Influence Without Authority

Practice guide · solo, with partner rehearsal

What this is: a short preparation you do before a conversation where you need someone to say yes — someone you can't simply instruct. You work out what they actually care about, then rewrite your ask so that granting it gets them something they want. Do it solo in about 15–20 minutes; it's sharper with a rehearsal partner whose job is to push back.

The one line to hold: the person you're asking will act on their reasons, not yours. Your job isn't to make your case louder — it's to translate it into theirs. **People support what matters to them, not what matters to you.**

· WHEN DO I USE THIS?

Use this when

GOOD FIT

Before a specific conversation where you need one person — or one team — to say yes to something you can't instruct: buy-in from someone who doesn't report to you, a request another team keeps deprioritising, a senior stakeholder whose time or decision you need.

WRONG TOOL

You need to align many people at once, not move one › Stakeholder Alignment Sprint. You're in an active clash over a trade-off, not discovering a hidden motivation › Trade-off Conflict Resolver.

The shift this tool makes: most people think their job is to be more convincing. This tool teaches the opposite — you're not persuading, you're translating. Your ask, rewritten in the other person's interests.

PART 1 THE PREPARATION

solo, or with a partner

1 · WHAT IS THIS REALLY DOING?

The one idea

THE ONE IDEA

When you don't have authority, the natural move is to explain why your request matters to you — your deadline, your project, your team. That's exactly the move that fails: powerlessness makes you talk about your own needs, and your needs are the one thing the other person has no reason to act on. Influence without authority isn't about pushing harder. It's translation — rewriting your ask so that saying yes gets them something they already want.

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2 · WHAT DO I NEED?

What you'll need

What	Why it's there
One real ask	A specific request you need to make of one person or team who doesn't have to say yes. Bring a live one, not a hypothetical.
The worksheet	Walks you through the five stages: your ask, their priorities, why they'd say no, what they gain from yes, and the rewritten ask.
A rehearsal partner (recommended)	Their only job is to push back — "I don't think that's what they'd actually say" — so you can't invent convenient motivations. They provide pushback, not facilitation. Not required, but it makes the swap real.

Alignment · Win Buy-In · about 15–20 minutes solo, a little longer with a partner. Done before the actual conversation.

3 · HOW DO I RUN IT?

The five stages

First, choose one real conversation you expect to have in the next week — don't practise on a hypothetical. Then work through these on the worksheet. Solo, argue the other side out loud to yourself; with a partner, they play the other person and push back until it rings true.

1. Name what you want	**2 min**	*Write the specific ask, plainly.* This is the version you're about to translate — not the one you'll deliver.
2. Argue their side	**5–7 min**	*Swap seats — literally, if you can — and make their case out loud, as them.* Continue until your partner says "yes — that sounds like something they'd actually say." Write what they're really trying to protect or achieve.
3. Name why they'd say no	**3 min**	*From their seat, write the honest reasons to refuse — cost, risk, effort, competing priorities.* This is what your reframe has to answer.

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4. Name what they gain from yes	**3 min**	*Write what they genuinely gain — not why your project benefits.* In their terms, not yours. This is the interest your ask will connect to.
5. Rewrite the ask	**3 min**	*Rebuild it so it ends in one line: "...so that you get _____."* Read it aloud — if it still sounds like your agenda, rewrite it. If you wrote two, keep the strongest.

THE SIGNATURE OUTPUT

BEFORE

"Can you prioritise our migration?"

same ask — add only their motivation ↓

AFTER

"Can you prioritise our migration *so that your team closes the audit findings before next quarter?*"

PARTNER TIP

If you're the rehearsal partner, your job is not to agree — it's to make them earn a believable version of the other person's thinking. Every time their version sounds too agreeable, say "I don't think they'd put it that way" and make them try again. Don't help them; the pushback is the whole point. A partner who nods along adds nothing.

PART 2 GETTING IT RIGHT

why it works & common mistakes

4 · WHY DOES THIS WORK?

Why it works

People act on their own motivations, not yours — so a request framed around your needs gives them little reason to move. Arguing their side out loud forces you past your assumptions and into what they'd actually say; rewriting the ask around a priority they already hold turns it from something you're pushing into something they'd choose. That's translation, not persuasion — and it's why it lands when logic alone doesn't.

THE SHIFT — FROM PERSUADING TO TRANSLATING

PERSUASION	→	TRANSLATION
"here's why my request matters — please agree"		"here's how this serves something you already want"
pushing your agenda		*connecting to theirs*

You stop trying to be convincing and start trying to be understood.

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5 · WHAT IF IT GOES WRONG?

Common mistakes

What happened	The fix
You kept explaining your problem	Rewrite until the first sentence is about what **they** care about, not your deadline. If your opener is still about you, the reframe hasn't happened yet.
You guessed their motivation	If you're not sure what they actually want, ask them before reframing. A confident guess about the wrong motivation is worse than a question.
You connected to the wrong motivation	People often care about different things than you assume. If the reframe isn't landing, you may have the wrong interest — swap seats again.
You wrote two "so that..." statements	Choose the strongest one. A single, clear connection beats two competing ones — the diluted version reads as hedging.
You never actually asked them	You're working from a guess about what they care about. If the conversation allows, test your understanding with them instead of assuming you're right — curiosity beats a confident wrong guess.

Before you have the conversation

- ✓ You've argued their side out loud — not just imagined it
- ✓ You can name what they genuinely gain from saying yes
- ✓ Your opening sentence is about what they care about, not what you need
- ✓ The ask ends in a real "so that you get _____" they'd actually value

6 · HOW DO I MAKE THIS STICK?

Take it back to work

THE HABIT

Before every influence conversation, ask yourself one question:

What does saying yes get *them*?

The more you run it, the more the shift becomes automatic — you start hearing your own asks from the other seat before you make them. Influence without authority stops being a trick and becomes how you frame every request.

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Appendix · Reference

You should not need this to start. Read it before, or if a run goes sideways.

7 · A WORKED RUN

Watch the ask get translated

A delivery lead needed the Security team to approve an exception before a release — and kept getting deprioritised.

Stage	What surfaced
1 · The ask	"Can you approve our exception this week? It's blocking our release."
2 · Their priorities	Arguing as Security: they're measured on reducing unreviewed exceptions and audit exposure — a rushed approval is exactly what they're punished for.
3 · Why they'd say no	A fast yes is risk on their ledger — more exposure, not less.
4 · What they gain	A documented, time-boxed exception with a review date actually improves their audit position.
5 · The translated ask	"Can you approve a time-boxed exception with a review date *so that you close it cleanly before the next audit?*" Same request — now in their interests.

8 · WHERE DOES THIS FIT?

Where this sits in the Gym

The real need	Use this
Move one person or team who doesn't report to you	**This tool — Influence Without Authority.** Swap seats, find their motivation, rewrite the ask in their interests.
Align many stakeholders around one direction	**Stakeholder Alignment Sprint** — one-to-many alignment, not moving a single person.
Resolve an active clash over a trade-off	**Trade-off Conflict Resolver** — for open conflict and trading, where here there's a hidden motivation to discover, not a fight to settle.

The move underneath: this tool asks you to see it from the other person's point of view before you ask them for anything. That same swap — arguing the other side until you understand it — is one of the Gym's most reusable moves, wherever influence matters more than authority.

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