

HOW TO INCREASE YOUR INFLUENCE

Hi, I'm Anj Handa, founder of Inspiring Women Changemakers. Having worked at Board level for many years, I have often have been the youngest and usually the only ethnic minority Board member. Challenging!

For that reason, I have had to research and develop strategies for building influence. The most effective approach is to set healthy boundaries and be polite and measured at all times. Here, I share my tips and techniques.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

SPEECH

- Consider what you would like to say before speaking, then say it succinctly.
- Speak with a calm, measured tone.
- Avoid peppering your sentences with 'I'm just' or 'I'm only.'
- Don't start your sentence with 'So' – it weakens your point from the outset.
- Mind your inflection – don't end your sentence with a high pitch, as if asking a question.

BODY LANGUAGE

- When standing, keep feet firmly planted, hip width apart.
- Power pose!
- When seated, keep your body language open. No slouching!
- Steepling: a common male posture is to steeple hands above the table to display power, while many women place their hands underneath or just on top. Even a slight steeple makes an impact - try it!

"Conversations are about exchanging information, establishing status and achieving connection."

To help you achieve these goals, below follow a number of approaches that you can adopt to increase your influence and be heard in your professional and personal life.

HANDLING INTERRUPTIONS

Turn the tables



Listen to the interrupter and question them without offering your take. When they're done, say "I'd now like to finish what I was saying earlier."

Be polite, but firm.



Writer Soraya Chemaly suggests saying "Stop interrupting me. I just said that. No explanation needed." If that feels too aggressive for you, simply state politely that you hadn't finished what you were saying.

Stop emulating male approaches



To succeed in the workplace, women and girls do not need to speak more like men. Conversations are about exchanging information, establishing status and achieving connection. Men and women take different approaches towards meeting these goals; it doesn't mean that either way is right or wrong.

Use Facts & Feelings



Use either evidence-based facts to back up your points, or your own feelings. It's difficult for anyone to argue with either.

Offer teaching opportunities



Let the person who interrupted you know (ideally in private to avoid humiliating them) what they did; how it made you feel; and what you would like them to do differently next time.

When faced with generalisations on gender difference, you can accept that some women behave in X manner, but that some men do too. This approach often opens a useful dialogue and brings insights.



There is a difference in the amount of use of interruptions by men and women, with men being more likely to interrupt and less likely to be interrupted.

An Investigation into Differences
between Women's and Men's Speech
James Broadbridge
The University of Birmingham

