

Need to influence someone

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A fast and effective influencing model

Have you ever noticed that the most useful models and frameworks are often also the simplest? At least partly I'm sure that's because they're easy to remember and our brains are so full these days that complicated models are quickly forgotten.

I've been exposed to hundreds of different models in my professional career, and have found that one of the most persistently useful is also one of the simplest. However, as is often the case, simple does not mean simplistic.

The model I'm talking about is: "Think, Feel, Do". If you use this to analyse where your audience is starting from and where you want to get them to, you will be much better able to develop a clear plan to move them from one to the other. It's a quick, efficient and surprisingly effective way to plan for influencing others.

Try this out - it will take no more than five minutes. Grab a blank piece of paper and sketch out a small table with 'before' and 'after' labels down the left-hand side and 'think', 'feel', 'do' labels across the top.

Now think about your next important meeting.

Putting yourself in the shoes of your audience, first ask yourself: "what does my audience think about the topic we're discussing?". Keep in mind that the first question relates to what they think now, before the meeting has happened. When answering that question for yourself - and here's the critical nuance to getting the most out of this model - answer in the first-person voice of your audience. So, let's say you're meeting to discuss the need for more budget to be allocated to your current project and you know your audience thinks you've already overspent - in the 'before/think' section you might answer "I hope we don't need to give any more money to that project" or "they're spending a lot on that project, I hope it gives us the return we've been promised".

Here's the critical nuance to getting the most out of this model, answer in the first-person voice of your audience.

Then ask yourself: "what does my audience feel about the topic?". When answering this question in the 'before/feel' section, focus on describing their attitudes or emotions, not just their thoughts - so use words like frustrated, relieved, scared, confident and so on, again as if you were your audience. You might answer: "nervous about how much we're spending" or "anxious about whether our money is being well spent".

The third step is to ask: “what does my audience do about the topic?”. In the ‘before/do’ section you need to focus on things they say and actions they take. You might answer, in their voice: “talk to my colleagues about the return we hope to get from this project” or “show up at every steering committee meeting to monitor progress closely”.

Then repeat the process, asking the same three questions in relation to where you want to get them to by the end of the meeting: “what do I want my audience to think, feel and do as a result of this meeting?” For the ‘after/think’ section, you might answer: “I know we’ve already spent a lot on this project, but if we spend a little more we’re going to significantly increase our chances of getting the promised return”, in the ‘after/feel’ section you might answer: “I’m relieved we have such a clear idea of how this extra funding will help” and in the ‘after/do’ section you might answer: “approve the additional funding and tell my colleagues why it’s a good idea”.

Now you have a clear, succinct summary of where your audience is starting from and where you want to get them to. By forcing yourself to answer in their voice, you’ve already put yourself in their shoes. This automatically increases your ability to empathise with their starting position and figure out what is most likely to influence them in the way you want to.

Next ask yourself: “what do I need to say or do to get them to move from one to the other?”, or, more pointedly: “why should they?”.

You’ll find that coming up with a plan of action or a set of key messages to move them from the ‘before’ position to the ‘after’ position is far easier than it would otherwise have been.

This model works whether you’re meeting with one person or a large group. Though if a large group is made up of distinct sub-groups, you’ll benefit from repeating the ‘before’ questions for each sub-group and sometimes the ‘after’ questions as well – often you’ll want them all to come to the same ‘after’ position, but not always.

This is an efficient and effective way to plan for influencing others. It’s simple without being simplistic and the best thing is, it’s really easy to remember. I use it before all my most important meetings or whenever I need to influence others and always find it adds disproportionate value. I hope it helps you as much as it has helped me.

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