely overlooked aspect: managing the interviewer’s tension.

Now let’s take a look at common traps that get in the way of building true influence, whether for an interview, a critical career discussion or a consulting sales effort.

The first is what I like to call GUESSING. This is where you assume you already know the other person’s needs, and act accordingly.

This can cause you to look:

- Arrogant, because you are pushing your agenda without first deeply exploring my needs.
- Pushy, signaling that you are just here to sell.
- Naive, because you think you already understand my needs. How can you, if we’ve only touched on them at a surface level?
- Uninformed, because you don’t really know as much as you think you do.

If your guess is just a little bit off, you lose most of your credibility and will have to work hard to regain it.

Here’s a prime example:

A CFO was looking for a job and struggling to get past the initial screening interviews. When asked what sort of questions he was posing, his response was that he already understood their needs, so he didn’t need to ask any.

Really?

Even if you are a world-class expert in the subject area, unless you have a great deal of inside information, you can’t possibly know all the nuances of how they apply to my particular operation. And you can only GUESS at the specific obstacles I’m running into, and the underlying reasons why those manifest in my situation.

And here’s another reaction that interviewer might have:

“Are you really interested in this opportunity? After all, you’re not even bothering to ask me much about what you will be walking into.”

Some people are afraid not to GUESS because they fear that if they don’t immediately present their value proposition when they sense an opening, they will never get another one. This is a flawed assumption.

If you get into a deeper conversation about my needs, what causes them, how they manifest in the operation, what other areas are affected in what ways, and so on, I can guarantee that you will hold my interest. As you do that exploration, you will get so much more information that will help you see:

1. How to adjust the proposition you had in mind at the beginning to better fit my exact situation, and
2. Which examples of your own expertise and accomplishments will be closest to the mark when you do show me how you might address my specific issues.

A common theme to how to avoid this is to develop patience. And that patience tends to come from a reservoir of confidence ... confidence that you have something really valuable to offer the other party, that they will recognize that, and that you don’t have to jump on any opportunity to present it.

I’d be interested in your feedback on this series. Drop me a note at John@JHACareers.com. ■



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ENDNOTES

- 1 “Building Influence” in the November 2017 issue of *The Stepping Stone*, available at <http://thestepingstone.soa.org/?issueID=2&pageID=1>.
- 2 “Building Influence in Interviews” in the March 2018 issue of *The Stepping Stone*, available at <http://thestepingstone.soa.org/?issueID=3&pageID=1>.