

## Soft Skills Influence Others; Think Before You Speak

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Hold sway with savvy persuasion, not verbal punches. Compelling execs take a thoughtful approach to winning 'em over:

- **Take the high road.** A true victor? Someone who can turn an enemy into a friend. In "[Adversaries Into Allies](#)," author Bob Burg explores such influence.

A first step, he says, is drawing a clear distinction between manipulation and persuasion: "Manipulation does not consider the good of the other party. By its very nature it results in a win-lose scenario."

On the other hand, "persuasion wants both sides to benefit," Burg told IBD.

- **Chill out.** Lesson two is keep cool. "The mighty person is one who can control their own emotions," Burg said.

Staying composed isn't easy. He points out that Founding Father Ben Franklin kept a list of things to work on. "One of them was to be calm and thoughtful," Burg said.

- **Find common ground.** A starting point is to agree, even when views are diametrically opposed.

"This isn't about giving in to anybody," Burg said. It's about finding the tiniest spot on which both sides can concur. "Now that you've found a point of agreement, this person is a little more open."

- **Handle with care.** "In any interpersonal interaction, the ego will come into play," Burg said.

Imagine the other person wearing a sign that says: "Make me feel good about myself." Respect the other party's ego, and "you become the type of person they want to please," he said.

- **Set the tone.** Anticipating a bout? You'll probably get one.

Going in with a smile — physical and mentally — sets a tone.

Burg's point: "Expecting someone to be helpful doesn't change them. It changes you. And that is what changes them."

Follow that grin with genuine concern for the other party's needs. "Now you are reframing the situation from one of conflict to one of cooperation," he said.

- **Deliver with diplomacy.** Burg calls tact the language of strength because it gets the job done.

"Tact should never be confused with compromise," Burg said.

You're still presenting your position, but in a way that softens the perceived blow.

The trick is to insert empathy.

Instead of: Your report's conclusion is weak.

Try: I can see you worked hard on this report. Adding some thought to your conclusion will wrap it up nicely.

- **Be deliberate.** In "[Stop Talking, Start Communicating](#)," Geoffrey Tumin tells readers to listen like every sentence matters, talk like every word counts, and act like every interaction is crucial.

- **Silence your rightness.** There's a time to speak, and a time to keep quiet. Staying on good terms sometimes requires resisting the urge to prove others wrong.

Avoid: "I told you so."

Stifling such a comment can feel like a point lost. But give yourself credit.

"Restraint isn't flashy or glamorous, but it won't blow up relationships or torpedo your goals," Tumlin wrote.

• **Hone it.** It takes diligent practice to become someone others listen to. So says "[Vocal Leadership](#)" author and voice coach Arthur Joseph.

His clients include actor Pierce Brosnan and former NBA coach Pat Riley, as well as ESPN and Ritz-Carlton.

Breathing techniques, voice warm-ups, body language, tempo, verbal and nonverbal expression — each tool helps speakers achieve a masterful tone. "It's not just what we say, but how we say it. Everything matters," Joseph wrote.

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