



## Making Your Case for Action

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***This article corresponds with Webinar #4 of the Integrated Leader Program ~  
“Beyond Authority: Leading with Influence”***

*Sitting anxiously in his chair, John watched as his colleagues slowly filled the empty spaces around the conference table. It was a familiar scene. In a few minutes the meeting would start and silent stares would slowly give way to stilted conversation – the kind where people talked but didn’t really say anything. Today will be different, John thought. He had an idea whose time had come.*

*The meeting progressed and agenda items were ticked off one by one until the time finally came for John’s presentation. He spoke impassioned, relating several carefully prepared scenarios and backing up his propositions with data. Looking around the table, he noticed that people were shifting in their seats and shooting glances at one another, which propelled him to speak with more vigor and emphasis until he had covered his last point.*

*In spite of his strong performance, he couldn’t help feeling a bit unsettled; which might be why two weeks later he was less than surprised that despite what appeared to be agreement at the meeting, one by one his seeming supporters disappointed him.*

With such careful preparation and flawless execution, how could things have fallen apart?

Upon reflection, John could come to several conclusions: (1) he wasn’t persuasive enough, (2) he didn’t have enough (or the right) data (3) his colleagues are apathetic, ignorant, or downright two faced. While it is possible that any of these could be true, none of these conclusions is likely to lead John to make the kind of changes that are necessary to garner true support for his cause.

Though John’s preparation was solid and his case was well researched, it is very possible that the solution he presented was designed to solve a problem his colleagues didn’t feel was significant enough to warrant action. Alternatively, the proposed actions may have provoked resistance in his colleagues as they came to conclusions in their own mind about what his solution would require of each of them. Additionally, they may have left the meeting with questions that John not only did not answer, but never allowed to surface. If John were to proceed with any of the previously mentioned conclusions, he may never actually know why he wasn’t able to secure and maintain the support he needed. And the actions he’d likely take as a result of such conclusions would have a strong chance of making things worse.

In an effort to have greater influence, we are likely to focus our attention on learning how to present more eloquently, or how to build stronger, more persuasive cases. While these efforts can be helpful at times, they can also cause us to miss the boat altogether. **The art of influence requires that a strong connection is made with those you seek to provoke a response in. And to establish such a connection with others, you must ensure that your presentation and all you hope to accomplish through it is just as much if not more about THEM as it is about you.**

It is not uncommon for people to approach situations such as John’s with the following predominant questions and thoughts:

- How can I get others to do what I want?
- How can I show them why they should care?
- What can I do to ensure that others see me as credible, competent and worth listening to?

But the most influential leaders approach these situations differently. In contrast, questions or thoughts they are likely to entertain include the following:

- How can I figure out what others want and care most about?
- In what way does what I want to influence them to do affect what is important to them?
- How can I respect their credibility, competence and time by giving them something they will find value in?

This shift in orientation allows these leaders to produce dramatically different results for the following reasons:

- (1) They are likely to inquire (or ask questions and listen to the answers) as much as they advocate (or talk persuasively about their ideas and proposed actions)
- (2) They are less attached to the outcome or needing things to go according to their set plan, and more apt to allow things to adapt to meet the needs of others as well as their own.
- (3) They are more likely to ensure that that the solutions they propose address problems significant enough to warrant the action of others, and to get agreement on what that action should entail.
- (4) They will not experience the anxiety that accompanies trying to "sell" someone on an idea since what they are really trying to do is achieve a common goal. As a result, they will naturally connect with their audience and establish a relationship rooted in trust and mutual respect.
- (5) Because they are willing to entertain the notion that they don't have all the answers and could quite possibly be wrong, they will not get into power struggles that end up alienating or repelling the very people they seek to influence. And they are likely to gain the respect of others who feel valued and appreciated by someone who is humble enough to listen and learn.

While this approach will not always lead you to obtain the exact outcome you initially set out to achieve, it will allow you to stay connected enough to the people you seek to influence to determine what must be done to accomplish the greatest good for everyone involved, including you. It will also allow you to garner the support required to achieve mutually beneficial results that will endure over a long period of time.