

The Senate Six

Half a dozen hints to gain influence

Being effective communicators requires influence: having access to decision makers, and the permission to advise them on things that could affect our organisations' reputations. Sometimes leadership and structure can limit a communication team's influence – but most often, the greatest obstacle to influence is how we are working as individuals. Senate has taken its own experience and the views of senior managers in organisations to create the Senate Six, half a dozen ways to gain influence.



1. Be excellent

We have to do what we do well - every time. Because you're only as good as your last job. This means that you have to deliver what you say you will, when you say you will. It means really thinking about every project and doing it well. And it means demonstrating results and being prepared and able to measure the success of what we've done.

2. Be knowledgeable

Being expert at communications is not enough: communication professionals also need to be deeply knowledgeable about the organisation they work in. This means you will spot opportunities and risks and ensures your input hits the mark. And most important: bring knowledge about the customer (or client, or stakeholder) to the discussion, every time.



3. Be connected

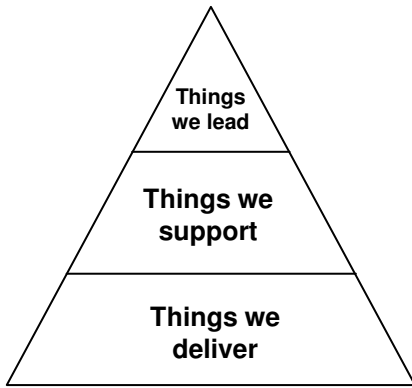
Have great relationships with your internal stakeholders – and external networks.

Make sure your colleagues know how you can help them and what you're capable of. The greater the regard they have for you, the more likely they are to seek your help early, and to give you good projects to work on.

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4. Know your place

For every project, and every internal client, there is a different way we need to work. Sometimes we are there to advise and challenge, other times we will have a contributing role, and other times we will just do as we are asked.

Getting this judgement right and knowing your place – not getting into the “yes” habit or having a reputation as a “blocker” – will help you gain influence.

5. Be the conscience

A core role for communication professionals is protecting our organisations’ reputation – and so integrity is one of the most important things we contribute. It is your job to ensure that everything your colleagues say is true and reflects what stakeholders are concerned about. It’s your job to challenge your colleagues to get to the truth of the matter, and then find the right organisational response.



The four critical questions:
 Why us?
 Why them?
 Why this?
 Why now?

6. Ask questions

Questions are the best tool of a communications practitioner. Questions are the best way to be sure we remain knowledgeable and useful, and that our input is as good as it can be.

Don’t be afraid to ask the dumb question!

At the beginning of every project, make sure you understand why you’re doing what you’re doing – using the four critical questions at left.

Tracey Bridges
 Partner
 04 471 5372
 Senate
 Communications

Senate Auckland office:
 09 353 6622
 Senate Wellington office:
 04 471 5370

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