



11 November 2011

Tips for influencing blockers

1. If you've labelled someone a blocker because of your own experience with them, can you find a pattern to their blocking behaviour?
2. Emotions play a key role in decision making and may be causing the adverse reaction in your blocker. Is there some way to reframe your position so that your proposition does not trigger emotional reactions in the blocker?
3. Make sure you're aware of what motivates them. You're more likely to be successful if you're pressing positive "reward centre" buttons for them.
4. Choose the timing of your pitch carefully. If there are a lot of other matters occupying their (or your attention) it may be better to reschedule to a time where you have undivided attention.
5. If you've previously received a "no" to a proposal, you're likely to get another "no" if you re-pitch with the same approach. This is because, even subconsciously, they will want to remain consistent with their previous decision. To overcome this, reframe your proposition – in this way it's almost like a new proposal, so you get a fresh shot at acceptance.

PREPARE TO INFLUENCE BLOCKERS

Blockers present a challenge

'Blockers', it seems, are the source of considerable frustration in Australian workplaces. In UGM's recent Personal Influence at Work study, only 58% of women and 65% of men felt they had the skills to deal effectively with blockers.

When we dug a little deeper, it turns out that understanding influence has a major impact on the likelihood of having those skills. 84% of men who said they understand influence say they can deal with blockers, compared with only 30% who self-assessed their understanding of influence as low. There is a similarly large gap for women, with 74% who understand influence able to deal with blockers effectively, compared with only 28% who say they don't have a high understanding of influence.

What can you do to better influence blockers?

There are a number of steps that you might take to intentionally influence blockers. One of these is preparing carefully for your encounters with them, whether chance or planned. Obviously, if they're blocking you, they're holding on to a position that isn't working for you. If you want to win through, you're going to need to change their thinking.

A great place to start is to know a little more about their decision making circuitry. Just how are their brain's (and yours, for that matter) working? Thanks to rapid advances in brain science, researchers are getting a much better idea about where particular activities are taking place in the brain.

Among the many fascinating insights about brain functions being revealed, the research spotlights a variety of 'circuits' that contribute to decision making processes. While you may experience the process pretty much as a single event, it's more complex than that, as you'd imagine. To increase the effectiveness of your influencing, you might actively think about attending to each of the circuits in play.

The brain circuitry of decisions

Psychiatrist Dr Srinivasan Pillay is also a brain researcher and business coach. In his recent book, *Your Brain and Business*, he relates current findings from neuroscience research to business. Naturally, decision making is one of the important areas he examines.

Pillay points out that five key circuits (among many circuits) provide input into decision making processes. These feed into the 'brain's accountant', for weighing up (including calculating risk-reward probabilities and prioritising possible actions) and deciding. Finally, the outcome of the decision is fed to the action centre of the brain to produce behaviour consistent with the outcomes of the decision.

The emotional register

Let's take a look at the first input, the emotional register. Emotions play a vital role in every decision you make. Emphasizing this fact, neuroscience researcher and author, Dr Norman Doidge, tells of a patient unable to make decisions because the emotional area of his brain is damaged. His book, *The Brain that Changes Itself*, makes a great read.

Dr Pillay points out that the emotional register, or amygdala, also channels long-term memories into the decision-making process. Remember that blockers (and you) will be affected by emotions, based on relative significance of past experiences. Be aware also that memories recalled often contain bits of other related memories. So, your blocker may be responding negatively as a result of strong memories carried over from other areas in their lives.

Short term memory

Another of the circuits is short term memory. It's the circuit, for example, that allows you to hold a phone number in your head while dialling, and then discard it when done. Since it has finite capacity, it can be overwhelmed. Be aware that these circumstances will make it bad timing to put your case. With everything else going on (maybe more of a concern than your issue) your message may not get through!

Reward Centre

You'll no doubt be aware that, at its most essential, the brain seeks to increase pleasure and minimise pain. It has a reward centre that experiences these effects. This information contributes to emotional tagging and the priority that experiences are given in the memory system. Strong reward or punishment generates strong emotional tags and these receive higher priority. It's these stronger emotions that surface first when apparently similar contexts arise.

Attentional Centre

Dr Pillay points out that the brain's 'attentional centre' is another important component of decision making. The attentional centre checks various sources of input for consistency (or inconsistency or conflict). If things 'don't seem to add up', the decision will be affected.

Brain's accountant

The final step before action is in the 'brain's accountant'. It takes the data, generates options, calculates their pros and cons and then prioritises them. The highest scoring decision prevails and determines the go or no-go result.

Being aware of, and planning for, these different decision making circuits is vital. The desired outcome is a more considered influencing strategy that presses the right, rather than the wrong, buttons.