



TRANSCRIPT

Episode #38: How To Get Others To Advocate For You

You are listening to episode 38 of *Mastering The Power Skills*. It would be nice if all we had to do in the work world is propose that something get done and it magically gets done. But that's not how it happens, of course. In fact, we often have to rely on others to advocate for us. We need them to use a little of their own power and authority in order for our voice to be heard or for a change to be made.

In other words, we need other people to advocate for us. So why can that be so hard to do? And how can we get colleagues and bosses to advocate for us more? Come join us in this episode to learn the answers to both of those questions.

How much more could you accomplish if you were 25% or even 50% more influential and persuasive? Welcome to *Mastering The Power Skills*, the podcast that provides you with the tips, strategies, and the inspiration to

grow your own power and win support for your ideas. And now here's your host, C-suite leadership coach Kathy Dockry.

Hi, everyone. If you've been following me for a while, you know that my one-on-one coaching clients tend to be on the senior leadership teams of some very large global organizations. And that means they're located all over the US and other countries. That's a lot of geography for me to cover, so we rely a lot on video meetings now, post pandemic, and we keep the face to face meetings to a minimum. That saves them a lot of money and it saves me a lot of time.

Of course, before the pandemic I used to live on airplanes. And while it looked like a glamorous life to my friends and my family, after several decades of that, it takes its toll. But I still have a special fondness for seeing my clients in person. It gives me a chance to see them in action with their teams and with others. And it helps me pick up so much more nuance and insight about the culture of the companies in which they work.

I spent a lot of my professional life in offices around the world. And I still love to walk through the hallways and notice the behaviors that can make an office or an entire company unique.

Recently, I had the opportunity to meet with one of my clients in one of the many offices that that particular company has. And because it wasn't her home office, it made sense for her to have a few town hall type meetings with the employees who worked at that location. It gave them an opportunity to get to know her better and it gave her the opportunity to learn more about what was on their minds.

One of those meetings was with an employee affinity group and I took advantage of the opportunity to sit in the back and listen to how things unfolded. It was really a great experience for me. And not just because I was so impressed with how my client connected with the group and thoughtfully answered the questions that were asked of her. I was impressed with the group itself.

The participants did a great job in asking important questions. And in speaking truth to power about the dynamics in that workplace that they were navigating, and why those dynamics are sometimes challenging. I was particularly struck by how many of the questions were about how they could get their voices effectively heard in a large organization.

And that's one of the recurring questions for us in our work lives, isn't it? When we're at the beginning of our careers or when we're in middle management and still several layers or more below the level at which big decisions get made, how can we speak up in a way that makes a difference?

Because let's face it, we can be surrounded by peers and bosses who want to play it safe. We can talk to them all we want, and they may even wish us well. But will they move into action?

There are a lot of people in the work world who actually think the best way to get ahead is not to speak up or to make change. And if we're trying to get heard, but we're surrounded by people like that, what can we do? Who's going to carry our message to senior decision makers?

Solving this dilemma is one of my passions and my mission as a leadership coach. Because this is what I believe, there are a lot of talented people and great ideas that get stuck at the lower levels of organizations. I'm always thinking about how we can supply people at that level, and every level, with the tools to get heard.

Providing them with a forum, like that affinity group, in which to speak up is an important and valuable first step. But supplying them with the tools to navigate the complex inter dynamics of an organization, well, that's true empowerment. That's one of the reasons why I started to focus on the power skills of influence, persuasion and presence in the first place.

These are the skills that you can use to get people to pay attention to you when you speak up. And these are the skills that you need to successfully

propose ideas and move them forward. So that's an awfully big mission that I'm on and there isn't enough time in a single podcast episode to cover it all. But let's talk about one question that I heard raised by that affinity group. It's one that I've gotten before from listeners of this podcast.

And that question is, how do you get someone else to advocate for you when you yourself don't feel empowered? That's a really good question. And there are some really effective tips I can give you to help you out. But it's also a tricky question. The answers are not entirely straightforward and it does take a little time.

It would be great if we lived in a world where all you had to do was to wait for someone else to notice how talented you are or what a great idea you have. And it would be great if we lived in a world where all you had to do is ask your boss to pitch senior leadership on a great idea that you have. But while these things occasionally do happen, and certainly we would love to have them happen more frequently, for the most part we don't live in that world.

We generally don't live in a world where people move into action on their own. They instead tend to focus on what's in front of them, and take the path of least resistance. Now, I'm not pointing this out to discourage you, but before we get to what you have to do to get others to advocate for you, we first have to clearly understand the situation we find ourselves in

because only then can we come up with good solutions. Solutions that actually can work versus ones that generally won't.

So let's look at why the people around us can be so hard to move into action in the first place. Why it can be hard to get them to advocate for us. Now, we could just blame it on their ignorance or their laziness. We could even blame it on their bad intent or their bad character. And certainly when we're hanging around just talking among ourselves, these are the sorts of things that come up, right?

But you know what? None of those things actually is very common. And playing the blame game can be fun, and it allows us to vent, so I've certainly done it myself. But it also keeps us on the sidelines. It disempowers us versus empowers us. However, there are two very common reasons why the people around us remain passive and don't move into action on our behalf.

The first reason is time and focus. And that makes sense, of course. Almost everyone I see in the work world has too much on their plate. And they often have a big deadline that they're worried might not be met. Taking on one more thing to do, can feel close to impossible. I've been there before. And you know what? You've been there too.

It's a very natural and human feeling. And it can lead you to not always focusing on the things that are important and valuable in the long run. We're so caught up with the things that seem urgent instead.

Now, the second common reason why people don't move into action on our behalf is, again, very natural and human. And the reason is discomfort and fear. Now, I'd like to gently suggest at this point, that this is where you may have a blind spot. I'm saying that not just because I'm a pretty experienced expert on influence and persuasion, I'm also saying that because I've had that blind spot too. And it's something I have to continually challenge myself about.

I think we all have this tendency when we're looking at our bosses, or we're looking at someone with power, or we're looking at anyone who seems to have more privilege than we do, we look at those people and we forget that it's a rare person who has inner confidence.

So, sure, the person you're looking at, your boss let's say. That person may be more experienced or higher up the food chain than you are. They might be a little bit more skillful, and a little bit more respected than you are.

But inside, they can worry about the same things you worry about. They can worry about looking awkward or stupid. They can worry about whether

they're meeting their boss's expectations or not. They can worry that they might fail at the next big task that they've been asked to do.

This is the way I think about it, I think about it in terms of video games, which I haven't played in a while. But when I did, every time I played a video game and I mastered the level that I was playing at, what happened next? Well, after the fireworks and the celebration, I entered a whole new level. It's a level that's many orders of magnitude more challenging than the last level that I got through, with a whole new set of expectations and risks that I hadn't encountered before.

And that's exactly what happens every time someone gets promoted in the work world. Those of us below that person, well, we see the status, the increased power and, of course, the money that that person may get. These are the external things about a promotion. But we can have a blind spot when it comes to the internal things. The feelings and emotions that can get triggered in the person who is in the bigger role.

It's a rare person who doesn't continue to feel some level of anxiety, loss of confidence, insecurity, and even fear because this is the human condition, my friends. It's just that the higher up you go, the better you become at masking that. But it's always true that you continue to have these feelings, unless you're the occasional and really exceptional leader who is willing to do the deeper work of self-awareness and self-mastery. And well, I guess

these difficult feelings might not be there for a leader who's truly a sociopath.

But I've been around a gazillion leaders in my life. And I can count on one hand the number who might have been in that category, and who knows for sure? The reality is, most leaders are simply just normal human beings, whatever the character, or skills or experiences. And they're subject to the same thoughts and emotions that all the rest of us have.

Now, you might be saying to yourself, who cares about all this? Who cares if my boss or someone else with more authority than me gets distracted by their work commitments? And who cares if they sometimes suffer from feelings of anxiety, or a loss of confidence or insecurity, or even fear? They're still better off than I am.

They're in a position where they can bring new talent and new ideas forward, and therefore they should. And I'm not in that position, and I need to rely on them to do the right thing. And you know what? You're absolutely right, if the measuring stick we're using is fairness. Of course, it's fair that people with more authority should use that position to help others with less authority. And of course, it feels unfair when they don't.

But what if the measuring stick we're using is effectiveness? In other words, do we want to be right? Or do we actually want to get a particular result to happen? Do we want to be effective? Because the only way to get the results we want is to have a clear understanding of what we're dealing with in the first place. And when we're trying to get our bosses or people in authority to do what we want, we have to figure out, one, what's keeping them from doing something. And two, how can we remove that obstacle?

They're not going to figure that out on their own. We have to figure it out on our own. And in a certain way, that's fair too. We're the ones who want something, so we need to be the ones to figure that out. Do I wish that we had a work world that was filled with the leaders we deserve? Of course I do, but we're also stuck with the work world we actually have.

It's a world that's filled with leaders who generally are normal, well-intentioned people, like you, who are subject to all the flaws and challenges of being a human being in the world. We're not perfect and our bosses and colleagues aren't, either. So this is the challenge we're facing when we're in a large organization and we need someone else to advocate for us.

What we're really facing is a problem of inertia. We want to motivate and energize someone to do something for us. For example, advocate for an idea that we have or provide us with a good job opportunity or promotion, or mentor us or make a change to the organization. And we have to figure

out a way of getting the decision makers to overcome their natural inertia, all those various human feelings of distraction, overwhelm, stress or fear, so that they will do what we want them to do.

Now, normally, we try to do this through arguments based on logic and fairness. But if those are the only tools we use, then I can tell you now our win rate won't be very high. At best, you're going to see a 50% win rate. And I suspect if we were going to study this issue scientifically, we would see that using logic and fairness alone results in us being successful less than 50% of the time.

But there are ways of having a much higher win rate. If you've listened to this podcast before, then you probably already have a good idea about what some of those ways are, but it's important to repeat this advice because we tend to forget it. We all tend to be action oriented in the work world. We get laser focused on the issue or the problem that we're dealing with and we forget to pause, take a breath, and think strategically about the problem that we're trying to solve.

So how do you get to that higher rate? Well, keep those arguments around logic and fairness, but add a few more tools to your toolkit. There are two main categories that are at your disposal. The first category of tools is the one that I call the power of skills, no surprise there, right? Because that's

what this podcast is all about, sharing all the tips and techniques that comprise the skills of influence, persuasion, and presence.

And just to recap, influence skills are the ones that help us get taken seriously. Persuasion skills are the ones that help our ideas to get taken seriously. And presence skills are all the various ways in which we help others understand and see us for who we are. The more you build your power skills, the better your win rate gets.

That's all it takes, folks. And it doesn't get much simpler than that. It's like going to the gym. The more you exercise, the stronger you get. It's just that in the case of the power skills, the more you grow these skills of influence, persuasion and presence, the more your colleagues and bosses start listening to you and supporting you. And isn't that what we all want in our work lives?

If you're new to this podcast and you're wondering how to grow your own power skills, then definitely go back to our original episodes and all the episodes since. You'll hear some tips and techniques that you can start to use right now. And also, be sure to keep on listening as we continue, because I'm going to continue to share even more tips and more techniques. Plus, I'm always happy to answer questions from listeners about their particular situations.

So that's one way of increasing your win rate. The second way of increasing your win rate is a very simple guideline that we all learned when we were kids, but we tend to forget about it in the work world. That is when you want something, you should offer something. In other words, we have to give in order to get.

Now that seems pretty obvious, doesn't it? But when we're in a hierarchy, which is really what almost every work organization is, we lose track of this principle. It's almost as if we believe that we're still in a family setting where the grownups have the power and they need to be using that power to help us out.

But our work world is not a family. It's just a collection of human beings who are trying to do things and accomplish goals in an organized way. And most human beings, including you and me, have a lot going on in our lives. We don't tend to go volunteering all over the place to do things, even if those things are good things to do.

We need a strong reason for dropping all the other stuff we're doing to help people out. But if someone is generous with us, we tend to be generous back. That's the emotional and psychological dynamic called reciprocity. And reciprocity kicks in even if what we're given by someone is very small.

Generosity doesn't have to be big or showy. There's something about even a small instance of generosity that kind of touches our heart. That's true for the tough guys, as well as the softies.

When someone does something nice for us, we make space in our lives to be more helpful to them. Now, if you're early in your career or you don't yet have a lot of authority or influence, how do you get reciprocity going? What can you give to a more powerful person in the hierarchy? Well, when I was starting out, I did two things.

The first thing was that I asked powerful people for their advice and perspective. That kind of sounds like an imposition, right? But it actually isn't. The research indicates quite strongly that when we ask someone for their insight, what we're doing is giving them a gift. They feel appreciated and valued.

Of course, the advice that they give you might be good, but it also might be terrible. There's a lot of advice that I've been given over the years where I said to myself, hmm, and then I discreetly ignored it. The point in asking people for their advice is less about the advice. It's more about showing them generosity.

The other thing you can do to create reciprocity is to volunteer to help the other person out with a problem. And what kind of help are we talking about? Well, it could be anything that you're good at, I'll give you a couple of examples from my own life. In my case, I'm pretty good at sizing up a situation and figuring out what's really happening to create the problem. I guess you could say I'm really good at assessing or analyzing things.

So I would sometimes go up to a more powerful person and say, you know that problem you're having over there getting things to work, right? Here's what I think might be causing it. And here are a few ideas you might want to try out. I wouldn't be heavy handed about it, just make a suggestion and leave it at that. But sometimes those suggestions were pretty helpful.

And another thing I would do with powerful people is to share some insight on a dynamic that they might be finding hard to understand. For example, I used to be part of a US company that was owned by a British company. Our British parent would sometimes struggle to understand why those crazy Americans were acting in certain ways. It could be difficult for them to deal with the management team over in the States, even though everybody was well-intended.

So I would help them out. I'd help explain the differences between the two cultures and I'd give them some ideas as to how they could avoid some of those bumps in the road. There's also the time I worked in a mining,

smelting and refining company. And as you can imagine, it was a very male oriented culture. My bosses weren't bad people, but they could struggle to be effective leaders with women and they needed more perspective and insight.

So again, I would help them out. I would discreetly help them to understand the dynamics that they weren't sensitive to. And I'd give them some workable ideas that might help them out. Did I have to do any of this? Well, of course not. And would it have been better for my British bosses or the leaders at the mining company to already have known all this stuff? Of course it would have, but I decided to be generous and help them out.

And you know what happened as a result? They started to look after me because they were grateful for the help. They began to take my ideas more seriously. They started to mentor me more. And they gave me bigger opportunities, opportunities that allowed me to have even more of a positive impact on the organization and to help even more people.

If I had just sat back and let them struggle with their problems, if I had just said, "Why can't they do better at their jobs," no one would have faulted me. But also, if I had just done that, a lot of important and meaningful changes wouldn't have happened in those organizations. I got the chance to make change happen.

And that brings us back to what leadership really is. At its core leadership requires us to figure out how to get something done. In other words, whatever the challenge is, what are the most effective ways of making change happen? And that's a lesson we can start learning at any point in our career, no matter what our position is in the hierarchy.

If our strategy for getting our voices and ideas heard is not working, if it keeps getting stalled, well, there's a message in there. A leader says this is a sign that I need to figure out more effective ways of getting something done. And then he or she looks for those effective ways, learns some of them, and starts using them.

And if what's not working for you is getting other people to advocate for you, that's not only a sign that those other people need to be more insightful and overcome their inertia. It's also a sign that your methods are probably not very effective. So start raising your game, learn some of the skills that will make you more effective in motivating and energizing those people to overcome their inertia.

A lot of us have heard that expression, "be the change, you want to be in the world," right? It sounds good, but when we say it I don't think we always realize the implications of that. The implication is right there. It's that we

need to go first. We need to be the change. In other words, if the change we want is for other people to be more generous with their time or to be more open to doing what we need them to do, then we need to go first.

Is that fair? Well, arguably it isn't. But, and it's an important but, it is undoubtedly the path of a leader. A true leader always goes first, no matter how low his or her position is in the hierarchy. And for that matter, a true leader goes first, or should go first, no matter how high in the hierarchy he or she is. We have to do the hard work first, even if we secretly think others should be doing it.

So all right, all you leaders out there. I know you have the willingness and the aptitude for the hard work of leadership. Now just be sure that you're honing your skills as well. In the meantime, I hope you have an awesome week ahead, and I'll see you in our next episode.

Hey there, would you like some personal guidance about how to use the power skills of influence, persuasion, or presence in a particular situation in your workplace? Well, if so, we've got your back. Just send us a note explaining your situation to powerskills@significagroup.com. We'll drop that email address in the show notes. We'll feature your inquiry in an upcoming episode, keeping your identity anonymous, of course, and make sure you have some tips and strategies to help you navigate your particular situation skillfully.

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