Influencing without Authority: A Four-Part Formula

Nano Tools for Leaders® are fast, effective leadership tools that you can learn and start using in less than 15 minutes — with the potential to significantly impact your success as a leader and the engagement and productivity of the people you lead.

The Goal

Gain assistance and compliance from those you have no formal authority over.

Nano Tool

As command-and-control leadership has given way to a flatter, more egalitarian approach, leaders who inspire and persuade, helping others to achieve by choice rather than compelling by obligation, are far more productive than those who require and demand. But even in today's increasingly flat organizations, internal relationships are still often informed by job roles and hierarchies. That means securing compliance, especially when you don't have the actual or structural authority needed to accomplish your goals, is an increasingly common challenge.

How do you get cooperation, compliance, motivation, and momentum from colleagues and cohorts outside your reporting structure? Many top

companies, including AbbVie Pharmaceutical (makers of Humira, the world's largest-selling prescription drug), have turned to the skills and techniques of *persuasion*. Far more than just a set of tools for marketing and sales, persuasion is not presentation, coercion, or manipulation. Instead, it's about making more meaningful connections with people and creating circumstances favorable enough for people to persuade themselves.

Our ability to persuade is based on two factors: how people make decisions, and what we do to influence those decisions. Recent neuroscience upended centuries of assumptions, famously articulated by Aristotle, that logic and reason were the best routes to persuasion. We now know that there is a highly disproportionate level of activity in the emotional brain for decisions of every kind — large or small, important or inconsequential. Successful persuasion, therefore, means prompting or *triggering* the emotional brain.

Scientists, researchers, and communication experts have identified different categories of emotional triggers, which enable us to select topics and design messaging most likely to be persuasive as we aim to persuade others.

Action Steps

Below is a four-step process for using persuasion skills that target specific emotional triggers to get compliance and assistance from those over whom you have no direct authority, but whose support and dedication would make all the difference in accomplishing your goals. The process is designed to build the most important interpersonal dynamic for leader-based momentum and productivity in flatter organizational environments: mutual trust. You don't need to follow the steps in order — think of them as ingredients in a recipe (a communication recipe) rather than a strict sequence.

1. **Engage and Ask.** The most fertile ground for persuasion is one of active engagement rather than passive observation. Whenever possible, you want participants instead of an audience, so find ways to involve people one-on-one or in groups. The easiest and best way to do that is to ask questions. Don't overthink it, but do pursue one piece of information: learn what the other

party is "in it for." Why do they work? What motivates them? What does "success" mean to them? This information can help you later.

2. **Connect and Align.** Make specific reference to what you both have in common, such as shared goals and mutual interests (if you don't already know them, use Step 1 to learn them). They can be personal or professional, calling out the ways in which you share a common experience of the world. We do this with others we like or admire all the time without thinking about it, but in fact this simple act of highlighting similarities activates a powerful emotional trigger, the Friendship Trigger. That doesn't mean your goal is to build personal friendships, but even simple references to shared experiences or similar interests creates a human connection that produces a very fertile field for persuasion.

3. **Legitimize Your Leadership.** Once you've psychologically set the stage for persuasion by inviting participation and highlighting alignment, establish your role as a leader. But proceed with caution: overdoing it can activate resistance, and underplaying it may not get the productivity — or trust — you need. One way to get the balance right is to view this essential step as a goal of establishing credibility rather than authority. Even if your people already know your background and capability — but especially if they don't — it's essential that you call out the factors that make you particularly well-suited to your role in leading the initiative. It's not about proving yourself or bragging about your accomplishments, but rather to assure others that they are in capable hands. Your cohorts need to see you as an authority, not because that's their reason to produce, but because it's the other half of the trust equation: the engagement and alignment created in Steps 1 and 2 are designed to produce a personal trust, while the credibility produced by activating the Authority Trigger is designed to produce a professional trust. The key to influencing without authority is to achieve just the right combination of these two emotional triggers, Friendship and Authority. When activated together, your persuasive power

strengthens. There's even a name for this dynamic: the "Halo Effect." The term refers to the highly favorable way virtually anything proposed or produced by someone who has successfully activated these triggers is viewed.

4. **Activate Hope by Providing a Reason Why.** The final step for gaining support and compliance is to activate two more powerful emotional triggers. When you identify and then highlight the potential outcomes or benefits that are specific to the other person — recognizing that those potential benefits are likely very different from yours — you turn on the Hope Trigger. Using what you learned in step one, show how alignment with you will help contribute to or create momentum for their goals. This in turn activates the Reason Why Trigger, giving them a very tangible reason to do what you're proposing. That's key when you have no formal authority. But what if your initiative doesn't tie in with an outcome or goal that has meaning for the other person? Studies have repeatedly shown that the brain is inclined to accept nearly any rational, feasible reason[1]. So, while full transparency is certainly ideal whenever possible, any reason is better than no reason at all.

How Organizations/Leaders Use It

Mike Iandolo, former VP and general manager of the Mobility Business Group at Cisco Systems, became an advocate of trigger-based communication solutions while president of the Wireless Networks Group at Alcatel-Lucent. "In today's corporate environments you need to cultivate support and buy-in regardless of reporting structure," Iandolo shared. "And even if you realize you have to get people's emotional investment to really succeed, how exactly do you do that, especially across dozens, maybe hundreds, of direct reports? Emotional triggers work like a template, or blueprint, for persuasive communication solutions. There's really nothing else like it. Triggers are applicable even if you do have authority, and absolutely essential if you don't."

The Managed Care team at AbbVie Pharmaceutical had been continually challenged in their ability to get the level of support and compliance they believed they needed from the company field reps, whose client calls covered an array of products beyond just managed care. Through a series of workshops, the Managed Care teams developed specific approaches to persuasive communication initiatives using a trigger solution set. Within weeks the metrics identified as those determinative of change and progress — things like access, response time, rep reporting content, and client engagement and outcomes — had started to climb. Within several months the Managed Care team had started seeing significant upticks in product orders.