

# How to have **POSITIVE INFLUENCE** and **IMPACT**

LEADERSHIP COACH AND AUTHOR CATHERINE STOTHART REVEALS THE SECRETS TO CONNECTING WITH OTHERS

**N**o one tells you how to be a leader. Most of us pick it up as we go along, perhaps learning from role models and experience, or from books and training courses – if we are lucky. It can be a hit-and-miss affair. And in truth, there is no single best way to be a leader – we must lead from who we are, from our own strengths and values. Whatever your leadership style, one thing is constant – you can't lead other people if they don't want to follow you, so how you influence them is a critical success factor.

Many organisations are trans-national, with leaders needing to interact both face to face and virtually with people in other parts of the world, who speak different languages and have different cultural expectations. They are often from diverse backgrounds, working in matrix structures and multi-functional teams, and all this adds to the complex task of communicating with them and gaining their commitment.

## WHAT ARE THE PITFALLS AND HOW CAN YOU AVOID THEM TO HAVE POSITIVE INFLUENCE AND IMPACT AS LEADER?

### THREE TRICKY TRAPS

- 1. Our impact on other people is often different from what we intended.** We judge other people by their behaviour – what they do and say. When you are a leader, every communication, however minor it appears, is important, as you create the culture by how you behave. People will observe what you do and say (or what you fail to do and say) and will judge you on this. You might have a positive intention, but if the way you come across has a negative impact on them, you will not have the influence or achieve the results you want.
- 2. Picking up accurate cues about other people's thoughts and feelings is difficult.** We don't usually know what they are thinking or feeling unless they tell us. We sometimes project our own thoughts and feelings on to them and assume they see things the way we do.

This means that we don't always respond in the best way to manage the relationship with them.

**3. When misunderstandings occur, our emotions kick in quickly outside our conscious control and can derail the interaction.** Steve Peters calls this our "inner chimp" – our flight or fight response activates before we can make a more considered response and conflict may escalate.

### SEVEN TOP TIPS FOR POSITIVE INFLUENCE AND IMPACT

The good news is that we can learn to behave in more emotionally-intelligent ways to get on better with other people and have the impact we want. Here are my top tips:

- 1. Take time to build rapport, even with people you know well.** Make eye contact, smile, ask them how they are and what's been happening. Pay attention to the answer and look for common ground on which you can build connections.
- 2. Keep your intention in mind – what do you want to achieve? And what behaviour (what you do and say) will give you the best chance of reaching your goal?** You may want to get something done quickly, which is a positive intention, but if you come across as impatient and demanding, people are less likely to go along with you.
- 3. Monitor how people react to you – what impact are you having on them?** Bear in mind that "the meaning of a communication is the response it gets". If they don't react as you expect, check out their understanding – observe their response and listen to what they say. Find out their perspective by asking open questions ("what are your thoughts on this?", "how do you feel about this?"). Avoid questions beginning with "why", as this can make people defensive.
- 4. When disagreements arise, look for common ground and areas on which you can agree.** Use inclusive language ("we") and switch from the past or present to the future ("how can we take this forward?", "what are the next steps?", "would you be willing to...?").
- 5. Be mindful of your own emotions and of what is happening in your body – tension in your jaw and shoulders, faster heart rate, shorter shallower breaths – are all signs that your body is preparing for flight or fight.** Take a deep breath, count to 10, and move away while you gather your thoughts. If you notice that you are feeling frustrated or irritated, take steps to manage your feelings so they don't come out in your behaviour – pause, take time out, change your speed and tone of voice, slow down your gestures, say something positive.
- 6. Communicate positive emotions – enthusiasm, cheerfulness, liking – through your words, tone of voice and body language.** People will pick up on this and when their positive emotions are engaged, you will get their commitment (they do it because they want to), rather than just their compliance (they do it because you have told them to). Brian Cox is an engaging presenter because he communicates his emotions, his sense of awe and enthusiasm, and this elicits similar emotions in us.
- 7. Never forget to take account of how people feel.** How do you want them (and you) to feel at the end of the conversation? Bored, nervous, angry, confused? Or curious, confident, relaxed, clear? Remind yourself of how you want them to feel and check that your behaviour fits with that purpose. The best communicators make other people feel good.

Finally, remember that if you can match the impact of your behaviour to your intention, you are more likely to achieve the influence and the outcomes you want.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Catherine Stothart MSc, CFCIPD, is a Leadership Coach and the author of *How to Get On with Anyone: Gain the Confidence and Charisma to Communicate with any Personality Type*, published by Pearson at £12.99. Available from all good bookshops.