

# 'You should focus on those who have influence'

How to talk people round

**Having to implement decisions that employees may not like is a part of managerial life. How do you convince your team to follow your lead?**

**Can I prepare to persuade?**

"Plan your influencing strategy carefully," says Melanie Long, a business psychologist at talent measurement specialists SHL. "People change at different times. You should focus on those who have influence in the group. Identify role models and use the political mechanics of the organisation to target stakeholders."

Your position will also be greatly strengthened if you develop a good rapport with people by helping them, says Steve Martin, co-author of *Yes! 50 Secrets from the Science of Persuasion*. "You are at your most influential immediately after someone has said 'thank you' so build up obligations beforehand."

**How do I present the decision?**

You need to appeal to hearts and minds. "Leaders often come up with really strong rational arguments," says Ms Long. "But they don't include people so they feel part of it. Tell a story, appeal to people's emotions, and put yourself in their shoes. Consult widely and act on this input, rather than presenting it as a fait accompli."

Jessica Pryce-Jones, CEO of performance consultancy iOpener, says that fear of the unknown needs to be dispelled. "Connect back to times where similar actions have worked," she says.

You should also recognise that influence is an ongoing process. "The process is like presenting a two-year-old with a

Brussels sprout," says Ms Pryce-Jones. "You don't change it, but you do try to make it palatable."

**What about me?**

"Lead by example," says Ms Pryce-Jones. "You have to share the pain as well."

One of the reasons that, historically, Japanese CEOs have had relatively little difficulty persuading staff to take pay cuts is because they so often take brutal ones themselves.

Mr Martin says that you should not tell people:

"'You should do this because of my position in the hierarchy or because it comes from the top.' It is better to be seen as someone who is in a position of authority."

If you are speaking to an audience you don't know well, he says, one of the best things you can do is tell them why they should listen: "credentialise yourself". You can mention externalities, such as the economy, but to dwell on them too much can look like you are trying to avoid responsibility.

**What about those I can't talk round?**

"Do mention payback," says Ms Pryce-Jones. "Say, 'I don't like having to do this, but when things get better you'll be the first people whose efforts are recognised.'"

But along with the carrot, you should also invoke the stick. Make it clear that if they don't take the action, there will be negative effects on other team members and third parties and their relationships with them.

Mr Martin says: "You can also appeal to [personal] loss. It sounds counter-intuitive but people are very risk averse. Say this is what you could lose if you don't take action."

**Rhymer Rigby**