

Want to Enhance Your Influence as a Startup Leader? Here's What You Need to Know.

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From an early age, we begin mastering the art of persuasion and strategic communication, skills that are foundational not just in personal interactions but crucial in professional environments like startups. Developmental psychologists have noted that by age five, children are already experimenting with various influencing techniques such as negotiation, persuasion and even tantrums. They keenly observe and emulate the adults around them, picking up on what behaviors effectively achieve the desired outcomes.

Additionally, foundational beliefs about assertiveness – whether it's believing that one must earn the right to make requests or feeling entitled to make demands without precondition – are shaped during these formative years. Consequently, children begin to adopt distinct influence styles based on their observations and experiences.

By the time we enter the workplace, these dynamics have become deeply embedded within our psyche, leading to the development of specific influence personality types. Most of us learn skills to better influence depending on the situation, but we typically have a default style that can be categorized into two main groups: *pushers and pullers*.

Assessments I've conducted across multiple organizations

reveal that only 10-15% of people surveyed fall into a blend of both styles, utilizing both push and pull with ease. The vast majority fall distinctly into either a strong push or pull style. Each type has its own unique approach to influence, and understanding which one aligns with your natural style can significantly enhance your effectiveness in driving better outcomes at your startup.

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Overview of each type:

Pushers are direct and clear, often driven by a desire for clarity and a reduction of confusion. They tend to position themselves as experts rather than being open and curious. In collaborative settings, they prefer to state their needs directly rather than asking questions to understand others' perspectives. Under stress, they can become demanding, aggressive and poor at listening, sometimes oversimplifying issues and taking control of the conversation defensively.

Pullers are seen as more collaborative, inclusive and open. They prioritize establishing trust and connection through questions and are highly attuned to others' emotions. Under stress, pullers might withhold their viewpoints, create stories in their minds, second-guess themselves, be overly verbose and unconsciously create confusion due to a lack of clarity in their desires.

Tactics for improving your natural style, while learning from the other

Pushers should:

1. **Provide the “why”:** Explain the reasoning behind your requests and make sure those reasons interest your audience.
2. **Ask open-ended questions:** Default away from tell mode and into question mode. Connection is often as important as expertise while working with others.
3. **Play back what you hear:** Reframe and paraphrase strategically the content, feelings and needs to demonstrate understanding.
4. **Don’t always expect to get your way:** Oftentimes natural pushers get upset when someone doesn’t see eye to eye with them. Learn to accept differing viewpoints to reduce frustration.
5. **Be patient:** Avoid forcing quick resolutions when more discussion is needed.

Pullers should:

1. **Lead with your conclusion:** Start with your main point instead of building a long-winded case for what you want and hoping people continue to follow along.
2. **Assert yourself:** State clearly and directly what you want. This takes practice, especially if asking for what you needed was tough in childhood. Practice with a trusted peer as a way to warm up to this skill.
3. **Practice brevity:** State what you want simply and plainly without unnecessary detail. Natural pullers tend to over-explain themselves and risk losing their audience in the process.
4. **Let go of past conversations:** Pullers often dwell on past interactions, critiquing themselves for not choosing the perfect words. It’s beneficial for them to

embrace the concept of “good enough,” rather than striving for perfection in every conversation.

5. **Don't unwind your ask:** After making your request, avoid excessive follow-up that might cause confusion. Pullers often feel the need to make sure they are understood. They have a tendency to explain themselves again in either Slack or email after the initial conversation. This can annoy their audience and create ambiguity that didn't exist before.

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Identifying where you fall on the push-pull spectrum and being reflective about how your style helps or hinders you in your role is crucial. Start by adopting one aspect of the opposing style that doesn't come naturally to you. Over time, you'll develop a more balanced skill set, which will be appreciated by your team and enhance your overall influence.

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