Leadership IQ Library.

I viewed a large number of the Leadership IQ webinars and found many of them very useful. While they were addressed to business leaders, the concepts they describe have applicability in academia as well. The two webinars I will discuss are “Influence Without Authority” and “Asserting Yourself”.

Influence Without Authority

- Organizations have decreased formal authority (chains of command) which has made them less hierarchical, so initiatives need more buy-in from more people with a little authority, rather than simply an okay from one authority figure. This is true of many universities, especially CUNE, particularly in light of the faculty structure at CUNE which assumes that decisions will be made at the “lowest” level possible, and communicated upward to individuals who may choose to re-think the decision.
- In order to be successful at any initiative, you need support from people over whom you have no authority. So, for instance, a new program needs support from the departments providing supporting courses.
- Understanding all my goals helps determine who I select to work with.
- Begin with enlisting support of those inclined to help, before working on antagonists. Build support first, before you start trying to convince antagonists.
- Approach people with a question, asking for advice. This is more effective than starting with a statement of your idea because it keeps them from getting defensive and instead gets them on board by feeling like they’re the ones that can help you.
- The webinar suggests using the power of obligation, for instance saying “I’m glad to help; I’m sure you’ll do the same for me sometime” after doing a favor. I’m a little uncomfortable with this. Any power from obligation should come from kind deeds done with no strings attached.
- “The more you understand others, the more they’ll understand you.” This is good advice, whether for exerting influence or trying to teach.
- Take a few minutes to think about your audience and tailor your message to their needs. More good advice. Communication needn’t be off the top of the head. As a teacher I think about what I’m going to say; this should be true for any interaction.
This webinar would be helpful for many people at Concordia, but especially those people in “middle management” – department chairs, office heads, etc. These are the people most likely to have initiatives to implement that depend on getting agreement from others. Individuals at higher (i.e. cabinet) levels have more direct authority to move things forward, while those at lower (i.e. faculty, professional/technical staff) have direct supervisors whose responsibility it is to begin the process of moving initiatives forward.

Thinking about this webinar, it is still difficult to always tell what individuals one must influence in order to bring about change. (This is a systemic difficulty at CUNE.) It can also be difficult to know how to tell whether an individual will be supportive or not. This is an important distinction to know, and yet I have found that people surprise me, and sometimes are supportive of things I wouldn’t have expected, while other times I run into roadblocks with people I thought sure would be on board immediately.

Asserting Yourself

- Assertiveness is seeing your needs as equal to others’. (Passive is seeing other’s needs more important than yours; aggressive is seeing your needs more important than others). Assertiveness sees the world as win-win (everyone can win); passiveness or aggressiveness see it as win-lose (one winner, one loser)
- I needed to build up some areas of assertiveness (probably all, but I scored higher on the assertiveness quiz based on things other than assertiveness).
- Common self-limiting beliefs often have to do with the impact on our relationship with others – this is especially strong at CU, where we value our relationships over most everything else.
- Self-limiting beliefs that inhibit our work can be re-thought into beliefs that are positive, in order to enable our work. (For instance, “It is rude to interrupt the flow of discussion at a meeting” could become “People want to know what I have to say, and will be disappointed if they don’t hear my opinion”.)
- Assertiveness can also be a form of being proactive, rather than reactive.
- It can be okay to delay decisions (or telling decisions) if necessary. Even a minor delay (to think things through) can be helpful.
- When saying “no”, try not to say, “I’m sorry”. That’s really difficult. It goes back to the feeling that saying no will impact the relationship, so I say sorry to maintain the relationship even though it’s something I really shouldn’t be sorry about.
• Assertiveness often boils down to using factual statements rather than judgmental statements. Seen in this way it’s easier to picture myself being assertive.
• The idea of practicing assertive statements alone makes sense. Practice makes perfect.

This webinar would be helpful for people like me who have naturally introverted personalities and find themselves acting in passive ways. It would also be useful for anyone moving into a leadership position. Even a person used to being assertive can benefit from seeing the proper balance between passivity and aggression.

Although it is easy to watch an expert make “I” statements, it seems that even with practice it is difficult to make statements like that seem natural (and therefore sincere) rather than forced. The same goes for saying “no”, although this has an additional difficulty – in an environment like Concordia, it is very difficult to say no to anything. There is a culture of taking on additional responsibility, of silent suffering, that discourages saying no. So the actual statement is easier than feeling it and believing it in your heart.