



How can you be successful in influencing others? The answer comes from the world of advertising and sales: Features, Attributes and Benefits, or FAB.

Leading by *Influence*

Applying Concepts from the World of Advertising to Successful Leadership

By Merge Gupta-Sunderji, CGA

If you're a leader, you know that your success comes from delegation: getting things done *through* others. But if you're the kind of person who likes to get things done by yourself, delegation can be a frustrating process. Instead of getting on with the task at hand, you're faced with the task of persuasion—influencing others to act in a particular way to achieve the goals of your department or organization.

If you're working with highly motivated and high-performing staff, convincing them can be quite easy, since their goals are likely to be the same as yours. But what happens when you're faced with an employee who disagrees with your approach or the proposed outcomes? Now your persuasion skills become critical.

For many leaders, particularly inexperienced ones, the process of persuasion can quickly turn into the failure of frustration. Rookie leaders often resort to persuasion based on their job title: *I'm your manager, just do what I tell you to do.* That's called "positional power." It works, but only in the short term, because positional power results in compliance, which is only temporary. Eventually, coerced employees find ways to circumvent or sabotage your persuasion, position or project. And therein lies the frustration. For long-term success, experienced leaders rely instead on "influential power."

Influential power does not come from one's title. It comes from the desire of the individual employee to get things done

because he or she believes it to be the right decision or action. Unlike positional power, which results in compliance, influential power creates commitment. While commitment and compliance may initially seem identical, commitment lasts for the long-term. Rather than looking for ways to outwit your instructions, employees who are committed to a decision work hard to follow through, even when problems arise.

So how can you be successful in influencing others—whether they're your employees, peers, or even your boss—and creating commitment? Interestingly, the answer comes from the world of advertising and sales. Advertisers put forward the concept of FAB: *features, attributes and benefits.* *Features* are what products or services do, *attributes* are what features do, and *benefits* are what those features mean to the consumer.

Savvy marketers know that when people make purchase decisions, they may evaluate their purchase options on the basis of features and attributes, but they make their ultimate buying decision on the basis of benefits. Consider the following description of a laptop computer:

- Intel® Core™ 2 Duo T5450 (2MB cache/1.66GHz/667Mhz FSB)
- Genuine Windows Vista™ Home Premium Edition
- Glossy, widescreen 15.4 inch display (1280 x 800)
- 120G 5400RPM SATA HDD

- Intel® Graphics Media Accelerator X3000
- 8X CD/DVD Burner (DVD+/-RW) with double-layer DVD+R write capability
- 1GB Shared Dual Channel DDR2 SDRAM at 667MHz, 2 Dimm

If you're a techie, you not only know what these abbreviations and acronyms mean, they're probably pretty exciting to you! To the rest of the world, however, it's just a list of the laptop's features. A potential buyer may evaluate these features, but this is not why he or she makes the decision to buy. Now compare that description to this one:

This laptop has a high-speed processor and graphics card and lets you view and burn CDs and DVDs. It comes pre-loaded with the new Windows Vista operating system and its widescreen display is easy to see.

This second version is better, but it's still not a reason for a potential buyer to plunk down their money. Now, in the following version, the attributes are translated into benefits:

This laptop's high-speed processor lets you quickly access large files without waiting. If you play games, its full-colour and high-speed graphics card will make you feel like you are in the heart of the action. Its wide and easy-to-see screen means that you won't have to squint, even in bright light.

Imagine the possibilities with its DVD burner—record videos of your children while you're all on vacation, burn the videos to a DVD and leave a copy with your children's grandparents before you head back home!

Not only that, but this laptop comes loaded with the new Windows Vista operating system—no more hunting for files or e-mails! If you remember anything about a file—the type, when it was created, or even what it contains—Windows Vista can find it quickly for you.

This final description tells you what the laptop's features can do for the buyer—in other words, the benefits the consumer will receive by purchasing the laptop. *Benefits* are why people buy products and services, and if these benefits are of value to an individual seeking a laptop, he or she will happily hand over their credit card!

When you're trying to influence others to adopt a specific way of doing things or a particular point of view, what you're really trying to do is "sell" your idea or approach to them. Just as people buy products and services on the basis of benefits, they "buy" ideas and actions. The basis of influential power lies in focusing on the benefits for the person that you are trying to persuade.

You may have heard of the acronym WIIFM, or *What's In It For Me?*. If you're trying to get your employees, your peers or even your boss to take a certain action or accept a certain point of view, try



Merge Gupta-Sunderji, CGA

Don't Miss Merge Gupta-Sunderji at CGA Ontario's Conference 2007!

Merge Gupta-Sunderji, author of *Why Does the Lobster Cast Off Its Shell?* and the upcoming *Power Tools for Leaders: Practical Strategies and Tactics to Build People*, will present two seminars on November 8th at CGA Ontario's Conference 2007: *Interpersonal Communication Skills for Leaders* and *Effective Delegation Skills*.

Merge turns managers into leaders. In just the last three years, more than 13,000 managers across Canada, the U.S., the U.K. and Mexico have attended her engaging keynotes and facilitated workshops. In addition to her CGA designation, Merge is a certified speaking professional (CSP) and holds a master's degree in business administration (MBA). To learn more, visit www.mergespeaks.com. For more information on CGA Ontario's Annual Conference plus Admission to Membership and Awards Ceremony, visit <http://conference.cga-ontario.org>.

phrasing it in language that addresses the other person's WIIFM. Instead of:

Please submit all expense statements by the 5th of the month.

Try:

I'd like your expense statement submitted no later than the 5th of the month. That way, we can issue your reimbursement cheque that week rather than having to wait another two weeks.

Or instead of:

All working paper files must be completed before the client's case file can be closed.

Try:

If you complete your working papers for one client before you move on to the next, you'll be able to cross it off your to-do list, as well as avoid all those complicated questions from me several weeks later. In addition, all the information will be fresh in your mind, so your papers will be easier to complete earlier rather than later.

Each of the first versions in these two examples is akin to describing the features and attributes of a product, but the second versions describe the benefits to the person the leader is trying to persuade, and address the WIIFM question from that person's perspective.

Rather than relying upon the authority derived from position or title (positional power), successful leaders rely instead on the authority arising from the art of persuasion (influential power). They seek to obtain commitment rather than compliance. Though the FAB concept has its roots in sales and marketing, don't be afraid to apply it in your role as a leader. In fact, the best proof will be when you try it—you'll be pleasantly surprised at how much easier it is to influence others when you can answer their question: *What's In It For Me?* 

“ A leader is best when people barely know that he exists. When his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will all say, ‘We did it ourselves.’ ”

Lao Tzu, *The Tao Te Ching*