

**Sometimes it's not enough to be talented, motivated, hard working, well prepared, technically competent, and fully informed...**

**Sometimes, you must be *influential* to succeed.**

Sherri Malouf and Cynthia Smith of SMS, "The Influence Company" point to seven situations where influence is essential, and tell you how to apply "positive influence" in each.

Why do so many people, even people who are great at their jobs, experience so much frustration and defeat at work? Often it is because they find themselves in situations where influence is essential, yet they lack a clear influence strategy.

### **Seven Situations**

Here are seven situations you may face where influence is essential:

- 1. Coping with conflict**
- 2. Dealing with your boss**
- 3. Selling your ideas**
- 4. Changing jobs**
- 5. Serving on cross-functional teams or task forces**
- 6. Navigating through organizational politics**
- 7. Surviving mergers, acquisitions, and reorganizations**

Let's take a closer look at each.

#### ***Situation 1: Coping with conflict***

While shouting matches are rare in most companies, subtler forms of interpersonal conflict are as common as paper clips... Grudges, jealousy, rivalries, resentments, stalemates, turf battles... Put people together for a prolonged period of time, throw in business pressures to perform and the everyday frustrations of work life, and you will get a rich variety of conflicts.

Since you know you will encounter conflict in many forms, why not prepare yourself to constructively manage conflicts when they arise? With the right strategy in place, conflict won't stop you from meeting your objectives.

***Influence strategy:*** Examine how you react to conflict. Many people, for example, experience a reflexive "fight or flight" response to conflict – they either meet it head on with aggression, or withdraw completely. Of course, neither of those responses may actually help them get where they want to go.

Managing conflict begins with remembering that you don't have to go with your reflexive reactions. Take a breath and choose a more thoughtful course. The Situational Influence Model™ developed by SMS suggests that there are times when you should *push*, times when you should *pull*, and times when you should *move away* temporarily, with the clear intent to try the interaction again as soon as it seems more likely to prove productive. Anytime you encounter conflict, remember: You have options.

### **What makes influence positive?**

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People apply positive power and influence when they meet their personal objectives (e.g., finish a work assignment) *and* enhance their working relationships, rather than trading one off against the other. For example: Sales reps who maintain strong client relations while increasing the profitability of their accounts. To consistently apply positive power and influence, you must shape influence strategies specifically for each situation you encounter, and apply proven influence skills that fit your strategy.

### ***Situation 2: Dealing with your boss***

What's the number one reason people leave their jobs? They don't like their boss. So it should come as no surprise if you sometimes have trouble dealing with your boss. Just thinking about a high stakes salary negotiation, a sensitive year-end performance review, or having to deliver some kind of "bad news" to your boss can raise your stress level. It's hard to be at your best in such situations. It will be a lot easier once you've crafted your influence strategy.

***Influence strategy:*** Any time you need to influence upward, clarity is key.

So prepare accordingly. First, get clear in your mind what's working or not working, from your perspective, and what you hope or expect to change. Think just as hard about where your boss is coming from. (If you don't know, then plan to ask.) Envision a conversation that reaches beyond just getting what *you* want. Get ready to search for mutually desirable outcomes you and your boss can pursue together.

As you talk with your boss, thoughtfully use a blend of the "push" and "pull" influence styles. Clearly state how you see things, and invite your boss to do the same, using your active listening skills to show that you're sincerely interested in his or her point of view. Then, state what you want, taking care to back your proposals whenever possible with reasons that connect to what is important to your boss. Ask your boss to share some of his or her goals, as well. Chances are, your boss will welcome this form of influence because it invites him or her to contemplate appealing possibilities. Throughout the dialogue, search for the common ground between what your boss wants and what you want.

Pursuing such conversations with your boss might not work perfectly at first, but keep trying. While others merely whine or make demands, you'll command your boss's respect by being clear about what you want, and by being sincerely interested in his or her goals, as well. Over time, this kind of interaction will transform how your boss sees you and deals with you.

### ***Situation 3: Selling your ideas***

Did you ever raise what you felt was a terrific new idea, only to have it ignored? Do you sometimes not even bother to mention your ideas because you assume you'll never get to put them into action? You're far from alone. Resistance to new ideas is a fact of organizational life. Many a fresh idea has been quickly trampled under the rush of business as usual. You might easily decide that raising new ideas is a waste of time. Don't give up! Appearances to the contrary, most companies need and value creative thinkers and people who can make new ideas work.

***Influence strategy:*** Don't just express your idea. Champion it. First, take a little time to assess your idea as objectively as you can. Pretend that someone else thought of it, and then constructively critique it. Can the idea be improved? Answer that question before you start sharing your idea with others.

Next, identify stakeholders. Who would have to support your idea for it to be implemented? Put yourself in their shoes... What will they find most appealing about your idea? What might concern them or cause them to resist what you propose? How might you avoid triggering concerns or resistance? Prepare to present your idea in the most favorable light to each stakeholder you identify.

Then, line up some allies. Who could best help you to persuade stakeholders to back your idea? (Note: Some individuals – your boss, for example – might be both an ally and a stakeholder for your idea.) Go first to people whose thinking you respect and whom you trust to hear your idea with a favorable ear, or at least an open mind. Test your idea with your friends and confidants. If they like it, ask them to help you advance it.

Becoming an idea champion is harder than simply blurting ideas out as they come to you. But if your idea is as good as you think it is, doesn't it deserve your best effort? Remember this: The most successful people in any organization do more than think up great ideas. They find ways to put ideas into action.

#### ***Situation 4: Changing jobs***

When you've been in a job for a while, you're known. And that eases all your interactions. The people around you automatically grant you a certain level of support and cooperation.

But when you get a promotion or a transfer – or perhaps take a job at a different company – you may suddenly be working with strangers. No matter how stellar your reputation, it will take time to establish yourself. You'll need new strategies to gain in the support and cooperation that were granted you as a matter of course in your old job. It's also important to recognize that the stakes are especially high any time you change jobs. Early successes can earn you the benefit of the doubt for years to come, while a few early missteps can permanently brand you as ineffective, uncooperative, passive or indecisive.

You'll want to go into any job change with a well-considered influence strategy... one tailored specifically to succeeding in your exciting but dangerous stretch as the "new kid on the block."

***Influence strategy:*** Respectful and thoughtful use of "pull"-style influence skills will help you quickly learn the new terrain. Craft your questions not only to earn high-gain answers, but to convey positive qualities about yourself as well. ("The new kid asks smart questions.") Invite your new colleagues to advise you as you shape your agenda for the new job. Actively listen to all that you're told. Look beneath the surface information for clues about the culture of your new workplace and the personalities of your coworkers, so you can begin to shape influence style strategies most likely to prove effective with each. Don't be shy about offering your ideas, or about admitting when you need help.

#### ***Situation 5: Serving on cross-functional teams or task forces***

Serving on a cross-functional team or task force is a lot like acting in a play that has no script. The rules aren't written or defined to nearly the same extent as when you are working within your own department. Most of the roles, responsibilities and operating procedures must be defined as you go. Further, there's no guarantee that players from other functions will want the same things you want. Small wonder, then, that so many cross-functional teams struggle to meet their objectives.

So, how do you get things done when working across functions?

**Influence strategy:** “Pull”-style influence skills may prove most effective, especially in the early going. While some colleagues will aggressively state their views and try to convince everyone else that they are right, you can focus on involving your less-assertive teammates in the discussion. Solicit their views and actively listen to what they say. You’ll set an example that will help the team function more smoothly and productively over the long run. You’ll also earn trust and confidence within the team. Later, when your team or task force is making its major decisions, people will remember that you listened to them, and so will be well prepared to listen to you.

### ***Situation 6: Navigating through organizational politics***

Granted, a lot of people think “politics” is a dirty word. But it doesn’t have to be. You can engage in politics without being devious, manipulative, or dishonest. Every organization has its own informal ways of deciding who does what, when, where and how. There are unwritten rules, behind-the-scenes agreements, back door access to resources, casual alliances, unspoken rivalries, friendships, cliques, groupings of opinion.... Are you going to act as though you’re above it all? Or will you jump in and make things happen?

**Influence strategy:** To engage successfully in organizational politics, develop your organizational “street smarts.” Study what makes your organization “tick.” Consider the *informal* processes and forces by which it operates. Investigate: Why do some initiatives blossom, while others wither and die? What are the real sources of power (e.g., expertise, reputation, access) and how do people wield them? Where do valuable talents and resources reside? What priorities truly guide people’s everyday actions?

Then, shape your answers to such questions into a map of your organization. Form a clear picture of how it *really* works. You can use that map to navigate your way through even the toughest “neighborhoods” to reach your objectives.

### ***Situation 7: Surviving mergers, acquisitions, and reorganizations***

You’d probably react to rumors of an upcoming merger, acquisition, or reorganization as you would to news of an impending earthquake. That is, you’d dread it. And why not? The only things that seem certain are 1) Your world is about to get “all shook up” and 2) People are bound to get hurt. As the merger, acquisition or reorganization unfolds, you (like everyone) are left to wonder: “Who is friend, and who is foe? Who will end up in charge? Who will end up gone?” Everyone is nervous. Many people freeze. They feel helpless. They do little but wring their hands and wait for others to decide their fate.

***Influence strategy:*** You can do much more. When the landscape starts shifting under your feet, *lead yourself*. Recognize that in a period of fear and uncertainty, you have two mindsets operating at once – rational and emotional. And both are revving into high gear. If you don't take charge, chaos will reign within as well as without. Use your organizational “street smarts” to rationally assess what is changing and where the emerging power points are, so you can position yourself to come through the upheaval unscathed, or even ahead of where you started. At the same time, use visioning, be present, and immerse yourself in self-empowering thoughts to cultivate and convey your inner calm. People will notice. That further enhances your capacity to influence how change unfolds.

## **Conclusion**

Ask yourself... How often do you actually stop to thoughtfully shape your influence strategy for a given situation? If you're like most people, the honest answer would be, “Hardly ever.” Yet you repeatedly find yourself in situations where influence is, without question, a key to your success.

Why not take those matters more into your own hands? Make positive power and influence one of your core competencies.

## **About SMS**

Situation Management Systems, Inc. (SMS) is the Influence Company. We developed the groundbreaking Situational Influence Model™ in the early 1970's. After 30 years, the model continues to prove its value in ever changing environments across a broad range of industries.

Visit our website at [www.smsinc.com](http://www.smsinc.com) for:

- Detailed information about SMS programs and consulting services
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