

# Change The Way You Change Minds

BY CANDY TYMSON CSP

I had a very interesting example of the power of influence recently. I was one of about 45 people at a local community meeting where we were being briefed on a proposed major redevelopment of a government training facility in our area.

The tone of the meeting indicated everyone was against the proposal and a motion was suggested along the lines that as a resident group we did not support the new plans. Everyone seemed happy to go along – but I just didn't feel comfortable. So I stated that I had no objection to the redevelopment and requested a show of hands as to who was for, and who was against, the project going ahead. And that's when I learnt a truly valuable lesson about influence.

It turned out that only five percent of those present were actually against the project, even though the perception was that the majority were. How did so few initially succeed in bluffing the rest that the majority were against the project?

To help me resolve this it was very timely that I found the latest book from the Harvard team of authors called *Influencer. The Power to Change Anything*.\*

## The Key to Influence

The breakthrough discovery from the book is that enormous influence comes from focusing on just a few vital behaviours. Find those behaviours in your circumstance, and you've found the beginning of influence.

Therefore if you focus on what to do, rather than the outcome, you are more likely to succeed. A simple example would be rather than focusing on the outcome of losing weight – focus on what you need to do to lose weight. Sounds simple, but is it?

Psychologists have identified a process they call Positive Deviance, deviance being generally any pattern of behaviour that is markedly different from the accepted standards within a society. The concept is that this process can be extremely helpful in discovering the handful of vital behaviours that will help solve the problem you're addressing.

## Positive Deviance in Action

The authors of *Influencer* cited an example of people experiencing uncaring or insensitive medical care. While patients at a particular medical centre always scored the clinical quality of the facility as very good, the scores showed that patients and their families didn't feel like they were being treated with care, dignity and respect.

How would you approach such an issue? The chief administrator called the executive team together and charged them with the task of finding the positive deviance – that is finding those health-care professionals who routinely scored high on customer satisfaction in areas where others did poorly, and identify what behaviours they did to achieve that.

## Here's how it's done:

1. Dive into the community/company you want to change.
2. Discover & study where the targeted problem should exist, but doesn't.

3. Identify the unique behaviours of that group and then replicate them.

By focusing on the behaviours of those who did it well, they came up with a process that was both recognisable and therefore replicable. It came down to just five behaviours that made all the difference. But more about that later....



## Using Stories to Help Change Minds

Another great discovery by the authors of *Influencer* was the power of using stories to persuade others to come around to your way of thinking – note that's story, not lecture!

So what is it that makes certain stories powerful tools of influence, while mere verbal persuasion can cause resistance or be quickly dismissed and forgotten? Stories have the ability to help individuals transport themselves away from the role of a listener who is rigorously applying rules of logic, analysis and criticism, and into the story itself. They therefore move from critic to participant.

Barack Obama's use of stories to influence and change opinion during his presidential election campaign is an excellent example of the power of stories. Did you hear his victory speech and his story about 106 year old Anne Nixon Cooper? (It's worth a look on YouTube).

## The secrets to using stories to influence are:

1. Tell the whole story.
2. Make sure the narrative you're using contains a clear link between the current behaviours and existing (or possibly future) negative results.
3. Be sure that the story includes positive replacement behaviours that yield new and better results.
4. Remember, stories need to deal with both "Will it be worth it?" and "Can I do it"?

.... Obama's story of Anne Nixon Cooper did all of this, and more.

Back to the five behaviours that made patients and families feel they had received excellent care. They were simply: 1. Smile; 2. Make eye contact; 3. Identify yourself; 4. Let people know what you are doing and why; 5. End interaction by asking: "is there anything else that you need?"

Surprisingly simple, isn't it. So, how can you apply such ideas to be more influential?

\**Influencer. The Power to Change Anything*. Patterson, Grenny, Maxfield, McMillan & Switzler. McGraw Hill. (2008)

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