

Effectiveness and Power

Virginia Valian
Hunter College and CUNY Graduate Center, New York, NY

Effectiveness in influencing decisions

- be prepared
 - even minimal preparation is better than none: sometimes only a few minutes of preparation are required (most other people will have done no preparation)
 - read the relevant materials – knowledge is power
 - develop your point of view before the decision point
 - develop the most important rationale(s) behind your view before the decision point
 - be prepared with comprehensive, authoritative, even-handed arguments
 - comprehensiveness can help preempt certain objections
 - authoritativeness will lend legitimacy
 - even-handedness will help you be perceived as neutral
 - put your favored action in the best possible light – do your best for your ideas
 - practice presenting your view and the rationale(s) for it succinctly and calmly
- marshal support and develop alliances before important decisions are made
 - identify and speak with likely allies, especially those who are highly respected
 - ask allies for advice about how to proceed
 - ask allies to do some of the work
 - anticipate what resistance there might be
 - evaluate objective merits of resistance
 - evaluate reasons for subjective resistance
- when appropriate, bargain ahead of time
 - X wants you to support proposal A or person B; you want them to support proposal D or person E – negotiate
- objections people have to proceeding as outlined
 - dishonest
 - not so: no one would give a talk without preparation
 - manipulative
 - a better expression is being effective by using a presentational style that presents one's point of view in the best light

Effectiveness in professional development

- develop clear and realistic short-term and intermediate goals
 - make the goals as specific as possible
 - ask for advice in specifying and evaluating the goals
- develop strategies to meet the goals
 - ask for advice in developing strategies
 - white men tend to get information in many informal contexts that women and people of color are less likely to be part of, hence the need to ask specifically for advice
- look at CVs of people you admire and would like to emulate
 - ask such people about their work habits and strategies
 - ask more than one person: there are different routes to success
- determine what awards and prizes you might be eligible for
 - learn what the criteria are
 - ask others to nominate you
 - make life easy for your nominators by providing them with useful information
- schedule other activities around your best writing time
 - do not schedule your best writing time around your other activities
 - aim to write 2 hours per day
- keep a work log
 - include time spent working per day
 - include achievements for each day
- get information about criteria for tenure, promotion, and other positions
 - look at the vitas of recently tenured and promoted faculty to learn more about the criteria
 - speak to people about criteria
- learn how to temporize before saying no or saying yes with conditions
 - never say yes or no right away
 - example of what to say: "Thank you for asking me, I'm flattered/honored/pleased. I'll need to think about it to see if I can do it justice, given my other responsibilities."
 - ask people, think it through, think what you'd need in order to do what's being requested along with your other responsibilities
 - if you'd like to do it but don't see how you can, figure out what would make the job easier and ask for it
 - depending on who's asking, you might be able to use someone else for cover
 - e.g., "I'm so sorry, but my division head recommends against it"

Power and influence: the individual

- everyone has some power; use the power that you have
- follow Kanter's (1979) advice: perform tasks which
 - are out of the ordinary
 - are visible
 - are relevant to current institutional problems
 - will allow you to define how the job should be done
- eschew routine, invisible, "housekeeping" tasks that require frequent effort
- adopt impersonal, friendly, and respectful style (successful women in male-dominated occupations are particularly likely to be perceived as unlikable by both men and women)
- build reciprocal relationships
 - solve problems for other people
 - expect a return (e.g., "I'm sure you'll help me when I have a problem")
 - ask others to work with you to solve problems
- make alliances with both men and women
- seek information about criteria for success; hard to be successful by accident
 - men receive much information informally
 - learn what resources are available
 - build reciprocal relationships: provide other people with information; ask others for information
- become successful outside the institution and let people know you are successful

Power and influence: improving the status of women and other groups

- recognize what you have to offer and offer it
 - provide a workshop on a skill you have, such as dealing with rejection
 - nominate women for prizes, awards, and positions of leadership
- actively develop women junior and senior job candidates
 - think ahead about what type of person you would like to add to your department
 - use conferences and other sources to learn about promising women
 - women are likely to be underplaced
 - location determines productivity as much as or more than productivity determines location
 - develop and make the best case for hiring a woman
 - anticipate objections and head them off
 - develop male allies
- make specific proposals for improving equity and diversity
 - demonstrate need and show how institution will benefit
 - provide supporting documentation for action
 - best practices from other institutions
 - scientific literature
 - provide timeline
 - indicate what outcome measures will be used
 - obtain institutional commitment to and resources for change
 - do not labor for love
 - make sure you have sufficient resources to do the job well
- identify reasons for institution to commit to change, such as:
 - better serve women students
 - attract more women as faculty
 - attract more recruiters to campus (holds primarily for undergraduate institutions)
 - improve morale
- identify problem areas for women and other social groups that lack power
- identify and work with institutional allies at all levels
- show individualized interest in and concern for others' opinions
- take experimental approach
- recognize necessity for on-going action

Recommended Web Sites

www.hunter.cuny.edu/gendertutorial

This web site presents four tutorials on gender and science in the form of slides with voice-over narration, developed by Virginia Valian through a grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF). The tutorials are particularly useful for students and administrators.

www.hunter.cuny.edu/genderequity

This is the web site of the Hunter College Gender Equity Project. It contains a great deal of useful information, including regularly updated annotated bibliographies, specification of visible and hidden problems and possible solutions, and much more (e.g., Valian, 2009, *Benefits of Ensuring Gender Equity*)

Partial Annotated References

Kanter, R. M. (1979). Differential access to opportunity and power. In R. Alvarez & K. G. Lutterman (Eds.), *Discrimination in organizations* (pp 52-68). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

A manual on how to achieve power in organizations. Kanter defines power as efficacy in shaping the goals and policies of an organization or group. Activities build power if they are a) out of the ordinary or pioneering or not part of the job description, b) visible to others in the group, and c) relevant to current organizational problems. People who want to advance should shun routine, invisible jobs. Administrators should equalize the presence of men and women in such jobs.

Ragins, B. R. & Sundstrom, E. (1989). Gender and power in organizations: A longitudinal perspective. *Psychological Bulletin*, 105, 51-88.

Women are less likely than men to obtain or receive information about promotion possibilities, job openings, and other opportunities for advancement.

Ridgeway, C. L. (1982). Status in groups: The importance of motivation. *American Sociological Review*, 47, 76-88.

To be accepted as a leader, both men and women must demonstrate their competence to the group, but women in addition must demonstrate that they are not trying to acquire status at the expense of other members of the group. Women must subordinate, and be seen to subordinate, their personal needs to the needs of the group. Attempts at self-aggrandizement by women are particularly negatively perceived. Implications: women should be impersonal, friendly, and respectful.

Valian, V. (1998). *Why so slow? The advancement of women*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. Chapter 14.

This chapter summarizes data on personal style and personal effectiveness, but warns that women can do everything "right" and still not advance because of structural problems within the institution. Suggestions: build power, use a "neutral" style in professional settings, become an expert, negotiate, bargain, seek promotion, seek challenging assignments, seek information.