



The Best Way to Influence Others

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Reprinted from *pankeyperspectives*
July 2006

*Peter Drucker writes, "Any organization develops
"A leader is a person who is willing and able to
influence behavior; her or his own first, then others
toward a preferred future!"*

How's your energy level? Are you excited about creating a practice that is moving toward your Preferred Future? Do you find yourself encouraging patients/clients and other team members to make pro-active, positive choices? The ability to influence others is crucial to success. One of the best ways to improve your ability is to better understand your talents and how you can positively apply those talents to the act of influencing.

First, here are a few words on how not to influence people. Have you had an experience with someone who has obviously attended a seminar on how to influence others? When this person tried to "lay on the charm" or apply the "sandwich" technique, you likely thought this person was not naturally charming. Did you feel annoyance rather than influence?

When it comes to influencing others, instead of imitating that person and trying to be someone you are not, it's much more effective to be your natural self. To illustrate this point, I would like to tell you about Jen. Jen owns a dental practice/business, and she must influence the people who work with her to maximize overall profitability and create a great workplace. She also needs to influence her patients/clients so they'll recognize the value of her services and ultimately purchase them.

Jen attended one of those how-to-influence-others seminars and was told that "charm" was the key to success. Now, that may be true for some people, but not for Jen. By nature, Jen is introverted. As a result of the seminar, she tried to be charming in an extroverted way but she came across as insincere.

Jen later learned from a strengths coach that being influential or even charming can be achieved in many different ways – that the best way for Jen to be charming or influential would probably be different than it would be for someone else. Jen also took Donald O. Clifton's StrengthsFinder.* a 180-item on-line assessment that measures a person's talents in 34 categories, referred to as "themes," and revealed her top five themes. Jen was able to use what she learned from the assessment, as well as what she learned from the strengths coach, to more effectively apply her greatest talents when influencing others and not focus on her weaknesses (non-strengths).

Two of Jen's top Clifton StrengthsFinder themes are Individualization and Belief. People who are highly talented in individualization are exceptionally able to appreciate the uniqueness of each person they meet. People with powerful belief talents tend to be drawn to endeavors that have a strong sense of purpose connected to them. Jen's strengths coach helped her understand how to apply her talents from these two particular themes to her daily life. Together they explored how she could use those talents when influencing others.

Once Jen understood her talents and how she could use them to influence others positively, her interactions with her patients/clients and team changed profoundly. For example, Jen had been trying to "get" a client to say "yes" to a new procedure, but the reluctant client attributed his resistance to price, even though Jen had explained that when factoring in time, ease of the procedure, investment and the procedure's overall quality, the client would ultimately save money.

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Despite Jen's reasoning, the client kept resisting, so Jen decided to leverage her greatest talents. Drawing on her belief, Jen said to her client, "I really want you to do what is right for you" – and she meant it; doing right by her clients is an essential part of Jen's sense of mission. Using her individualization, Jen was motivated to probe what was troubling this particular client in this specific situation.

"I sense there is more to this than price," Jen said. "Please tell me what else is holding you back from making the change, because in the long run, I think it's in your best interest to have this procedure."

The client finally admitted that it was a time issue. His previous experience in a dental office led him to believe the procedure would take numerous short appointments. He was concerned he would have to reconfigure his entire schedule to accommodate the procedure. Jen asked the client why he hadn't told her this before. The client, recalling the way Jen used to "lay on the charm," replied, "I didn't think you really cared before."

What a powerful moment this was for Jen! She realized that, when she had tried to be charming in the past, her client sensed her unease and interpreted it as insincerity. By tapping into her talents, Jen was able to reconnect with her client, and this helped her achieve the dentistry that was most appropriate with a treatment sequence that would take less time. In the end, the client came to a better understanding of appropriate, individualized care.

Dentistry takes people who can do the technical tasks with competence and confidence, while at the same time being committed to learn about the patient through behavioral discovery. We can and should develop behaviors that are consistent with our own temperament, strengths and values that will influence and help others toward health-centered dentistry, creating a positive energy for the patient/client and team. It will energize our life's work! ■