INFLUENCE

How Identifying With the Other Makes You a Better Influencer:

Needs, Fears, and Issues

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Thinking yourself into the mind of the person you hope to influence is key to choosing the right approach.

One of the most important skills for influencers is the ability to "think themselves into" the mind of the person they are hoping to influence. Identifying with the other is often key to developing a successful influence approach. Once you have clarified your objective, you can put yourself in the other's place and imagine how learning about it might affect them. Here are some questions that can help you in this process:

- What is currently "top of mind" for the other? What are they most concerned about right now?
- What are some areas of common interest (that will be obvious to the other) between you related to the action you'd like them to take?
- What possible conflicting interests might arise, given your objective? Even if you don't agree that the other might have something to lose by taking the action you would like them to take, what might the other fear losing?
- What "felt needs" (i.e., needs that he or she experiences) does the other have that might drive their decision-making about this?
- What issues or concerns might arise from these needs and/or what practical issues might come up for them?

The answers to these questions will help you decide on your approach – to choose influence behaviors that are relevant to the needs and issues that will drive the other's decision.

Needs and fears

Needs are deeper and though they often present as practical issues, resolving the issues may not lead to the decision you are aiming for. In that case, you are dealing with a need or possibly a fear that you will want to address in a thoughtful way. The other may not even be aware of the need behind the issue. Here are some examples of human needs that have been shown by researchers to affect decision-making:

HUMAN NEEDS THAT AFFECT DECISIONS

- **Belonging:** Being part of and associated with a specific group, tribe, or community
- **Control/power:** Having autonomy over one's life, being free to make important choices
- **Confirmation:** Having one's beliefs and opinions supported and verified
- **Respect:** Experiencing the acceptance and esteem of important others
- **Well-being/safety:** Feeling protected, secure and confident about one's life and that of loved ones
- **Meaning:** Being able to make a positive contribution to one's profession or community through one's work or life.

Fear of loss is often related to these needs – for example, loss of respect or loss of control. If the other fears some kind of loss if they do what you ask, they will not be open to influence.

Issues

Issues may reflect a deeper need or may simply be practical requirements related to the action you're asking for. They are certainly easier to talk about than needs, so it's often useful to consider what need the issue may represent. Typical top-of-mind issues may include:

- Time
- Resources
- Assistance
- Support
- Education

If resolving the issue fails to move the conversation forward, consider what need it may represent and explore other ways to meet that need. Use Receptive influence behaviors (Inquiring, Listening, Attuning, and Facilitating) to go deeper, learn more, and encourage the other to move with you toward achieving a result you can both support.

When you identify with the person you're influencing, you will be better prepared to respond to the other's needs, concerns, and issues. You will come across as someone who can understand and empathize - enabling you to build trust. And genuine trust is a key factor in our openness to be influenced by another person.

For more on influence behaviors, see Exercising Influence: A Guide for Making Things Happen at Work, at Home, and in Your Community (3rd ed., Wiley, 2015). For the Exercising Influence workshop, webinar, or coaching program, contact hello@bkimbarnesconsulting.com.

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Founder of **The Influence Guru**, Kim Barnes is a coach, facilitator, and author with more than forty years of experience in leadership, influence, and organization development. She was a founder and, for many years, CEO of Barnes & Conti Associates, and developed or co-developed programs including *Exercising Influence*, *Inspirational Leadership*, *Intelligent Risk-Taking*, *Consulting on the Inside*, and *Managing Innovation*. She is the author of six books, including *Exercising Influence* (Wiley) and *Building Better Ideas* (Berrett-Koehler). She works with enterprise companies, government agencies, small businesses, and individuals from the San Francisco Bay Area.

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