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Patterns Of Influence

by **Michael Lovas**
[AboutPeople](#)

As employers scramble to keep their key people on staff longer, a body of knowledge related to applied psychology has begun to be recognized in American executive suites. It links language with behavior and provides executives with a methodology for understanding, predicting and influencing behavior. This body of knowledge is the essential element of a smart pill for executives. With it, they're now discovering how their key people make decisions, what they value and, thus, how to motivate them.

Executives who develop internal programs without knowing how people make decisions could be sabotaging their own efforts. People are attracted to specific language patterns and words. Using the correct patterns and words effectively can create a message that's compelling.

In conducting face-to-face meetings—performance reviews, hiring interviews or peer meetings—managers who don't know the right questions to ask and who don't know how to hear language cues in others' conversations, could be missing out on one of the most influential psychological tools available. The cost of replacing a key employee is about 130 percent of the annual salary, so it pays to understand this body of knowledge and how to use it.

People make decisions—buying decisions, vacation decisions, professional decisions—based on strategies learned early in life



and, typically, remain unchanged throughout life. To learn how to influence someone or motivate a team, it helps to find out two things: what the people value and how they make decisions. Armed with those two things, an executive wields a very powerful one-two punch.

Here are the two questions to ask.

- *Why did you choose your current job?* This should point up if the person follows sequential directives and procedures or is driven by values. If it's procedures, the interviewee will answer by telling a story. These storytellers simply require a procedure to follow. If value-driven, people will list the values they expect to receive from the job. Find out more about the values by asking: "What do you mean by (the value)?" Provide the procedures or honor the values to win.

- *How do you know when your manager does a good job?* This question shows the strategy the person uses to make decisions. For instance, most people access information and learn visually. That's why PowerPoint presentations are ubiquitous at conferences and why there are so many whiteboards in meeting rooms. But internal programs are often presented in an auditory mode—words, not pictures. If candidates are made to listen and not given enough to see, only 30 percent will maintain interest. If a department simply circulates documents or spreadsheets, 97 percent of the recipients will lose interest.

The smart pill for skillfully motivating people is in these simple questions.

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