



## TRANSCRIPT

### **Episode # 45: Favorite Influence and Persuasion Strategies from Top-Tier Leaders**

You are listening to episode 45 of *Mastering The Power Skills*. Do you know someone in the workplace who always seems to win support for their ideas and initiatives? And if you do know someone like that, have you ever wondered what their favorite go-to strategies are for winning that support? Well, wonder no more, in this episode I'm interviewing three different leaders, each seen by their bosses and colleagues as highly skilled in advocating for ideas that have added value to the various businesses in which they've worked. It's a veritable masterclass in winning trust and credibility, and you won't want to miss this.

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.

Well welcome, everyone, and what a treat this episode has been for me. One of the benefits of having a lengthy corporate career and then being a leadership coach for a lengthy time as well is that I get to see a wide array of talent over numerous geographies and industries and business cycles. And my eyes always light up when I see someone who is earning trust and respect and who is a natural at the power skills of influence, persuasion and presence. The three guests who joined me today are each great examples of that.

I chose these guests in particular because they're all special in other ways as well. Let me quickly explain what makes them unique because I think that enhances the value of the recommendations that you're going to be hearing from them.

So first, they've each been in a lot of organizations during their careers, often at some of the biggest names in the business world at pivotal times in the existence of that company. But not just that, they've also been in smaller organizations at different points of their evolution. So today's guests truly have a wide perspective on all the varieties of organizational life.

Secondly what makes them special is that they all started their careers as functional leaders, although they've often expanded into operational roles. So why is that important? Well think about it, functional leaders face a much tougher challenge in getting a seat at the table when the important decisions are being made. They also often are advocating for ideas or initiatives that might be seen as unnecessary or inconvenient to those on the business side.

So if you're a functional leader with a reputation for winning enthusiastic support for your ideas, then you also are a rock star at influence and persuasion, you just have to be. And the power skill strategies that you're using have just as much value on the operational side as they do on the functional side, so we all can learn from this.

Thirdly, each of these guests have a deep learning orientation. They're hardwired to be curious and they're always challenging themselves to think and do things from an out of the box perspective. They actually like learning from their mistakes as you'll hear from some of them. And they're not overly attached to being either conventional or trendy. Instead, they're always looking for the best or most effective way of doing things, and the advice that they share in this episode reflects that.

And finally, they're special because they each have a very thoughtful way about thinking about what's worked and what hasn't worked for them when they're trying to win influence and persuade others. And that thoughtfulness means that they can clearly explain their strategies to other people and are good guides to those of us who are strengthening our own skills in that respect.

So, have I piqued your interest? My guests today are Claire Hart, the newly appointed chief legal officer at AI chip maker Groq, and formerly at Google, Blizzard, and other companies in the tech world. Lynne Oldham, who is an influential and award-winning CHRO who is currently chief people officer at Stash. And Jim Arnold, who most recently played a COO role at Markup Specialty.

I'll tell you a little more about Lynne and Jim later in this episode, but let's first jump into my interview with Claire Hart. Claire and I were first introduced when I was giving a talk on the power skills to professional women in the tech world. And it soon became apparent to me that in the companies where she worked she was just as valued for her business judgment as she was for her legal skills.

I noticed whatever company she worked in, whether big or small, that she was being asked to lead initiatives that were non legal in nature. Her roles often required interactions with some very high powered boards, and I noticed how

some of those very well names in the Silicon Valley and entertainment world were taking notice of her too.

It was clear to me that she was a natural in terms of winning trust and credibility in the business world. In the interview that follows, Claire reminds us of the foundation you need to build to have that credibility. And she also shares two questions that help you create the alignment you need to effectively steer people to the right outcome.

---

Kathy: So thanks for joining us on this episode, Claire. You have some great strategies for us today on influence and persuasion that have served you pretty well.

And before we get to the actual tips, could you tell us a little bit about what those strategies have done for you? And by that, I mean that while your career titles are consistent with the titles of being a chief legal officer, which you are now, you've actually played a much broader role in many of your jobs. And that tells me that you've earned a lot of credibility and influence in your roles.

So why don't you share with us some of the non-legal issues that you've tackled and led in some of your jobs?

Claire: Sure. So in my role previous to the current one I have, I had official responsibility across the people functions, partnerships, and for a time IT as well. And so all of the issues in those areas. But even informally, one example is that at the beginning of the Covid outbreak I was asked to take on the job of thinking holistically about how to protect a global business and all of its functions in dealing with the pandemic. And so that sort of touched everything from facilities

—

Kathy: And that was a pretty major global company, if you mentioned that.

Claire: Yeah, for sure.

Kathy: I'm sure that our listeners would recognize the name.

Claire: Yeah, at Blizzard Entertainment.

Kathy: And I remember you were working right across the organization globally with all the different aspects of the organization coordinating.

Claire: Right. And it was a 100% in office sort of organization. So moving into the home and making sure the business continuation succeeded was really important.

Kathy: Yeah, for sure. Yeah. And then also in your prior role, you ended up having that segue into the people as an asset side of things, I guess.

Claire: Right. So including HR and recruiting. So all aspects of that, as well as working not just as the legal person on deals, but also in a partnerships capacity as well.

Kathy: Yeah. So after spending time, decades for me, in many different management teams and boards, I know that you don't get a seat at the table in the way that you've gotten without being skilled at influence and persuasion. So let's talk about some of your go-to strategies when you are getting ready to have that level of influence that you have had.

So your first tip has to do with the fact that it's hard to have a strong influence unless you have a broad perspective on the business. Now, that's a pretty, in

some ways, obvious statement, but it's so important. Tell us a little bit more about that. Unpack it for us.

Claire: Sure. Well, in my primary role in the legal department, I noticed really early on that because every part of the business needs support from the legal function, you get this really unique view across all of the different pieces. And you can really become aware of themes and threads that are happening, and then use that to your advantage to help shine a light on or solve problems that may not be obvious to people working more within a certain function.

And so that's something that I have used to help be involved in projects that might not obviously be something where I would necessarily either be involved or drive.

Kathy: People want to hear what you have to say, because you are saying things that are relevant to the business and the perspective.

Claire: Yeah. And you can sort of say, I'm seeing this thing come up across a couple of different areas in the work that my team is doing. And I think it's coming from this problem or issue or opportunity, and here's an idea for how we



could bring a group together, for example, to try and tackle it. And it might not be obvious to others.

And I think the G&A functions in particular can have that level of access to information, but anyone can gather it, because you can –

Kathy: Yeah, so if you're on the business side and you're in a particular unit or a particular department, yeah, your first question is going to be, so how do I gain more perspective on the areas of the company I'm not familiar with?

Claire: Right. And it's, I think, the same mechanism, but it takes more going out and getting the information yourself, which means having conversations. So find a person in a different part of the business and make a connection and ask what they're working on.

And then the more you do that, the bigger your network is as you tackle problems, but also the more you come to understand the dynamics of the different pieces of the business. And then you can bring that objectivity and information into the work that you're doing to be able to not just look within your function, but to be able to see how it fits into the greater puzzle.

Kathy: Yes, exactly. And we were talking earlier about this and you made this great point, which I think applies to all of us, and some of us naturally gravitate to it and others of us don't. But being curious is a wonderful asset. And if you just are constantly curious about what people are doing and why they're doing it and what the overall goal is of doing it, wow, you really ramp up your own perspective and your own insights and you're better equipped to come up with really good ideas that will serve the business well.

Claire: Yeah, and I don't think you need to identify all of those folks, but as you have conversations, you can say, who else do you think it would be good for me to meet and know? Or what else should I be reading and understanding? And so when I have that initial conversation, I always try to end by asking that question. What more can I do to learn? Who else should I meet? If you have things I should read to understand your function, can you send them to me? That way you're continuing the conversation and gathering additional pieces.

Kathy: And here's the other thing that I think we often forget, I'm sure that you don't forget it, but I think when people are starting this sort of thought about having more conversations, they worry about imposing on people. But people love to be asked about what they're doing and why they're doing it. They really do. Yes, they're busy and you have to pick your times appropriately, but you're actually deepening the relationship when you ask them for the information.

So number one, the benefit is you get the information, but number two is that you're really creating stronger bonds when you apply that curiosity to everybody around you.

Claire: I think that's right. I think people want to be seen, right? That's a natural human desire. And so when you're asking someone to tell them more about how they fit into the organization that you're a part of together, they're excited, usually I have found, to tell you that.

Kathy: Yeah, I think you're right. So that's a strong reminder that you have to build a strong foundation as well before you can even apply your influencing and persuasion skills. You have to understand what's important to the overall company, kind of like the lens that a CEO has. I mean, obviously you're not in the CEO position. You may not need to understand it at the same depth, but you generally want to get that broader understanding.

When we were getting ready for this interview, you also shared with me two great questions that you ask to get better alignment with colleagues and decision makers. And I love the topic of alignment. I think it's really a crucial thing for doing well in our jobs, but I'm not going to talk all about it myself. Why don't you talk about these questions that you use? Because I think they're killer questions.

Claire: Sure. So a lot of times I get asked a very specific question. Someone will come to me and they're going to have formulated a question they think they can get my advice on. And I usually restrain from starting to just answer the question because I have found that sometimes the question isn't exactly what they're trying to understand. And so what I usually do is say, well, tell me what is it you or the business or both are trying to achieve? So let's take a step back and look at this sort of together.

And then maybe it is the right question. Or maybe we find that it's a slightly different question or a longer conversation that then is more rich and probably we reach a better outcome because we've started from that place of understanding. So I think there's a real instinct to want to just answer questions and get your checklist of items done for the day.

Kathy: Particularly we lawyers have that tendency.

Claire: For sure. And people want to come to you with a specific, they've been told you come to a lawyer with a question, right?

Kathy: Yeah.

Claire: But they often don't really know exactly what the question is. And so I think it's good to resist just answering.

Kathy: Yeah. Yeah, and I think that's true whether it's a lawyer or a business person, for all of us, that stepping back and saying, "What are we really trying to achieve here," helps both parties get aligned on, is it something that's much more complex than we originally thought? Or is it something much more simple than we originally thought?

You need that sort of perspective and alignment before you can really come up with a good solution. And so there's another question too that you ask, and I love this one.

Claire: Yeah, so sometimes that leads to the question or a discussion around a topic of sort of who are we and what do we believe in? So sometimes I'll get asked –

Kathy: Oh, tell me how that works. Yeah.

Claire: Yeah, sometimes I get asked to answer a specific question that really needs an anchoring in a point of view that could vary depending upon the business, the time at the business, or what we are trying to do. And so a lot of times what I'll say is, let's form a foundation of understanding about our philosophy or who we are and what we believe in. And from that framework, the answers will be easier.

I recently was asked two separate questions in the same topic that were diametrically opposed. And so what I said was, all right, let's take a level up. Let's figure out an overall strategy. And then those answers will become very clear once we decide on what that strategy is. And so will all the other questions in that category. And so I think if you don't do that, you can end up taking inconsistent positions or strategies or decisions because you don't see how they interact.

Kathy: Yes. Inconsistent and, worst case, decisions that might actively sort of undermine what the overall goal really is, right? Because you're not looking at that sort of broadly. Who are we and what's our philosophy here?

Claire: Right. And I think as leaders, we can spin the business or people that work with us and for us because they're chasing a specific answer that you've given to them, a direction that's outside of that sort of overall picture.

Kathy: Yeah, that's very true. And I particularly love these questions, which I sometimes ask, but I probably don't ask them enough because if you achieve this kind of high level alignment early on with colleagues, then you don't have to actually exert a lot of effort down the road to persuade them when particular issues arise.

It's made your life easier for you. You don't have to really sort of try to herd cats. You're all, to some extent, on the same page already. And I like these questions because they also help everyone else as well. So one of the things I noticed early on in my own leadership journey when I was looking at leaders that I admired is that what made them great was that they were always creating clarity and alignment for everyone.

It's like they had this capability to suddenly light things up for people, the sort of things that people were wrestling with and they were stuck on. And then all of a sudden the leader would come along and shine this light and everyone's clear and everyone's aligned and now they can move forward productively. It's a real act of leadership, really good effective leadership to be able to do that.

And that's another reason why I think your questions are really killer in that respect. It's not only good for influence and persuasion, but you're playing, I think,

a much more mature and sophisticated role as a leader when you ask these questions.

Claire: Yeah, I think so too.

Kathy: Well, thank you so much for joining us today, Claire. And I'm looking forward to us connecting again at some point so we can get a few more of your insights on the program.

Claire: Well, thank you for having me.

Kathy: Okay, take care. Bye bye.

Claire: You too.

---

Kathy: One of my takeaways from my interview with Claire is that she is probably so good at what she does because she's always looking at the issues she's dealing with as if she were the CEO. That's a great perspective to take when you're advocating for an idea. It helps you to better explain to others what the value of



the idea is to the overall business. And if you do a good job of that, you will always win support.

Now, let's hear from Lynne Oldham who is currently the chief people officer at Stash and who also sits on boards and otherwise advises other startups. Lynne has had HR leadership roles in a variety of other well-known companies, including an amazing ride as chief people officer at Zoom during the pandemic when it seemed like Zoom was at the center of all of our lives and was experiencing the challenge of hyper growth.

Lynne and I first met decades ago when along with Jim Arnold we were all young leaders at Castrol and then BP. Despite the inevitable bureaucracy at the global energy world, Lynne, Jim and I shared an entrepreneurial spirit and a deep belief that credibility didn't come from our roles alone, instead it was our job to earn credibility. As a result, each of us consistently won support for major innovative initiatives, often in a way that surprised our peers.

Both Lynne and Jim went on to put those power skills to good use in the careers they went on to have at other companies. In my interview with her, Lynne shares her strategies for earning trust and credibility quickly when she joins a company, as well as a nifty persuasion tactic she uses when she's advocating for a new initiative.

---

Kathy: So, Lynne, when I was thinking of doing this episode, I immediately knew that I wanted you to be one of the guests. And our audience probably already knows why, because I've covered some of the highlights of your career. You've really had an impressive range of leadership experience. And that is over, number one, a variety of industries. Two, a variety of company cultures. And three, a variety of business cycles.

And by that, for my audience, I want to say from mature companies, to startups, to companies in stages of hyper growth. And if you've ever heard of the word Zoom out there, you'll know what I mean. So we're very lucky to have you join us here today.

Lynne: Thank you, Kathy. I love talking to you. I love this topic. I think we could talk about it all day. But I'm happy to start with whatever you want to talk about.

Kathy: Okay, great. So I'm thinking, I'm having this image of you walking through the door of one of the many different roles that you've had. And you walk in that door, what is one of the first things that you think about in order to build influence and credibility in a new company, in a new role?

Lynne: I think about making sure that I use my expertise to establish a track record. I want to make sure that I'm moving fast, but not breakneck, and putting myself in a position where I'm establishing relationships in the organization. I really want to build trust with the people around me by doing great work, by having great relationships. Those are my key, my two like pillars of strength.

And then I would say when you do that, the executives around you, your peers, your boss, their boss, they're more likely to support initiatives that you bring forward because they see you as someone who's successful. They see you as someone who can carry messages across with your relationships that you've built. So I think it's really about having that successful delivery record and having the relationships.

And I can tell you a time where that really, I mean, it's worked for me a lot. But let me tell you, I went to work for a French bank in the United States. And that's a tough sell because the French, they like the French. I mean, it's just like us, right? They know who they know and they know the schools you've come from and all of that. So relationship building was key there.

And so I went about making friends with everyone that I could, not just on my side of the pond, but on the other side of the pond. And through that, I actually

had an expat become my boss. And I did some really good things and the French saw the good things. And when it came time to think about who would succeed him, as they roughly worked three years in the same job and then they moved to the next assignment.

Kathy: Right.

Lynne: As we came to the end of the three years, about two years in, he said, “I really want you to go and live in France and work projects on that side of the pond.” So I did. I took the role and I got the role because of the relationships, because of the work I’d done.

And honestly, Kathy, the job they had me do while I was there, I almost would tell you that I had no business doing it because my experience before I got there was really what I’ll call back office HR. So the functional pieces. And I went there and they asked me to create a talent identification program and career development for the entire globe for the corporate and investment bank.

Kathy: Wow.

Lynne: Yeah.

Kathy: First of all, a very, very fun job, but also a very, you know, it's a high stakes job as well. So they must have had a lot of confidence in you.

Lynne: Well, they did. And it was because, like I said, I didn't just form relationships in the US. I formed relationships with not only the French, but my German peers, my Japanese peers, folks that sat in Hong Kong. So they weren't hesitant about giving me a role that would cross all those geographies because they'd seen me at work and they knew that I could convince, cajole, influence my peers.

Kathy: Sway.

Lynne: Sway my peers. So that's where I'd say all of that was critical. Establishing that credibility, those relationships early really do a lot for you in making sure that you are in the mix on really interesting and important work.

Kathy: And there's something I'd like to circle back to and pull out a little bit from the first part of your answer, which I really liked. You were saying how important it is to deliver from the beginning. And that's something I think that a

lot of people don't always pay enough attention to when they're entering into a new role.

There's this tendency to want to, I don't know, show the additional value that you can bring. You want to say, here's all the new stuff, to some extent, that I can give you and help you out with. And the fact is you might be able to do all that new stuff, but you haven't yet actually delivered on the stuff that's just the normal expectations of your role. And that's the unsexy area for a lot of high powered people.

Lynne: Yeah, but critical.

Kathy: But critical, absolutely. I don't think you ever get to have a seat at the table and present your ideas until you've also shown that you can do the mundane work of your job as well.

Lynne: Completely, completely agree. Yeah, the job that I got hired to do was not sexy. It was the back office of HR, which I love, don't get me wrong. It was not anything like this talent identification and development system for the globe for the corporate investment bank, right?

Kathy: Exactly.

Lynne: Just because of how different and sexy it was, I was dying inside when they said that's what I was going to do. Because, like I said, I don't know that I would have picked me to do it, but I did it and it still exists today.

Kathy: Exactly. And my experience has been having seen other people sort of plucked out and given some really high-powered role is generally that's not a matter of happenstance. You're being carefully watched. People, even if you don't have the understanding that you can do it, the people around you already know that you do.

Lynne: I think if I were not being funny about it and actually thought about it, which I do, it's the resourcefulness that they saw in me because as soon as I got that role, I read every book, article, met anybody who was at all smart on this topic, because they weren't giving me budget and they didn't give me headcount, so I had to figure it out. So I do believe it was not only the relationships and the past work, but they saw that resourcefulness in me and that really did get me that opportunity.

Kathy: That's great. So once you've established that strong reputation for delivery and have a foundation of credibility, what do you think about next when you want to pitch leadership on a new idea or initiative?

Lynne: I definitely want to understand what the overall strategic objectives are of the company. So I make it my business to know the business that I've landed in and really understand not only what they want to do, but how they want to get there. Because I think that's really important to making sure that what I pitch aligns to that.

Kathy: Right.

Lynne: The other part of that is really understanding my executives. So my boss, what do they want? How do they want to think about supporting the initiatives that are the company initiatives? How do they want to contribute to the big picture? And then I tailor my approach around what's top of mind for the executive that aligns with those company goals.

So I really want to speak their language. I want to address their specific concerns. Because if I go with something over here in the left field that doesn't have even a tangent, it's not going to work. So my example where I didn't do this well was –



Kathy: Ooh, tell us.

Lynne: I don't like to talk about the failures, but it was a learning, right? We learn something from every failure. So I started to work for this company and the CEO, I had full access, and we were talking about DEI. It was the early days of DEI. And I never took the time to fully understand what he meant by it. I knew what I meant by it. But I didn't –

Kathy: And by the way, could you just sort of give the meaning of those initials?

Lynne: Oh, sure. I apologize.

Kathy: Yeah, some of our listeners actually might not know it because it's so American in origin.

Lynne: I'm with you. Okay, so DEI is diversity, equity, inclusion.

Kathy: Yeah.

Lynne: And so I sat down with the CEO to give him the plan or what I was thinking and he pretty much backed me down because he was very confident in what we'd been doing already with Spanish language speakers in some of the branches, the retail operations that we had. He thought that that was good enough.

So once I started to hear his point of view, my big bang approach was just too much for him to really consider. But I did learn in that interchange that he was a lover of data. He wanted more data. So what I took out of that is I needed to learn, obviously, what I described to you is I needed to learn more about him, how he thought about it.

And then once I learned that data was important, I was able to get some data and show him that not just the places that we had retail operations that he was thinking of were the only places that we needed to be Spanish speaking. There were other neighborhoods, areas that we had retail operations that were really equally critical, if not more critical.

So it was not until I returned with what he was craving, what he thrived on, that I was able to move my initiative forward. So I went in without all my homework done, which was, like I said, a learning, right?

Kathy: We've all been there. We've all learned that lesson. And different leaders are going to have different things that will make it easier for them to understand an idea that you're pitching them and why it might be of value. So you have to take the time to figure out what's going to work for this particular person. In this case, it was data, which is always a helpful thing.

But sometimes it's not even sufficient in and of itself, because if you're asking someone to give you approval for an initiative, they've got to spend some political capital as well, right? And when you're at that level, you're thinking, I don't mind making wise investments in my political capital, but I don't want to spend it willy-nilly. So you have to really help them understand why it would make sense and what the payoff is of doing that.

Lynne: And you can rest assured I never showed up again in his office without data, without a lot of data.

Kathy: Without a lot of data. Okay, so finally, you have, I think, a really fantastic tip for how to handle things if you sense that leadership might not yet be willing to agree to your idea at an enterprise level, you know, a global sort of level for the company. And I love this tip. And frankly, I'm surprised that this approach isn't used more often, because it's such an effective way of winning support for

your proposals in the long run and making sure that they're fully adopted. So why don't you tell us a little bit more about that?

Lynne: So generally, what I've made a career of is figuring out through that relationship building, who are fans of what? And basically what I do is if I bring an initiative forward and it's not enterprise accepted at this point in time, I find that fan who will champion the idea for me. Better to go it with someone rather than go it alone, right?

Kathy: Right, yeah.

Lynne: And if the idea is a good one and you know it's going to be a good one, you find that champion, you pilot with them, and then they become the product or service spokesperson because they've felt the benefit.

So my example here is at my current company when we were looking at different softwares to enhance our ability to recruit, the pain point and the person who was most interested in the product was the engineering leader. So I brought him along with me on the journey. He was very excited about it.

We decreased our time to recruit on all counts around his organization. And so it was an easy sell. In fact, he did the selling when we wanted to buy it on the enterprise level because he was the one who had benefited, understood it, and could talk to the product more than I. I mean, I'm just a facilitator. I try to find great products, services to bring, to bear to make things better. But if I don't have the business with me, it's harder to do.

Kathy: Yes.

Lynne: So I could tell you a hundred more stories like that, but piloting with a champion, piloting with a fan who becomes your champion is one of my biggest tips.

Kathy: I think that's wonderful. And I think it does even more for you. I mean, there's some benefits that you didn't even talk about there. I think it makes you look more like a business partner and savvy to begin with. The fact that you're doing it with someone else rather than relying solely on your particular expertise, which is substantial, but expertise alone is not going to sell ideas. And showing that you've got this partnership going on makes you even more credible in the long run, not just your idea.

And the other reason why I love this technique so much, and it's a little bit sly, it's not exactly the most elevated way, but I've seen it used a couple times. You can leverage some of the competitive and envious feelings that might exist among the business leaders.

So if you find a champion, and that person's area of the company is suddenly doing so much better than everybody else's because of the idea or the initiative that you propose to them, people notice. They want to jump on the bandwagon because they don't want to have their peers get ahead of them. So you can trade a little bit on that.

Lynne: That's true. You do have more friends. Yeah, all of a sudden you do have people who are interested in the next big thing coming out of your team.

Kathy: Exactly.

Lynne: And hoping they can be the champion.

Kathy: Right.

Lynne: I totally agree with you. And that has happened many more times than I can remember.

Kathy: And while we're laughing about this, that is, I think, the name of the game for all of us, whether we're on the functional side or we're on the operational side. Don't we want our reputations to be that we make other people and other parts of the company perform even better? No matter how good they already are, we're adding value by helping everybody perform better. That's a pretty good reputation to have.

Lynne: Absolutely. That's my mantra. I make the business better through the people lens.

Kathy: Yeah.

Lynne: So I'm really just bringing to bear what I know and I'm an expert in to make the business shine. And I think that's exactly right, that's why the piloting with the champion really works.

Kathy: Exactly. Well, Lynne, thank you so much for spending time with us today. I know it's really hard to sometimes get on your calendar with all the wonderful things that you're juggling right now. But this was really helpful.

Lynne: It's always a pleasure to talk to you, Kathy, you know it. Yeah.

Kathy: It's always fun. Okay, take care. We'll be talking soon.

Lynne: Okay. Thank you.

---

Kathy: So some great observations there from Lynne, including this very fundamental one. If you want to dazzle others with your new ideas, be sure that your colleagues already perceive that you and your team have a solid performance track record, otherwise no matter what the value of your ideas your credibility is lacking and your influence, I hate to say it, is weak. The more solid your performance track record, the greater your ability to win support for your ideas.

So, our final guest today is Jim Arnold. Jim is a great example of some of those characteristics that I mentioned earlier in the episode. He made that shift from a primarily functional role as a general counsel, into broad operational roles within



the insurance industry. In fact, he now provides COO services to a variety of mid-sized companies.

Jim also has that strong learning orientation that I mentioned. While juggling all his corporate leadership responsibilities, what did he do? He also decided in the latter part of his career to go back to school and earn a masters degree in industrial organizational psychology. And by the way, he's also been immersing himself lately in studying the complex implications to organizations as AI starts to enter the workplace.

Jim has a number of noticeable traits, one of them is his irrepressible sense of humor. In fact, we had to stop recording this interview at several points because I was laughing too hard. It's a quality that helps him support one of his signature strengths, which is building great working relationships. If there's a colleague or client who doesn't thoroughly enjoy working with Jim, I have yet to hear about it. So that quality is something we can all get better at. And in this interview I wanted to learn more about how he thinks about that.

---

Kathy: Hi, Jim, I'm excited to have you join us today, not only because of the breadth and the success of your career, but also you're one of those people that

a lot of people think of when they're thinking about skill and building relationships. In fact, you've always sort of had a reputation for being a natural at that. And I was wondering, before we get started, whether you'd like to share a little bit about how come you got so good at that?

Jim: Yeah, for sure. Well, first, Kathy, it's great to be with you and it's great to talk with you this afternoon. Yeah, so I think of this skill as perhaps a survival skill as a youngster. I am one of 16, yes, that's 1-6 children. And I am number nine. So think of me as a middle child with extremely big bookends on each end.

But I'm number nine in a family of 16. I'm also the only lawyer in house. And so I kiddingly refer to myself as Switzerland among the various factions that develop in the family. But truthfully, I do, and I have always found myself in situations with my family members where we were having to or I was having to bring together various people, various groups within the family. It just happens, it's a large group. And most certainly when you get into the next generation, and I think we've got oh, it's north of 70 grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Kathy: Oh my gosh. Wow.

Jim: The need for someone to help manage, coordinate situations as they do occur, that just tends to gravitate to me. So I have been doing this a long time and it feels like second nature.

Kathy: Yeah, well, I've also known you a long time and we've given you some grief about that in the past, but honestly it's been truly impressive. And that's a great illustration about why relationship skills are also key to success in the workplace as well. You know, you have all those different parties and the need to get everyone aligned and on the same page.

And I know, in fact, over the course of your career you've given a lot of thought to what works, what doesn't work, and why that is. So your first tip is especially important and foundational. And it's one that's really easy for the rest of us to forget, especially if we think of influencing and persuasion in terms of doing something to people. And it's really not quite about that, at least not in the beginning. So maybe you could tell us a little bit more about that.

Jim: Yeah, I'm happy to. You know, when I talk to folks about influencing and about persuasion, what you often hear, what I often hear people talk about are individuals they know who have great communication skills, great orders. You know, think of Margaret Thatcher, think of Ronald Reagan, you know, people who are just really very, very effective in getting their message across.

But what I have found, and I think what the reality is that persuasion actually starts with great listening skills. And there's a few reasons behind that. First, when you listen, you get to understand your audience, right? You get to know both the individual and the context where the influence is being utilized. So this listening really helps you understand the context. And in doing that, speak the speak of the language.

And I find that that is so important. To be able to go in, and if it's someone in data science, be able to speak the data science language. If it's somebody in marketing, be able to speak the marketing. And you only learn that by first listening.

Kathy: That's right.

Jim: And then beyond the areas, understand the individual themselves. What kind of person is this? Is this a person who's very data driven? Is this a big thinker? Or is this someone who's heavy on detail? And by listening and understanding that, you're really able to cater your language to that person appropriately and to be most effective.

But beyond all of that, though, I think that listening also conveys a genuine interest in the subject matter and the person. And not just listening, active listening, right? So this is the sort of listening where you don't have a cell phone in your hand, where you're making eye contact with the individual, where you're providing those affirmations as the person is speaking to you. That active listening is so powerful.

Kathy: Where they truly feel heard. Right, yeah.

Jim: Where they feel heard and engaged, right?

Kathy: Yes.

Jim: The listening is a two way street. They are speaking, you're intaking, and then you're providing that feedback that you're listening and genuinely interested in what that person is saying.

Kathy: Yeah.

Jim: And I had a boss one time who was just amazing at this, and I really tried to emulate him. He had the ability, and has the ability, to make you feel like in that moment you are the most important person in at least his world, right?

Kathy: Yeah.

Jim: Totally engaged. And I'm sure when I'm speaking with him, that he is absorbing what I'm saying. But also, it again gives me the feeling that, hey, we're kind of partners in this. And knowing that, were he to come back to me, and when I do it with people that I work with, when I go back to them, looking again to influence, having that as a foundation before getting into the actual influencing, I think is very, very powerful. I would say probably critical.

Kathy: I can see why. I mean, there's a lot of hidden treasure in that one. But obviously, you're building trust, right?

Jim: Exactly.

Kathy: And trust certainly helps when you're influencing and persuading other people. And you're also collecting, I guess we could say you're assessing the environment. You're understanding the context in which you're operating. You're

seeing what's important, where the opportunities are, you're gathering a lot of intel as it were, that can really help you and pay off for you in a big way, if and when you actually have to come and pitch something to that person.

Jim: Exactly. That's exactly right. I think that's critical.

Kathy: Yeah. Okay, good. So your second piece of advice is especially important when we're trying to persuade based on our expertise. So in other words, there are occasions where we're going to be the subject matter experts. And we can make the rookie mistake of thinking that's all that we need to be to persuade other people, which is to be the subject matter experts.

But that's usually not sufficient in and of itself to persuade people who aren't subject matter experts, particularly if those people are senior to us and higher up in the hierarchy, and we need to be attuned to that. So tell us a little bit more about that and what your tip is there.

Jim: Yeah, thanks. I speak in terms of making sure that your desired outcome is both relevant to and valued by the other party. So with my teams, I would often tell them, don't look to implement a solution for which there's no perceived problem.

Now, sometimes the other party doesn't perceive there to be a problem or a need for what you're advocating, even though there might be. So what that means is you need to do the job of communicating the value of what you're advocating or the problem that needs to be addressed.

I would see this sometimes in law departments where you have lawyers and those with governance sort of responsibilities who think in terms largely, not largely, often would speak in terms of what must be done, what is required. And what I would say is help the other person understand the value of what it is that you're advocating.

The alternative is either, A, you may not get the buy-in. Or B, the buy-in is short-term buy-in, right? Like, okay, for this thing that you're in here for now, I will buy in on that. But the overall concept, I'm still not bought in. But if you spend the time, you're able to demonstrate the value, I think the level of the buy-in, the duration of the buy-in all increase.

And so, yeah, I think spending that time helping them really understand the value of it is really important. Even if it's something that really is a must, that really needs to be done, I think it's still important to spend that time.



Kathy: Yes, you're going to make life easier for yourself, even if it's a requirement, if they're already bought in and behind you on what that requirement is. And I think a common mistake I sometimes see when it's, say IT or one of the tech areas or the research area, when they're making a pitch on what the problem is and why it would be valuable to solve it, they define things too narrowly, I think, sometimes. And they're not saying what the value will be to the business, they're just saying what the value will be to the particular set of circumstances. So things will be better within IT if we do it this way.

Well, at the end of the day, that's not going to be persuasive enough. You've got to actually show what the actual business value is going to be. How is it going to advance the business in terms of meeting its strategic goals or gaining competitive advantage?

Jim: Yeah. And that's really important. And it's challenging sometimes because the currency or the metric that you're used to operating in may not exactly translate. So if you use IT, I think that's a fantastic example where if you're advocating for a change in the technology area and it will make you more competitive, and from an IT perspective you see that the entire market going to the cloud, great example, going to the cloud, right?

The IT folks see the larger value in going to the cloud, they advocate for it. The response comes back, okay, show me how many dollars we're going to save for that, right? And you're being kind of dragged into a currency that may not be the direct currency.

Kathy: Well put, yeah.

Jim: And so being able to formulate what that story is, what that value is, is really, really important in situations like that.

Kathy: Yes, exactly. And by the way, guys who are listening, there are whole books written on that subject out there and you can go and take a look for them. We'll probably cover this concept of value as we have in the past, we'll probably do it in future episodes as well. But I would definitely say that you'll want to get more literate, more fluent in being able to describe value if you're going to be persuading people.

Jim: Absolutely.

Kathy: Finally, Jim, you have a tip that probably has been, I think, in some ways understood throughout history in many different contexts. And yet, we can

forget about it in the workplace because we sometimes fail to understand that a workplace is, among many other things, sort of like a community or a mini-society. Your tip has something to do with the concept of reciprocity, so tell us more about that.

Jim: Yeah. So reciprocity, I think about it in terms of also the concept of capital, understanding the concepts of reciprocity and capital in our dealings with folks in the workplace. I think it's really important to remember that efforts to influence or persuade, they don't happen in isolation in an organization. But rather they happen within the context of the overall working relationship that you have with the people that you're interacting with on a day in and day out basis.

So if you're coming in and asking for something today, you'd be well-served to have delivered something of value yesterday. Part of this is really ensuring that the other party knows that on balance, what you're positing is to help them and help their business.

And I find an effective way of doing that is remembering what I call the mutuality of interests. It's really important that the other party knows that their success is your success. And conversely, when they don't succeed, neither do you. And so having that level of, you said it, Kathy, it's really trust, right? Having that level of trust, that even though they may not directly see the value of what it is that

you're advocating, they know from the previous engagements that you've always steered them well, right? Even when they didn't see it.

And so you go in with this one, having had that established relationship, and then you've got that little bit of capital as we talked about, you've got that sense of reciprocity, so that what you're advocating for today, you've got a little bit of wind at your back because of the prior dealings that you've had with that person.

Kathy: That's right. Yeah. When we're talking about stuff like this, I always think of this cautionary tale that happened to me as a coach, gosh, probably 15 years ago. And I started working with a client who had recently joined the management team, a very well-known company. He had been a consultant to the company, and then he became part of the leadership team and I was his coach.

And he was a guy who, as he looked around himself at the rest of his peers, he quickly formed the opinion that they were nowhere nearly as bright as he was. And he thought they were unnecessary to his own success. He really could have been right in that one, he was a pretty smart guy. And he started off with a bang and he was highly successful.

And I could not for the life of me convince him that it was worth his while to be reciprocal with his colleagues and forming those relationships and providing value to them in case he ever needed value from them sometime down the road. Cut forward a couple of years later –

Oh, well, let me tell you what the warning was that I gave him. I said, “You know, you might be able to get away with this for a while. But at some point, something is going to go wrong with your segment of the business. Won’t necessarily be your fault, but there’ll be some sort of reversal. And when that happens, you better be prepared for the knives to be out.”

And that’s exactly how it all came down. A couple years later, he was struggling in his business. Were his colleagues there to support him? No, they were kind of actively jumping up and down with glee that he was having problems. He had just never created the safety net of trust and reciprocity that he needed when things didn’t go right. Needless to say, he left after that.

Jim: Yeah, yeah. And that is really a really good example. You know, from a defensive posture, that’s such a great example. But, you know, I have never found, honestly, I have never found a situation where there was not some measure of value to be derived from whomever I was dealing with.

Kathy: You are so right. Yes, right.

Jim: I didn't care if I was the smartest, not smartest, the most effective, the least effective, you know, there is value to be gained. And I think those with a sharp eye and able to identify value, identify opportunities for value, those are the ones who I think don't find themselves in the positions or at least less often find themselves in the positions that you're talking about.

Kathy: A sharp eye and a well-managed ego.

Jim: Yeah, that's right. That's right. Well put.

Kathy: Well, thank you so much, Jim, for sharing your expertise today. We're going to be providing details on you in our show notes. And I want to let listeners know that they may be hearing from you again sometime in a later episode. Jim and I have been talking in particular about how innovation and technology like AI gets introduced into organizations.

So here's the question we've been pondering. If you're the expert and you're trying to introduce new ideas to senior leaders, particularly in the technology area, what are some of the ways that you might increase your odds that they'll

listen to you? So Jim and I are going to do a little bit of thinking about that. We'd love to come back a couple of months from now and give you a taste of that.

In the meantime, thanks again, Jim, and we'll be talking.

Jim: Always great to talk with you, Kathy.

---

Kathy: Well, some great observations from Jim on how to earn credibility and influence. You can see the role played by good common sense relationships skills taking your influence and persuasion capabilities to the next level. I especially appreciated how he made explicit what was already implicit in the interviews with Claire Hart and Lynne Oldham. Good listening is not a passive, nice to do activity, it's an essential foundational skill in your ability to move your ideas and initiatives forward. It's a valuable investment of our time to learn how to do that well.

Okay, everyone, I'm sure you noticed that this episode is lengthier than usual, but I hope you agree with me that the perspectives of these guests really made it worth it. They're top-tier in steering their ideas and initiatives through a complex organization and in consistently winning the strong support that they need to

implement them. So their ideas are worth listening to for us as well, and the skills and strategies that they use can serve you well.

Until next time though, 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](mailto: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.

Thanks for listening to this episode of *Mastering The Power Skills*. If you like what was offered in today's show and want more insights and resources from Kathy, check us out at [www.significagroup.com](http://www.significagroup.com).