



Lessons from a Dragon

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Arlene Dickinson Illuminates the Principles of Persuasion & Influence in the Business World

I love Dragon's Den. Each Wednesday night, along with many Canadians, I tune into CBC to watch some poor entrepreneur try to entice the Dragons into investing their own hard-earned cash. While I find the show entertaining, I value Arlene Dickinson's tough business savvy approach along with an ethical eye to her business transactions.

I recently read Arlene's book, Persuasion, and saw many of her ideas aligned with one's influence skills. Influence as a core competency is the highest request from clients in terms of development. The principles of persuasion and influence on the surface may seem quite simple. In practice they are not. Just watch Dragon's Den, or examine some of your more challenging influence situations. Effective influence and persuasion requires us to dissolve our usual habits. I use the term dissolve purposefully, as habits change over time and aren't a simple 'break' with the old.

Using some concepts from Arlene's book I challenge you to take action. Consider these ideas and incorporate them into your repertoire. As a leader, practice it and watch your effectiveness increase! Distill a Complex Subject to make it Accessible to Everyone

Dissolving Habits Requires Awareness

Arlene suggests "Real expertise involves the ability to take a complex subject and distill it to the point that it's accessible to everyone." The difficulty in distilling

information and positioning it often arises when we are the subject matter experts, or the boss. We have to see the issue from the other's point of view. Taking the time to step into the other person's shoes will speed up the buy in process for the person being influenced. Dig deep, walk in the other person's shoes, gain understanding.

Influence with Long-Term Orientation

Effective influencers have a long term orientation and are concerned about their reputations, not just the immediate issue. "They know a short term win is meaningless if it leads to a big loss down the road," Arlene writes.

Strong Negotiation Skills Avoid Manipulative Tactics

Occasionally a Dragon deal fails during due diligence. When someone has to change their mind on a deal or a situation, ask yourself "what if this phone call is being taped, would I be embarrassed if others listened to my side of it or would I come across as standing my ground calmly and courteously in a principled fashion". This approach helps us stay out of manipulative tactics. Rely on your gut instinct when influencing.

Honesty is at the Core of Influencing

Honesty is one of those words that people aspire to live. Arlene highlights being honest attracts the right type of clients and people who want to work with you. Anyone should be honest enough to say when they don't know something. Don't try to fake it. It comes

across as dishonest. When this happens our internal alarm bells start to go off. It's a signal to disengage from the influence situation in some way or be willing to say you don't know and move on.

Reciprocity - Know What the Other Person Wants

Arlene discusses the concept of reciprocity: knowing what is in the deal for the other person. This concept is also mentioned in the book "Exercising Influence: Building Relationships and Getting Results", by Kim Barnes. Influence happens in the mind of the other person. Determine what is going to be meaningful for them to engage with you. Focus on the benefits to the individual you are persuading. Ask - what do I need to know about the other person to influence them effectively? Ultimately a dialogue is what you are striving for. If you catch yourself talking too much, stop and ask a meaningful open ended question. Developing questions beforehand will help you stay in their mindset.

Presentation is not the same as Preparation

On Dragon's Den, preparation will override the bells and whistles of a presentation every time. Thinking through the obstacles of implementation and knowing the facts are essential. Effective influence doesn't happen by accident. In our work on Influence we emphasize the need for planning. We typically do this all the time in our heads. By putting plans to paper and assessing the variables that go into planning your effectiveness in an influence situation will increase. Having a clear idea of how your influence idea will help the person pursue a dream of success or stop the pain of something will increase your chances of effective persuasion.

Try these ideas. Start to practice them tomorrow! You will be amazed at the powerful influence and persuasion results you can achieve by dissolving old habits into new effective ones.