



# Managing Up and Across: Leveraging Lateral Leadership Skills

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**Dr. Marie-Hélène Budworth, Associate Professor at the School of Human Resource Management at York University recently joined Stikeman Elliott lawyers, alumni and clients for a presentation on the art and science of influence. The following is a summary of the key highlights.**

**[View the complete video recording](#) of the presentation on our Knowledge Hub.**

The ability to influence others has become an essential skill for success in our current environment of flattened organizational structures and commoditized knowledge. For in-house counsel and those managing legal operations, ensuring that colleagues and internal clients hear and understand your legal advice and ideas is both a business and career imperative.

**Research has shown the following four factors can greatly impact your ability to influence others:**

- **Social Networks**
- **Reciprocity**
- **Message Delivery & Negotiation**
- **Power**

## **Social Networks - Understand where you are in your network and whether it is serving you properly**

Social networks describe how people are connected to one another and this helps us to understand how resources like information move through our social spaces. You will have different kinds of connections in your network and you should leverage them differently. Early on in your career and at career transition points you want to ensure that you have a lot of varied connections. These will not be strong relationships but will provide you with access to a wide range of novel information, opportunities and new ideas – a phenomenon known as “the power of weak ties.” Later and at more established points in your career, it is important to develop a smaller number of tight connections where you have a strong network of trusted resources. At that point in your career, you gain value from having people with similar expertise who can act as a sounding board.

## Reciprocity - Be the first to give but don't burn yourself out

Reciprocity is the well-studied social norm of responding to a positive action with another positive action. Put another way, people want to be nice to people who are nice to them, a behaviour which can be a powerful tool for influencing others.

Research shows that people tend to demonstrate three types of behaviour preferences: **takers**, **matchers** and **givers**. While most people are matchers – cautiously giving when social norms demand - the most successful people are givers. However, selfless givers do not fare well; to be successful, givers must balance their urge to give with their own needs and leave time to accomplish their own tasks and goals. By continuously providing value to people in your networks, while still getting your work done, you will move towards the centre of your network and increase your influence over time.

## Message Delivery & Negotiation – Getting to yes

The manner in which you deliver your message can have a big impact on whether you are able to achieve your objective. Some strategies to enhance the persuasiveness of your message include:

- **Social Proof** – People have a tendency to conform to the actions of others which is why social proofs like testimonials are such an effective marketing tool. Social proofs can also be effective in the workplace to influence decision-making. For example, your business case for a new technology platform might include statistics on the proportion of companies in your industry already using the platform.
- **Commitment & Consistency** - A more nuanced approach might be to first bring stakeholders on board with a general principle before asking them to commit to a specific plan of action. For example, you might want to develop a program to support **sponsorship for women and diverse employees**. Before getting a commitment on the specific details of a program, seek out support for the big idea, (e.g., sponsorship generally). Once someone agrees to a concept, they are more likely to agree to a more detailed plan at some point in the future. This is known as the principle of commitment and consistency. If you can get people to signal alignment with the big idea it's much easier to get them to agree to the specifics.
- **Start With A “No”** - Another useful tool to get to yes is to get to no first. People are far more likely to say yes when they have already said no to an initial proposal and you have conceded. This is known as an exchange of concessions or reciprocity in the negative. If used strategically and if both 'asks' are legitimate, it can be a very effective tool for moving an initiative forward.

One last comment on message delivery: when you have provided value and are thanked for it, do not devalue your effort by responding “no problem” or by using a similarly diminishing reply. Over time these types of responses lead the other person to believe that there was no effort on your part and therefore no reciprocity is owed! A simple “you're welcome” is a much stronger response. Or perhaps you can try “I am glad that we are able to do things like this for one another.” Always graciously acknowledge the expression of appreciation without undercutting your effort and investment.

## Power & Influence - Look for ways to expand your range of power

At the end of the day, there are times when your best attempts at influencing up and across fall short. Under those circumstances, you might seek the more traditional “power-based” approach to getting people on side.

Everyone has some level of power in an organization which is based on a number of factors including position in the organization's hierarchy, expertise, reputation, and a myriad of other potential factors. Individuals with higher levels of power enjoy greater scope in terms of the requests they can make of others. While many sources of power are beyond our control, there are ways to expand your range of power and by extension your influence with others in the organization. Here are a few strategies drawn from the research:

- "Borrow" power by advocating for the organization or a more powerful group within the organization.
- Display your expertise.
- Get others on side first.
- Understand the interests of the other person.

## Conclusion

While in-house counsel benefit from the power derived from their legal expertise, there are many situations in which this will be insufficient to convince others within their organization that a particular course of action is the best one. This may be because there is some ambiguity in the law or its application or more commonly because the issues involved are not purely legal. In such cases it is important for in-house counsel to have other tools of influence to draw upon to ensure that their opinions are heard, understood and considered as part of their organization's overall decision-making process, leading to a greater overall impact on future strategy and operations.

## Further Reading

### Influence

Pre-Suasion: A way to influence and persuade by Robert Cialdini

Give and Take by Adam Grant

Women Don't Ask by Linda Babcock

### Social networks

Friend of a friend: Understanding the hidden networks that can transform your life and your career by David Burkus

### Negotiations

Negotiation Genius by Deepak Malhotra & Max H. Bazerman

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