

Winning Conversations

How to turn red tape into blue ribbon

The average piece of business advice to an executive takes about eight hours of your and your team's time to prepare and fifteen minutes to deliver.

Those fifteen minutes, simply cannot be wasted.



About the Paper

If you are from a support function within corporate services or a shared services unit you will know that there is often a perception that what you deliver is more red tape than blue ribbon. Hence you or your staff find yourself “talking to the hand” of the business you are there to support and enable. You and your team would much prefer to be seen as trusted advisers.

I know we all like to think of ourselves as trusted advisers but what does being a trusted adviser actually mean?

I was once in a meeting with a government client that provides services to other government departments. In fact, the other government departments were obligated to use my client’s service. His organisation’s purpose statement said it was “A trusted adviser to government agencies.” In the meeting pre-amble, my client mentioned that he was a trusted adviser to the department. The Deputy Secretary stopped him in his tracks and said, “I’m sorry, whether you are a trusted adviser to us is not for you to decide. It is my choice and it is earned, not labelled.”

The Deputy Secretary knew how to make a statement. It was delivered with mastery. From that moment I learned that I must earn my client’s trust. And that you must earn the trust of your stakeholders.

Herein lies a problem. If you can’t get your stakeholder to take your advice how can you become their trusted adviser? The answer is that first you need to be persuasive.

You need to persuade your stakeholder to take a risk on you.

This paper is about those 15 minutes you have with a stakeholder when you are giving your advice and you do not have the needle on the trust meter maxing out. It is about ensuring all those hours of hard work preparing for that moment are not wasted in that 15-minute window you have battled to get.

It is all about a winning conversation in 15 minutes – so you are seen as blue ribbon not red tape!

"I thoroughly enjoyed the session. Great content, thought-provoking ideas delivered with workable simplicity."

Delene Kemp, Assistant Service Manager, Aon Risk Solutions

Why Advisers feel they are not being listened to

The truth is that many advisers are not being listened to and I mean that quite literally. It is pretty hard to listen to someone if you don't show up to a meeting. Constant cancellation and/or re-scheduling of meetings between the business and support functions is the strongest indication that there is a problem. While you feel it is disrespectful (and it is), it is incumbent on you to ensure the business sees value in meeting with you. If they don't, why blame them for cancelling or postponing, again? They have plenty of pressures and if you are not helping them, why should they give you their time?

If you are getting the meetings and your advice is not being followed, then you still have a problem. In particular, if they are attending "because they have to".

Finally, if your internal client is attending, is listening, is agreeing with you, however, they can't relay the message and no action is taken, you *and* they have a problem.

The comments I hear most from advisers as to why their advice is not being followed include:

- "It's because we are not 'sexy' like sales and marketing."
- "Well, we are not from the CEO's office now are we?"
- "They don't really see me as a key adviser. I don't think they trust us."

Here is the thing, it is not about you or any other adviser. It is not that you are not funny enough, interesting enough, intimidating enough. The problem is much more complex. Let me explain.

"I had the pleasure of attending Bryan Whitefield's Winning Conversation Workshop delivered for Leadership Think Tank recently. Bryan's style of facilitation was totally engaging and thought provoking. The models shared by Bryan at the workshop has really assisted my preparation for meetings and my confidence has grown as a result. A very valuable, worthwhile workshop. Thank you so much!"
-Cath Shaw, Founder, Positive Living Skills

Why leaders can be difficult to convince

There are three main things going on with those you are trying to advise and they are inexorably linked. First, because you as the adviser from Finance, IT, HR, Risk ... have been “monitoring” them and you have been reporting on their performance in certain areas. They have a reason to at least be wary of you. And if you have caused them grief in the past or grief for those that report to them, they may downright resent you.

Second, if you have put into place controls they feel are overly restrictive, that are counterproductive, they may be more focused on how to “game” your controls than listen to what you have to say.

Third, because of one and two and because of a whole bunch of other reasons, they are not thinking clearly about the decisions they need to make. They have developed a host of psychological biases that are very difficult to overcome without help.

What you as an adviser need to do is help them to manage the risk in their decision making. To do this, you will need to get inside their head, understand their biases or other potential errors in their decision-making process and create an “intervention”. More on this later.

What occurs as you become more persuasive

The more decisions those that you advise get right over time that are attributable to great advice from you, the more valued you will become as an adviser. The greater will be the trust factor. The more often you will be invited to provide advice, early in the decision-making process.

Have a look at the trust scale in the diagram to the left. When our persuasiveness is at a low ebb our tendency is to revert to the only tool left in the tool box, the biggest stick we can find.

Depending on your role, you may have the ability to block an area of the business from making progress and you may be tempted to enforce this only to become known as a **Tyrant**. People desperately avoid tyrants.

Trust Scale

Adviser

Authority

Expert

Controller

Tyrant

Invite Scale

10x

5x

1x

-5x

-10x

Leadership

Dictatorship

Similarly, if you are so focused on your proudly designed controls and fail to see things from the perspective of the business you fall into **Controller** territory and staff will tend to avoid consulting you as they know what they will get. Most advisers at least find their way to **Expert** level where the business is happy to consult with you for the advice they need that only someone in your support function can give.

Adviser status arises when you start solving some of their business problems, not just because of your expertise, but because you are providing insight well beyond what the business perceived your support function is able to deliver.

Finally, if you are so insightful, if you are “wisdom personified” when it comes to a particular type of decision and the **Authority**, you will be the first they call on for advice and very early in the process.

When you attain **Authority** status you are able to create real change. *You are able to make the difference you know your advice can make.*

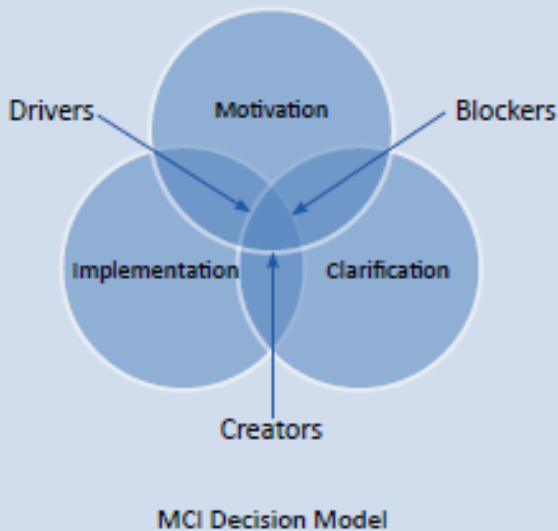
Finding the pathway to deliver your advice

I am sure you will agree that finding the right pathway to deliver your advice is an interesting challenge. You have probably tried many different methods. There is no doubt variety is important, however, finding the right variety for the person you are wishing to influence is key.

In a moment I will introduce you to my Pathfinder Model for helping advisers find the right pathway to ensure your advice cuts through. First, however, let’s return to the notion of creating an “intervention” to help those you are advising to manage the risk in their decision making.

The way I do this is through my MCI Decision Model which is shown to the left. The premise of the MCI Model is to flip our inherent decision-making process on its head. To start with motivation, then move to clarification and finally focus on implementation. This is inverse to our natural tendency to start with implementation, then do some clarification and completely ignore the need to understand our motivation to ensure a good decision is being made.

The MCI Decision Model helps you identify what is driving your stakeholders, the mindset that it’s creating, and the potential blockers to good judgement. It also helps you identify if they have gone straight to implementation without appropriate clarification. When you identify where they are in their decision-making process you can design your intervention using my Pathfinder Model.





The Pathfinder Model

The Pathfinder Model is a simple process that asks you to:

- **Stand** in the shoes of the person you are trying to persuade, so that you understand them. So you can align your advice with their goals.
- **Paint** them a picture with a diagram or picture that allows them to understand with clarity your advice. If you don't they will form their own mental picture and it might not be what you think.
- **Tell** them a story so they connect with you and with your advice. Decisions are heavily influenced by emotions.
- **Make** them believe through stats and case studies as well as answers to all their counter arguments.

The reason this approach works is that penetrating the barriers people put up when receiving advice is a big challenge. Finding the chink in their armor, the error in their decision making is one thing. It is another thing all together to fully penetrate their thinking and embed your advice deep into their thinking.

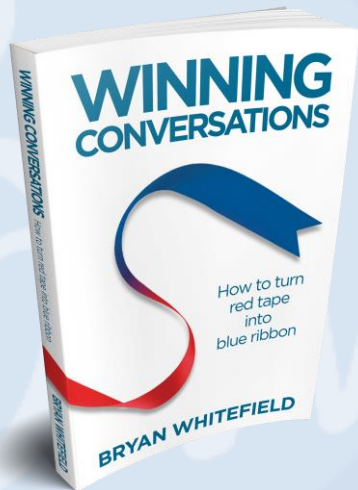
What should you do next?

Like so many other skills in life, you can learn to become more persuasive and I have provided you a simple formula. Some elements of the formula you will already do well. Your challenge is to master every one of them.

If you take on the challenge to master all elements of the Pathfinder Model you should definitely read one or more of the classics in this space including Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, David Maister's *The Trusted Advisor* and Robert Cialdini's *Influence*.

To really get inside the heads of those you need to influence, to identify the risk in their decision making, I can recommend the unilaterally acclaimed *Thinking Fast and Slow* by Daniel Kahneman, *Decisive* by Chip and Dan Heath and *Why Decisions Fail* by Paul C Nutt. And if you like the MCI Model and want to get to know the ins and outs of it, contact me for a complimentary copy of my book *DECIDE How to Manage the Risk in Your Decision Making* or buy it online via my website or Amazon and other quality online book retailers.

Finally, you should grab a copy of my book, *Winning Conversations: How to turn red tape into blue ribbon* and check out my website and see if I am running one of my Winning Conversations Programs or get in touch with me about the one or two-day program I run in-house. Both help to transform advisers into the valuable assets today's complex environment demands.



About the Author

I have been working as an adviser internally and externally for 30 years throughout my journey from chemical engineer, to risk engineer to management consultant. I have worked with hundreds of organisations across the public and private sector and all sectors of industry. So I know that all advisers and those they advise face the same problem – giving and receiving valuable advice, succinctly and with clarity.

Because of my background in risk and particularly risk-based decision-making, I came to realise that we all genuinely have trouble thinking with clarity when making key decisions. Even with a solid risk assessment in front of them I witnessed poor decisions being made by senior leaders. That is, I failed to influence their decision appropriately.

This made me realise how critical and difficult the role of advisers is. It is not enough to provide decision makers with well thought through options, advisers must understand the elements that may prevent good decisions being made and break them down.

Over the years I researched and studied many authors, models and approaches in my quest to better understand how advisers can maximise their ability to persuade and I have found a method that works for me and for many, many others I have had the pleasure of teaching through my training and mentoring programs and during the course of consulting assignments.

I have authored many papers over the years and in 2015 I took the plunge and wrote my first book, *DECIDE How to Manage the Risk in your Decision Making*. My second book, *Winning Conversations: How to turn red tape into*



blue ribbon, teaches you practical methods to cut through with your advice and make the impact you want to make.

The more I use the MCI Decision Model on which *DECIDE* is based the more convinced I am of the value of a simple model that can be used day-to-day, in business and for personal decision-making. It never ceases to amaze me how we manage to trick ourselves into a poor decision so convincingly and easily.

Master the methods you have found in this paper and you will have significantly more control over your own destiny as you will be a persuasive adviser.

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