

Ask for what you need



Make strong arguments for what you and your staff need to make the product strong. And don't take them back. Let your arguments hang in the air awaiting a response. Work with your allies to identify what you need and how to ask — and then ask.

In “The Empowered Manager,” Peter Block lists three things a leader must do to build support for his vision. The first two pertain to asking:

- 1. Support the authority that comes from within yourself.**
- 2. Express yourself. Let others know how you feel, what you want, where you stand.**

Gerry Spence, the renowned defense lawyer, says this in his book about making powerful arguments:

Revealing our honest desires, asking for what we want, makes it difficult for others to refuse us. When we honestly communicate our wants to others we exercise a great power. People do not want to say no, not to us, not to our face, not when we have plainly asked for what we want, not when our request is reasonable, not when it is just.

Roland Loup, management consultant, reminds us that you often have to repeat your request several times to be heard and considered.

You have to say things seven times, seven ways, before people begin to see you are serious about wanting change.

PUSHING FOR CHANGE/ASKING FOR WHAT YOU NEED

Rate yourself, 1 being “I am poor at this” and 5 being “I do this naturally,” on the following.

1. When I'm dissatisfied, I try to understand the source of my dissatisfaction. 1 2 3 4 5

2. I don't sit on my dissatisfaction; ultimately, I look for solutions. 1 2 3 4 5

3. I am able to look at an issue from viewpoints other than my own. I have a sense of the views of others who have a stake in the issue. 1 2 3 4 5

4. I reach out to allies and work with them on possible solutions to problems. 1 2 3 4 5

5. I am strategic about asking for things: I consider who I'm asking and the timing and form of the request that will be most effective. 1 2 3 4 5

6. If I'm not heard the first time, I seek feedback from somebody I trust and use it to rephrase and repeat my request. 1 2 3 4 5

7. When I feel sure my request is important to the product, I persevere. 1 2 3 4 5

8. I pace my requests. I don't ask for too much at once. 1 2 3 4 5

9. I phrase my request as an argument to improve the product, not as a complaint. 1 2 3 4 5

Be a good colleague



In Charlotte, we made allies by awarding reporters and editors the Golden Eyeball Award for Excellence in Visual Thinking.

As a crusader, you are arguing regularly for things to be better than they are. You have to live as a model of that view of the future. You have to operate as if the world had already changed. Make your department a shining example of a better way of doing things.

Block's third rule for building support for your vision:

3. Commit yourself to acting out in your unit how you want the whole organization to operate.

Block talks about the four kinds of people to negotiate with to make cultural change: Allies, Opponents, Bedfellows and Adversaries. The more people you get to be Allies, the more likely you are to be able to make change.

Opponents, those who trust you though they don't necessarily agree with you, are also a huge help, because they can tell you whether your arguments are likely to win people over.



Establishing trust with your colleagues — whether or not they agree with you — paves the way for change. There is a reciprocity to building trust: If you want to be able to trust your colleagues, you have to show that you are trustworthy, that you are holding yourself to the same standards and commitments you wish to apply to them. If you want to be on somebody's radar screen, you have to show that they are on yours. If you want colleagues to care about your work, care about theirs.

Giving can help you build trust. Giving is perhaps your most powerful use of authority as a leader. Freely give your support, praise (make it specific and sincere), and your interest and participation, and you will get those things back.

Deepak Chopra, in "The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success," describes The Law of Giving:

If you want to get love, appreciation and respect, give love, appreciation and respect. What goes out must come back.

PUSHING FOR CHANGE/BEING A GOOD COLLEAGUE

Rate yourself, 1 being “I am poor at this” and 5 being “I do this naturally,” on the following.

1. I practice what I preach. I live up to the ideals I want others to meet. 1 2 3 4 5

2. I try to build alliances with my closest colleagues. I share information and help out to strengthen those relationships. 1 2 3 4 5

3. If I can't have someone's agreement, I try to have their trust, at least. 1 2 3 4 5

4. I seize opportunities to offer specific, sincere praise to people. 1 2 3 4 5

5. When my trust has been violated, I don't just stew about it. I make sure I have my facts right and then I speak up, firmly and temperately. This keeps relationships clean. 1 2 3 4 5

6. I look for ways to give whatever I think is missing in our culture. I try to start the process of circulation, because I know what goes around comes around. 1 2 3 4 5

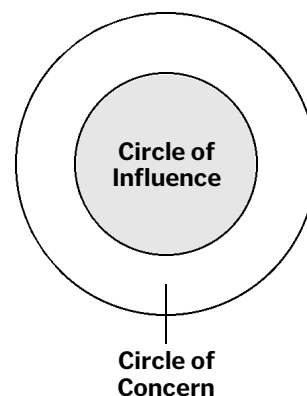
Fight the right fights



The editor wasn't really for us on our photo illustration approach to this section; but she wasn't against us, and that's what mattered.

Steven Covey, in “The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People,” argues that the way to build influence is to focus first and most on the areas you have influence over. Tend to those areas (and start with your own behavior), use your authority to the utmost, and you are likely to gain in influence and authority. If you are too focused on what other people need to do to improve and on fixing their behavior, you take time and energy away from areas where you can unquestionably make a difference.

Highly effective people focus on being rather than having, Covey says. World champion figure skater Elvis Stojko came in second in the 1997 World Championships when he became very ill and had to perform with a high fever. Nevertheless, he viewed his performance as a victory:



You want to have that perfect performance. But life isn't quite like that, so you have to learn to deal with what you have and not what you think you should have. In my own way I won the battle because I didn't give up.

Fighting the right fights also means distinguishing between your goals and your wishes. Don't get bogged down wondering if people respect your area or understand your craft. Those things may come in time. Focus instead on getting the specific accommodations you need to do your best work and make the maximum contribution to the product.

You don't need higher-ups and peers to agree with you on everything; you just need them to stay out of the way as you take steps toward your goals.

PUSHING FOR CHANGE/FIGHTING THE RIGHT FIGHTS

Rate yourself, 1 being “I am poor at this” and 5 being “I do this naturally,” on the following.

1. I put my efforts into issues I can influence. If a decision is out of my hands, I don't waste my energy on it.
1 2 3 4 5

2. When I'm bothered by something, I consider whether I might have a role in the problem. I don't assume I'm just a victim. 1 2 3 4 5

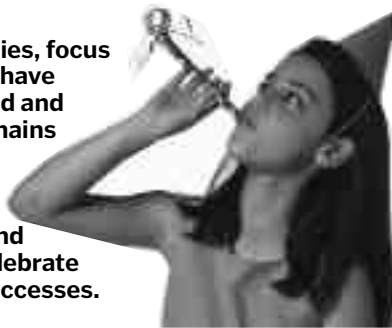
3. I do the best I can in the areas I am responsible for, to build influence. 1 2 3 4 5

4. I let little irritations go and concentrate on issues that really matter. 1 2 3 4 5

5. I try not to waste energy wishing for global things like respect. I focus on specific measures (like colleagues meeting deadlines) that add up to respect in my mind. 1 2 3 4 5

Keep your energy up

With your allies, focus on what you have accomplished and not what remains to be done. Reaching your goals takes time and patience. Celebrate all of your successes.



Crusading is hard work. Pacing yourself is critical. Making your case, being a good model, negotiating with opponents and adversaries — these are taxing activities. Make sure you don't overextend yourself. And never let opposition — no matter how vehement — send you into isolation. Instead, try to learn from it.

Take a cue from a gay rights activist, who reminds us that we have choices about how we respond to conflict and opposition:

I learned that even though I'd been shoved aside and battered for the stands I took, you have to fight not to be isolated, even when people are being hateful.

If you retreat because people are ugly to you, you become so hypersensitive that you can't separate anything from the ability to respond spontaneously. Such people always have their guard up. And that's a hell of a way to live. Just have the crap knocked out of you and keep going.

Hardship is inevitable as you crusade, but suffering is optional.

You have to persevere because you never know when you'll reach critical mass and succeed. Lots of tiny events led up to the fall of the Berlin Wall. Then it seemed to fall overnight, and the whole world was different. That's cultural change.

A certain detachment is also crucial to maintaining your stamina as you crusade. Nurture your dream, but don't become too fixated on how it will be realized. Leave open the possibility that you may get what you want in another form than you have in mind now.

Finally, reserve energy for the rest of your life. Don't put all of your eggs in your professional basket. Find pleasure and meaning elsewhere as well.

They could fire me tomorrow, and I'd be OK. Deputy Managing Editor
(and senior crusader) Tom Tozer, The Charlotte Observer

PUSHING FOR CHANGE/KEEPING YOUR ENERGY UP

Rate yourself, 1 being “I am poor at this” and 5 being “I do this naturally,” on the following.

1. When I’m in conflict with someone, I try not to take it personally. I try to learn from it. 1 2 3 4 5

2. I am aware that I have a choice in how I respond to adversity. 1 2 3 4 5

3. When I have a goal, I don’t let little setbacks defeat me. Things worth having are worth striving and struggling for. 1 2 3 4 5

4. When I have a bad day, it doesn’t ruin my week. 1 2 3 4 5

5. When I have a bad day, I think of something fun to do to relieve stress. 1 2 3 4 5

6. I acknowledge little victories at work and look for ways to celebrate. 1 2 3 4 5

7. I have sources of meaning and pleasure outside of work. 1 2 3 4 5

ADD UP YOUR SCORES

108-135: People listen to you. You are headed for great things.

81-107: Change some habits, and you’ll be an effective change agent.

Below 81: Perhaps some self-examination is in order.