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People Management
The Five Key Principles of Influence[1]—Part 4

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No matter what you do, you are in sales in some way. The word "sales" or "selling" brings up negative connotations for many people. It may be helpful to think of it as "influence." Whether you're a sales professional, coach, consultant or executive—there are key stakeholders in your world you need to influence.

To persuade successfully and non-manipulatively, it's important to understand **five key principles of influence.** We covered the first four principles in the November 2015, February 2016 and May 2016 issues of *The Stepping Stone*.[2]

Let's look at the fifth and final principle now.

PRINCIPLE #5
PEOPLE WILL MORE LIKELY BE INFLUENCED IF YOU HELP THEM GET TO THE HEART OF THE MATTER

Persuasion is the process of getting your client (or your boss, direct report, spouse, child, etc.) to clearly associate their most desired feelings to your product, service or idea. To do this we first need to know how to elicit these desired emotions from the person in conversation.

How do we do this? By using a skill called "chaining," with which you link a series of questions together in order to get to underlying motivations or beliefs. For any given topic, it usually takes at least three or four levels of questions to move from superficial, factual answers to more revealing and meaningful ones.

For example, in a business conversation, your first question may elicit an answer involving a *fact or technical issue*. The next question may uncover *underlying business issues*. Further questions will take you to the level of uncovering *consequences and implications of actions and decisions*. Ultimately, if you stay with it, your conversation will get to a level that reveals *personal beliefs*, *feelings*, *convictions and motivations*. Now you know what is really driving this person and what their needs are. Only now are you in the position to truly meet their needs.

EXAMPLE OF CHAINING

I was demonstrating this concept in one of my seminars recently. I asked a person to identify something he really wanted to have or change. He said he wanted to bring his golf score to the low 90s or better. Sounds like a pretty clear goal, doesn't it? And it would have been very easy for me to assume why he wanted this: Obviously he loves golf and wants to excel in it. If I had made this assumption, I would have missed out on some very important knowledge about this individual and subsequently focused our conversation around golf (which would have been the wrong issue).

Let me lay out the trail of his responses as I continued to probe deeper into his motivations using the skill of chaining:

- **Level One.** "I'd like to shoot in the low 90s in golf."
- **Level Two.** "I'd then be able to play with a whole new group of people at my club. At my current ability I wouldn't feel comfortable playing with these people because they are really good golfers."
- **Level Three.** "This would allow me to network with a whole new group of people. Many of these golfers are business professionals who hold a high ranking in their respective organizations. It would benefit me professionally to expand my network this way."
- **Level Four.** "This would dramatically increase my career options and connections in case my current job does not work out."
- **Level Five.** "I would feel like I have a great deal more job security. This would give me a true sense of freedom."

So this conversation was not about golf—it was about job security and feeling a sense of freedom! I could have totally missed this if I had stopped short and not really understood his true motivations. By the way, I elicited these responses by asking one question over and over again: "*What would having this allow you to do or be (and eventually feel)*?" Asking questions in this way also will help the client understand their true motivations. How valuable is that—helping someone clarify what they want and who they are?

The concept of chaining is very simple but not necessarily easy to apply. Most often we stop short, not because the other person is uncomfortable, but because we are. We ask questions on the periphery because that is where we feel safe. Even when we penetrate a couple of layers, we often stop just one question short of breaking through to deep and meaningful responses.

My advice to you is **don't bail out!** If you truly want to impact your "clients" and create more value in their lives or business, it's better to ask a few questions that penetrate to the core rather than many questions that stay on superficial levels. Don't stop at the first level—that is, unless you don't care about the results!

If you want to learn more about strategies, skills and models actuaries can utilize to become more influential, you may want to read *The Influential Actuary*. ■

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ENDNOTES

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[2] Available online at *www.SOA.org/ld.*