



*Bryan Whitefield is an independent management consultant and author.*

# THE BEST ADVISERS IN ORGANISATIONS LEAD ALONGSIDE

By **Bryan Whitefield**

Leading alongside. That's what the best advisers in organisations do. You can't dig it out of the ground, fly it, design it or deliver it for them. What you can do is lead them to make the best decision under the circumstances because they heed your advice.



**"The smartest advisers play the long game and lead alongside."**

UNFORTUNATELY, AND OFTEN DUE TO expediency, we use our authority to get things done. You get a short-term win; however, influencing is both a short-term and long-term game. The smartest advisers play the long game and lead alongside. People who lead alongside build truck-loads of trust. And trust is what is required for you to have the impact on the organisation you know you need to make.

In his seminal 1984 book, *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*, Robert Cialdini introduced his six principles of persuasion:

- **Reciprocation.** When someone gives us something, we want to return the favour. This is a fundamental human response.
- **Commitment and consistency.** People like to show they are consistent in their actions. For example, if you can persuade someone to take a small action to protect the environment, they are then more likely not to act in a way that would harm the environment.
- **Social proof.** We look to others for confirmation on what we should be doing or liking. Think fashion, music or management trends.
- **Liking.** If we like someone, we are much more likely to listen to them and do as they wish.
- **Authority.** We are more likely to comply when urged by an authority figure.
- **Scarcity.** We don't like missing out, which is why

retailers use promotional tags such as 'limited stock'.

If you take Cialdini's six principles of persuasion and consider them in terms of advising stakeholders in your organisation, you will see that there is a hierarchy to the six principles that you can apply to your influencing skills. Think about them in terms of 'push vs pull' strategies.

## Push strategies

Push strategies are about imposing your will through direction or instruction. At some level, however subtle, force is involved. And, if you know your physics, you know every force has an equal and opposite one, where force meets resistance. Consider these push persuasion principles:

- **Authority:** Having authority is definitely an advantage when seeking to persuade. Yet everyone is accountable to someone, and authority alone can't be relied on in all situations. Some people resent others imposing their authority and while they will usually comply, they may do so with little goodwill.
- **Scarcity:** Creating scarcity, for example through limiting your availability to provide your advice, may drive people to seize the chance to hear your advice but can leave them with a less-than-





positive attitude towards you, as you have forced their hand.

- **Social proof:** If you have developed a good reputation, people are more likely to listen to you, but they are not necessarily compelled by what you say.

### Pull strategies

Pull strategies are about motivating, sharing, informing, and encouraging people to listen to you and follow your advice. Consider these pull persuasion principles:

- **Reciprocity:** It can be as simple as shouting someone a cup of coffee, buying them a cake or sending them a link to a video they would appreciate. Doing something good or nice for someone inspires them to return the favour. Taking it a very large step further, giving them sage advice is a gift from which they may gain immeasurable benefits.
- **Commitment and consistency:** Rather than providing advice that asks someone to go the whole way in one big step, this is about starting small, showing value and building step-by-step.
- **Liking:** Take Cialdini's likeability one step further. Make yourself "desirable". That is, be both likeable AND make your advice as likeable as possible. If they like you and the picture you are painting of a future they desire, and if you have the credibility to convince them you can take them there, they are very likely to follow your advice.

**"Now, I have to add that the devil will be in the details because many of these matters have not been fleshed out."**

Advising is about influencing a stakeholder's decision. Nothing more, nothing less. The importance of great advice cannot be understated. Despite what we know about the causes of poor decision-making, such as our unconscious biases, we still accept uncomfortably high levels of poor decisions. As reported in an article by Dan Lovallo and Olivier Sibony in *McKinsey Quarterly*, a 2009 global survey of more than 2,200 executives showed that "... only 28 percent said that the quality of strategic decisions in their companies was generally good, 60 percent thought that bad decisions were about as frequent as good ones, and the remaining 12 percent thought good decisions were altogether infrequent".

The role of the strategic adviser in organisations is as important as ever. Play the long game, lead alongside, and increase your influence and your impact on key strategic decisions. ...

### About the author

*Bryan Whitefield is an independent management consultant who speaks to, facilitates for and mentors executives in organisations to increase their influence and improve decisions across their organisation. He is the author of Winning Conversations: How to turn red tape into blue ribbon and delivers his Persuasive Adviser Program across all sectors of the economy. For more information visit [www.bryanwhitefield.com](http://www.bryanwhitefield.com)*

