

Competitive intelligence



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Competitive Intelligence Learning What Competitors Are Doing Competitive intelligence helps you plan your next move. © iStockphoto/ssuni Your business doesn't exist in a vacuum. Whatever sector you operate in, and however unique your selling proposition, there will always be other businesses competing for customers in your field. A competitor is a rival company operating in the same industry as you, selling similar goods or services.

You may be competing against your rivals to win customers on the basis of price, the type of product you sell, the type of promotions you run, or perhaps the quality of service you offer. When you look around at your current competitors, do you know what they're doing? Do you know how effective their current operations are, or how satisfied their customers are? When you develop your business strategies, do you consider what your competitors' strategies might be? This sort of knowledge is competitive intelligence (CI). It's generally part of a market intelligence plan, which is designed to improve your business decisions by keeping you up to speed on what's happening in the external market environment.

Using CI practices, you can monitor and assess the actions of competitors and long-term market prospects. This helps you gain valuable information, and develop proactive plans to reduce the chances of receiving unexpected news — like a competitor's new product launch, or a change in pricing strategy. You've probably heard sensational stories about unethical competitive espionage — like companies sending spies into a competitor's research and development department, or paying a former staff member for information about another business. Fortunately, you don't have to resort to

such covert means, as you can learn a great deal from legitimate, legal sources. The key is deciding to look in the first place ??” and then knowing where and how to look. What is Competitive Intelligence Competitive intelligence is the systematic monitoring of your competitors actions to determine what theyre currently doing ??” and what theyre likely to do in the future. By gathering this type of information, you improve your own decisions, both strategically and tactically. For example, if you know that a major competitor is pursuing an acquisition strategy, then you might decide not to compete on size, but to focus on quality and customer service instead.

Or, if a competitor starts to buy raw materials from another country, you might emphasize that you use ??? home-grown materials as a theme for your next advertising campaign. Competitive intelligence focuses on five basic categories of information: BrainstormingGenerating many radical, creative ideasBrainstorm better with James Manktelow & Amy Carlson. Brainstorming is a popular tool that helps you generate creative solutions to a problem. It is particularly useful when you want to break out of stale, established patterns of thinking, so that you can develop new ways of looking at things. It also helps you overcome many of the issues that can make group problem-solving a sterile and unsatisfactory process. Used with your team, it helps you bring the diverse experience of all team members into play during problem solving. This increases the richness of ideas explored, meaning that you can find better solutions to the problems you face.

It can also help you get buy in from team members for the solution chosen ??” after all, they were involved in developing it. What??™s more, because brainstorming is fun, it helps team members bond with one-another

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as they solve problems in a positive, rewarding environment. Why Use Brainstorming Conventional group problem-solving can be fraught with problems. Confident, “big-ego” participants can drown out and intimidate quieter group members. Less confident participants can be too scared of ridicule to share their ideas freely.

Others may feel pressurized to conform with the group view, or are held back by an excessive respect for authority. As such, group problem-solving is often ineffective and sterile. By contrast, brainstorming provides a freewheeling environment in which everyone is encouraged to participate. Quirky ideas are welcomed, and many of the issues of group problem-solving are overcome. All participants are asked to contribute fully and fairly, liberating people to develop a rich array of creative solutions to the problems they're facing.

Brainstorming 2. The original approach to brainstorming was developed by Madison Avenue advertising executive, Alex Osborn, in the 1950s. Since then, many researchers have explored the technique, and have identified issues with it. The steps described here seek to take account of this research, meaning that the approach described below differs subtly from Osborn's original one.

What is Brainstorming Brainstorming combines a relaxed, informal approach to problem-solving with lateral thinking. It asks that people come up with ideas and thoughts that can at first seem to be a bit crazy. The idea here is that some of these ideas can be crafted into original, creative solutions to the problem you're trying to solve, while others can spark still more ideas.

This approach aims to get people unstuck, by “jolting” them out of their normal ways of thinking. During brainstorming sessions there should therefore be no criticism of ideas: You are trying to open up possibilities and break down wrong assumptions about the limits of the problem. Judgments and analysis at this stage stunt idea generation.

Ideas should only be evaluated at the end of the brainstorming session ??“ this is the time to explore solutions further using conventional approaches. Individual Brainstorming While group brainstorming is often more effective at generating ideas than normal group problem-solving, study after study has shown that when individuals brainstorm on their own, they come up with more ideas (and often better quality ideas) than groups of people who brainstorm together. Partly this occurs because, in groups, people aren??™t always strict in following the rules of brainstorming, and bad group behaviors creep in. Mostly, though, this occurs because people are paying so much attention to other people??™s ideas that theyre not generating ideas of their own ??“ or theyre forgetting these ideas while they wait for their turn to speak.

This is called “blocking”. When you brainstorm on your own, youll tend to produce a wider range of ideas than with group brainstorming – you do not have to worry about other peoples egos or opinions, and can therefore be more freely creative. For example, you might find that an idea you??™d be hesitant to bring up in a group session develops into something quite special when you explore it with individual brainstorming. Nor do you have to wait for others to stop speaking before you contribute your own ideas. You may not, however, develop ideas as fully when you brainstorm on your own, as

you do not have the wider experience of other members of a group to help you. Tip: When Brainstorming on your own, consider using Mind Maps to arrange and develop ideas. Group Brainstorming When it works, group brainstorming can be very effective for bringing the full experience and creativity of all members of the group to bear on an issue. When individual group members get stuck with an idea, another members creativity and experience can take the idea to the next stage.

Group brainstorming can therefore develop ideas in more depth than individual brainstorming. Another advantage of group brainstorming is that it helps everyone involved to feel that they??™ve contributed to the end solution, and it reminds people that other people have creative ideas to offer. What??™s more, brainstorming is fun, and it can be great for team-building! Brainstorming in a group can be risky for individuals.

Valuable but strange suggestions may appear stupid at first sight. Because of this, you need to chair sessions tightly so that ideas are not crushed, and so that the usual issues with group problem-solving don??™t stifle creativity.

How to Use the Tool: You can often get the best results by combining individual and group brainstorming, and by managing the process carefully and according to the “ rules” below. That way, you get people to focus on the issue without interruption (this comes from having everyone in a dedicated group meeting), you maximize the number of ideas you can generate, and you get that great feeling of team bonding that comes with a well-run brainstorming session! To run a group brainstorming session effectively, do the following: * Find a comfortable meeting environment, and set it up ready for the session.

* Appoint one person to record the ideas that come from the session. These should be noted in a format than everyone can see and refer to. Depending on the approach you want to use, you may want to record ideas on flip charts, whiteboards, or computers with data projectors. * If people aren't already used to working together, consider using an appropriate warm-up exercise or ice-breaker. * Define the problem you want solved clearly, and lay out any criteria to be met. Make it clear that that the objective of the meeting is to generate as many ideas as possible.

* Give people plenty of time on their own at the start of the session to generate as many ideas as possible. * Ask people to give their ideas, making sure that you give everyone a fair opportunity to contribute. * Encourage people to develop other peoples ideas, or to use other ideas to create new ones.

* Encourage an enthusiastic, uncritical attitude among members of the group. Try to get everyone to contribute and develop ideas, including the quietest members of the group. * Ensure that no one criticizes or evaluates ideas during the session.

Criticism introduces an element of risk for group members when putting forward an idea. This stifles creativity and cripples the free running nature of a good brainstorming session. * Let people have fun brainstorming.

Encourage them to come up with as many ideas as possible, from solidly practical ones to wildly impractical ones. Welcome creativity! * Ensure that no train of thought is followed for too long. Make sure that you generate a

sufficient number of different ideas, as well as exploring individual ideas in detail.

* In a long session, take plenty of breaks so that people can continue to concentrate. Taking Your Brainstorming Further...

If you're still not getting the ideas you want, try using these approaches to increase the number of ideas that you generate:

- * The Stepladder Technique – This improves the contribution of quieter members of the group, by introducing ideas one person at a time.
- * Brainwriting – Brainwriting uses a written approach to brainstorming to generate and develop ideas. This helps you get ideas from all individuals, and develop these ideas in depth.
- * Brainnetting – This is similar to Brainwriting, but uses an electronic document stored on a central server.
- * The Crawford's Slip Approach – The Crawford's Slip Approach helps you get plenty of ideas from all participants in your session, and gives you a view of the popularity of each idea. The techniques below help you in specific brainstorming situations:
- * Reverse Brainstorming – This is useful for improving a product or service.
- * Starbursting – Starbursting helps you brainstorm the questions you need to ask to evaluate a proposal.
- * Charette Procedure – This procedure helps you brainstorm effectively with large groups of people.

(Conventional brainstorming is cumbersome and increasingly ineffective when more than 10 to 12 people are involved.)

- * Round-Robin Brainstorming – This technique helps you ensure that people will contribute great ideas without being influenced by others in the group.

Where possible, participants in the brainstorming process should come from

as wide a range of disciplines as possible. This brings a broad range of experience to the session and helps to make it more creative. However, don't make the group too big" as with other types of teamwork, groups of between 5 and 7 people are often most effective. Key Points:

Brainstorming is a useful way of generating radical solutions to problems, just as long as its managed well. During the brainstorming process there is no criticism of ideas, and free rein is given to peoples creativity (criticism and judgment cramp creativity.

)This tends to make group brainstorming sessions enjoyable experiences, which are great for bringing team members together. Using brainstorming also helps people commit to solutions, because they have participated in the development of these solutions. The best approach to brainstorming combines individual and group brainstorming. Group brainstorming needs formal rules for it to work smoothly. Managing Conflict in Meetings Handling Disagreements on the Spot Getting away from no. © iStockphoto" But thats ridiculous, Bob! We cant possibly have the new product ready in time for the Autumn Expo! What do the rest of you think Is anyone else stupid enough to think well be ready" Well, I can see your arguments for appointing Alison.

But I just think James would be better, and youre not going to convince me otherwise." Many of us have experienced tension and conflict in meetings. This can be exciting and energizing, but it can also hurt the teams progress and morale. If youre in charge of a meeting and conflict occurs, what is your role How do you restore peace How can you assure that these conflicts dont harm your work While you cant always prevent conflict in meetings, there are many things you can do to stop disagreements from damaging your teams

wider goals. Consider the following: * Can you set up your meeting to reduce the risk of conflict * How do you turn the conflict and tension into a positive force, and one that generates better solutions and results * Can you reduce the negative impact of conflict * How can you help those involved accept the situation when consensus isn't possible We'll look at each of these.

As we do so, remember that there are two separate underlying reasons for conflict in meetings. Types of Conflict Conflict in business meetings usually falls into two categories: 1. Real professional differences ??“ Conflict can arise from very real differences in professional opinions. In many cases, these differences don't develop into open conflict. But conflict is more likely when the outcome is extremely important, when the decision being made is irreversible, or when the impact of making the wrong decision will reflect badly on those involved. When this type of conflict is left unresolved, it can rapidly spoil relationships. 2.

Power struggles and personality issues ??“ Conflict can arise when individuals or groups dislike one-another, or feel that their positions are being threatened. This type of conflict tends to be more about people's personalities than about “ facts” or decisions being made. The techniques we'll discuss below still apply, but you may also need to resolve the underlying problem. For more on this, see our articles on Conflict Resolution (in particular, Thomas and Kilmann's conflict styles) and on Resolving Team Conflict. Reducing the Opportunity for Conflict The best defenses against conflict often involve preparing thoroughly before the meeting, and chairing strongly during the meeting. If you develop a reputation for running tightly

structured meetings, there's less chance that individuals who attend those meetings will try to pursue their own agendas.

See *Running Effective Meetings* for practical tips on how to do this. Send out the agenda in advance, and when the meeting begins, ask the group to agree to it. Then follow your agenda closely, but don't be overly rigid. If a conflict arises, a good agenda makes it easier to recognize that the group is going off course.

If people agree to the meeting's goals, interruptions that lead to conflict aren't as likely to occur. You should also be alert for meetings where the atmosphere and dynamics of the people involved make it more likely for conflict to arise. These include gatherings where "known troublemakers" or individuals or groups with a history of causing conflict are present. They also include meetings of new teams that have reached the "storming" stage of their team development when individuals begin to struggle for influence, but the team hasn't yet established effective ways of working. Read more about this in *Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing*.

In these situations, state the meeting rules in advance. For example, meeting rules might be as follows: * Individuals will be allowed to speak after raising their hands and only one person may speak at a time. * The chair may summarize what has been said to make sure everyone understands. * Everyone will be invited to contribute, so that one person cannot take over the discussion. As chair, you must be firm about managing and enforcing these rules! If the team needs to make decisions, you may also want to establish the decision-making process, and ask all participants to agree to

this. Gaining Benefits from Conflict Have you ever attended a meeting in which a conflict ??“ probably the “ real professional disagreement” type ??“ was successfully resolved If so, you can appreciate the benefits of working through your differences to a satisfactory conclusion. Conflict is not, therefore, something you need to avoid at all costs. In fact, conflict can sometimes be the quickest and best way to make creative progress.

You certainly dont want everyone automatically to say “ yes” to everything without proper discussion! Spotting Potential Conflicts Early One key to spotting the first signs of conflict is watching “ body language.” If the conflict is mostly due to professional differences, rather than personality differences, the sooner you allow people to make their points, the better. Make sure that people have the opportunity to express disagreement as soon a possible, so that issues can be resolved and the discussion can proceed on a correct basis. How do you know if someone is frustrated Look for these signs: *

- * Making facial expressions of amazement or disagreement, such as shaking the head or rolling the eyes. The person may also fidget, or move around in a restless or nervous manner.

- * Looking at other people to see if anyone elses body language or facial expressions reveal their disagreement with the speaker.
- * Whispering or writing notes to another person. This may indicate that the frustrated person is checking on his or her position or trying to gather support for a confrontation. This can apply to both types of conflict.
- * Staring, possibly in an intimidating way, at the speaker or potential target of confrontation.

When you spot the signs of conflict brewing, use the resolution approaches set out in the next section proactively rather than reactively. And nipping the

problem in the bud is usually better, because then no one will have to live with the memory of “ what was said at THAT meeting”.

Resolving Conflict So, what if you follow these suggestions, and an unexpected conflict still occurs What do you do then Here are some approaches and techniques you can use. Depersonalization This involves wording issues so that they focus on what one party doesn't like rather than the person who is proposing the unpalatable option. How does this work in practice Lets going back to our earlier example:” Well, I can see your arguments for appointing Alison. But I just think James would be better, and youre not going to convince me otherwise.” As a leader, you need to pick this up and rephrase the statement:” So what youre saying is that while Alison clearly has strengths, James strengths may well be more important.” From here, you can move the discussion into an objective analysis of the relative importance of different qualities. Questioning Another approach is to switch your teams focus from conflict to “ research.” Encourage people to provide information, rather than state that theyre angry or disagree with something.

To achieve this, use some carefully phrased questions. Dont just ask yes-or-no questions ??” try to clarify what people are thinking. Ask for specific examples, and perhaps suggestions for how the “ disagreeable” idea would need to be changed to make it acceptable to them. In some cases, the alterations they want may be quite small. When a conflict arises in a meeting, you, as the chair need to take control.

Dont let others start wading in to the conflict by interrupting you or the speakers. Remove or Reduce the Perceived Threat A key cause of anger or conflict is that people may perceive that they, or things they hold dear, are threatened. Perhaps they feel that something being discussed threatens their reputation, judgment, chances of leading a successful project, or chances of getting a bonus. Or perhaps they perceive a threat to a project theyve worked hard to promote, or believe in strongly. There are two parts to this: the perception of threat, and the threat itself.

This is where you need to explore the issue and fully understand what it is. Its possible that the perception may be wrong ??“ perhaps based on faulty or incomplete information. Here you need to supply the correct information.

Or it may be that the perception is correct, and the person is right to feel threatened. Here you need to address the situation. Another thing you can do is make sure that you clear up unknowns, because the unknown is often treated as a threat. Going back again to our example of the Alison vs James hiring decision, you might ask the supporters of each to talk about what benefits their non-preferred candidate would bring to the team, and what areas for development theyd need to work on. Take Things “ Off Line” There are times when you cant resolve a situation in a meeting: this is particularly the case where problems involve sensitive personal issues, which shouldnt be discussed “ in public”. In this case, youll need to acknowledge the disagreement, and arrange a specific meeting to address the issue later on. Finally, remember that sometimes it simply isnt possible for everyone to be happy with an outcome.

If you've given everyone a fair chance to express their opinions, and you've gone through a fair decision making process (where appropriate), don't take it personally when people are unhappy. This also applies to you ??“ if you're the one who's unhappy with a decision. Key Points The best way to avoid conflicts in your meetings is to prepare properly, taking all factors into consideration. It's particularly important to make sure your expectations match what the group is capable of handling. Know yourself, and your team, well enough so that you're aware of tensions that may exist between people ??“ and have strategies in place to deal with them.

If anger and conflict arise, move back to your agenda by questioning people to determine the immediate cause of the conflict. Develop questions to get people to clearly state their problems and issues. By doing this, you'll guide people back to rational thinking, focus group energy, and encourage learning and problem solving. Better Public Speaking & Presentation Ensure Your Words Are Always Understood? © iStockphoto/Viorika There are many things you can do to ensure that your verbal messages are understood time and time again. Although somewhat obvious and deceptively simple, these include: * Keep the message clear. * Be prepared.

* Keep the message simple. * Be vivid when delivering the message. * Be natural. * Keep the message concise. Preparation is underrated.

In fact, it is one of the most important factors in determining your communication successes. When possible, set meeting times and speaking and presentation times well in advance, thus allowing yourself the time you need to prepare your communications, mindful of the entire communication

process (source, encoding, channel, decoding, receiver, feedback and context). By paying close attention to each of these stages and preparing accordingly, you ensure your communications will be more effective and better understood.

Of course, not all communications can be scheduled. In this case, preparation may mean having a good, thorough understanding of the office goings-on, enabling you to communicate with the knowledge you need to be effective, both through verbal and written communications. Being prepared: Guidelines for Thinking Ahead: Ask yourself: Who What How When Where Why Who are you speaking to What are their interests, presuppositions and values What do they share in common with others; how are they unique What do you wish to communicate One way of answering this question is to ask yourself about the success criteria. How do you know if and when you have successfully communicated what you have in mind How can you best convey your message Language is important here, as are the nonverbal cues discussed earlier. Choose your words and your nonverbal cues with your audience in mind. Plan a beginning, middle and end.

If time and place allow, consider and prepare audio-visual aids. When Timing is important here. Develop a sense of timing, so that your contributions are seen and heard as relevant to the issue or matter at hand.

There is a time to speak and a time to be silent. Its better to be silent than sing a bad tune. Where What is the physical context of the communication in mind You may have time to visit the room, for example, and rearrange the furniture. Check for availability and visibility if you are using audio or visual

aids. Why In order to convert hearers into listeners, you need to know why they should listen to you ??” and tell them if necessary. What disposes them to listen That implies that you know yourself why you are seeking to communicate ??” the value or worth or interest of what you are going to say. Be concise. Be brief.

Use short words and sentences. Where appropriate, support these with short, easy-to-understand examples, which help demonstrate your message.

Managing Presentation NervesCoping with the fear within?©

iStockphoto/MarkBernardYour stomach is queasy, your palms are sweaty, and your mind has gone blank about your opening lines.

What will you be like when youve been introduced and the room goes quiet Are you doomed to presentation panic or paralysis, or can you overcome that debilitating nervousness and deliver a speech that wows the audience (Or at least leaves them feeling satisfied)If you are like most people, then public speaking or presenting is one of your major fears. Yet these skills are often called upon. It might not be to an audience of hundreds, but giving presentations to staff or even team members is a common enough occurrence. You owe it to yourself to develop some strategies and techniques to manage your nerves so you can concentrate on delivering an effective and engaging presentation. Notice I didnt say to get rid of your nervousness. This is because presenting is not a natural activity; even the most practiced presenters get a bit nervous.

The point is this: your nervous energy can be used to your advantage. When you are in a heightened state from the adrenaline that is being pumped into

your body, you can use that energy to communicate enthusiastically, convincingly, and passionately. The key is to decrease your level of nervousness so you can use your energy on these positive activities, not on trying to control your nerves. So, to harness your nervousness and bring it under control, there are six key tips to remember.

These tips are all designed to help you focus on your audience and their needs rather than on yourself and how you are feeling. They all stem from one truism: The more uncertain you are, the more nervous you will be. The more you can control the uncertainty, the less nervousness you will experience and the more residual energy you will have to devote to the presentation itself.

Six Steps to Conquering Your Presentation Nerves
Step 1. Know Your Audience
Consult your audience before your presentation. The more confident you are that you are presenting them with useful and interesting material for them, the less nervous you will be overall. You really don't want your presentation to be a surprise. If it is, you lose complete control over the audience's reaction and that is a large factor in nervousness.

So: * Define who your target audience is. * Ask people who are representative of the audience what they expect from the presentation. * Run your agenda by a few people to see if they think something is missing or is overkill. * Consider contacting participants by email beforehand and asking them a few questions about what they expect. * Greet audience members at the door and do a quick survey of why they are there and what they expect.

Step 2. Know Your Material Nothing is worse for nerves than trying to give a presentation on a topic you are not well prepared for.

This doesn't mean you have to be an expert beforehand, but you'd better know it backwards on presentation day. And making sure you've understood your audience and their needs properly will help you ensure that your material is on target to meet their needs. Another important point to remember is that you can't possibly cover everything you know in your presentation. That would probably be long and boring. So select the most pertinent points from your subject base and then supplement with other material if time allows. Tip: To make your material interesting and memorable, include occasional questions to the audience to encourage audience participation. This enhances the learning experience and gives you a break from presenting.

It also allows you deliver your information in a more conversational manner which is often more believable. Step 3. Structure Your Presentation A common technique for trying to calm nervousness is memorizing what you intend to say. But all this does is make your delivery sound like it is coming from a robot.

If you miss a word or draw a blank, your whole presentation is thrown off and then your nervousness compounds itself with every remaining second. It is far better to structure your presentation so that you give yourself clues to what is coming next. * Have a set of key phrases listed on a cue card. * Refer to these phrases to trigger your mind as to what is coming up next. * If you're using slides, use these key phrases in your transitions. This approach helps

you control your own uncertainty about whether you will remember what you want to say and the order you want to say it. Tip: A simple, widely used, and highly effective structure is to tell the audience what you're going to say, then say it, and then recap what you've said. Step 4.

Practice, Practice, Practice Although you should avoid memorizing your presentation, you do want to be very comfortable with your delivery.

Familiarity brings confidence, and practice helps you to deliver the words naturally. This means they will be coming more from your heart and mind, rather than from a piece of paper. * Learn the organization and order of your presentation. * If you do feel the need to memorize, limit it to your opening.

This will help you get off to a smooth start.

* Try videotaping yourself. You will see what you look like to others and then you can make a plan to change the things that need changing. * Use audiotape to listen to how you speak, your tone and your speed, and adjust appropriately. * Prepare for large speaking events by practicing with a smaller audience first; for example, by inviting colleagues to listen to a dry run during their lunch hour. Step 5. Prepare, Prepare, Prepare Once you know what you are going to say, you need to prepare yourself for the actual delivery.

* Decide what you are going to wear ??“ make it comfortable and appropriate. * Arrive early and get your equipment set up. * Anticipate problems and have backups and contingencies in place in case something doesn't work, you forget something, etc. * If possible, give everything one last run through in the real environment. * Prepare responses to anticipated

questions. Try to think like that one person in the front row who always tries to trip the presenter up. Step 6. Calm Yourself from the Inside Nervousness causes physiological reactions which are mostly attributed to the increase of adrenaline in your system.

You can counteract these effects with a few simple techniques: * Practice deep breathing ??“ adrenalin causes you to breath shallowly. By breathing deeply your brain will get the oxygen it needs and the slower pace will trick your body into believing you are calmer. It also helps with voice quivers, which can occur when your breathing is irregular.

* Drink water - adrenalin can cause a dry mouth, which in turn leads to getting tongue-tied. Have a glass of water handy. Take sips occasionally, especially when you want to emphasize a point. * Smile ??“ this is a natural relaxant that sends positive chemicals through your body. * Use visualization techniques ??“ imagine that you are delivering your presentation to an audience that is interested, enthused, smiling, and reacting positively. Cement this positive image in your mind and recall it right before you are ready to go on.

* Press and massage your forehead to bring to energize the front of the brain and speech center. * Just before you start talking, pause, make eye contact, and smile. This last moment of peace is very relaxing and gives you time to adjust to being the centre of attention. * Speak more slowly than you would in a conversation, and leave longer pauses between sentences.

This slower pace will calm you down, and it will also make you easier to hear, especially at the back of a large room. * Move around during your

presentation. This will expend some of your nervous energy. * STAY or Stop Thinking About Yourself. Remember that the audience is there there to get some information and it is your job to put it across to them. Many of these tips were suggested by members of the Mind Tools Club who discussed presentation nerves in the Career Cafe forum. So thanks again to Aussieghump, Misliona, Ladyb, Midgie, Lulu, Geoff Harrop and Rachel! To take this to the next level, click here to listen to our “ Performing Under Pressure” expert interview with Dr Don Greene. This gives you many more tips and techniques for managing performance stress.

Key PointsWhen it comes to presenting, nerves are inevitable. Letting them get the better of you is not. You need to develop a strategy for taking the focus off your nervousness and putting that energy to positive use.

By controlling as much of the uncertainty as you can, you increase your confidence in your ability to deliver an excellent presentation. This confidence then counteracts your nerves and you create a positive cycle for yourself. Nerves are not your enemy and you don't have to fear public speaking. For your next presentation, be knowledgeable, be well practiced and prepared, try out some physical relaxation techniques. Amaze yourself and impress your audience with your calm and cool delivery of a great presentation. Delivering Great PresentationsCommunicating effectively with the right delivery, content and slides Less is usually more!©

iStockphoto/abuEver been to a really bad presentation You know, the kind where the speaker stands behind the podium, uses slides that mirror what he is saying directly, and includes lots of data tables to validate his position. But.

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“ Whats so bad about that” you ask. “ Isnt that how most presentations are given” Yes. That is how most presentations are delivered, but that doesnt mean thats the most effective way to deliver them. This kind of presentation risks boring your audience to the point where they start for a fire alarm to go off so they can escape. And once you lose someone, it is next to impossible to bring his or her attention back.

If the information you are presenting is important enough for you to deliver orally, then it demands an appropriate amount of planning and preparation so that the information you present is memorable ??” for the right reasons. Give a bad presentation and youll be remembered all right: It just wont be the type of impression you want to leave in anyones mind. When someone presents well, it sends the message that the person is capable, confident, intelligent, and competent. These people get noticed and that type of attention bodes well for your career. Even if you dont make formal presentations in your current position, think about the future and keep in mind that you do have to present your ideas and opinions on a daily basis. The same basic principles of effective delivery apply. Four Principles of Great Presentations 1. Understand Your Audience.

2. Prepare Your Content. 3.

Deliver Confidently. 4. Control the Environment. 1. Understand Your Audience To deliver a great presentation you have to consider the following audience characteristics: The Influence Model Using Reciprocity to Gain Influence (Also known as the Cohen-Bradford Influence Model) Do you have influence? © iStockphoto/shironosov Have you ever tried to get something ??”

perhaps advice, support, or a key piece of information ??” from someone who didnt want to help you Sometimes, it can be extremely difficult to get peoples help, especially when we have no authority over them. This is where an approach such as the Cohen-Bradford Influence Model can help us identify what other people value. We can then use that information so that everyone gets the outcome they want.

In this article well examine the Influence Model in detail, and discuss how you can use it when you need help from other people. In this article well examine the Influence Model in detail, and discuss how you can use it when you need help from other people. About the ModelThe Influence Model, also known as the Cohen-Bradford Influence Model, was created by Allen R. Cohen and David L. Bradford, both leadership experts and distinguished professors. The model was originally published in their 2005 book, “ Influence Without Authority.” Cohen and Bradford believe that authority can be problematic. It doesnt always guarantee that youll get support and commitment from those around you; and it can create fear, and motivate people to act for the wrong reasons.

This is why its so useful to learn how to influence others without using authority. The Influence Model is based on the law of reciprocity ??” the belief that all of the positive and negative things we do for (or to) others will be paid back over time. For example, if you give your boss a tip that cuts hours off her workload, you might expect, perhaps subconsciously, that shell do something nice for you in the future. Using the ModelThe Influence Model is useful whenever: 1. You need help from someone over whom you have no authority. 2. The other person is resisting helping you.

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3. You don't have a good relationship with the person from whom you need help. 4. You have one opportunity to ask the person for help. 5. You don't know the other person well.

The model has several steps. These are: * Assume all are potential allies. * Clarify your goals and priorities. * Diagnose the world of the other person. * Identify relevant “ currencies”; theirs, and yours. * Deal with relationships.

* Influence through give and take. Once you're familiar with the model, it's not necessary to think each step through consciously. Let's look at each step in detail, and think about how to apply the model: 1. Assume All are Potential Allies Influencing someone else ??“ especially someone who seems to be “ being difficult” ??“ can make you feel upset, nervous, or unsure.

However, don't write anyone off: approach this situation by looking at the other person as a potential ally. 2. Clarify Your Goals and Priorities In this step you need to identify why you are trying to influence this person. What is it that you need from them What are your primary and secondary goals Here, it's important to keep your personal wants and goals out of the situation. For instance, you may subconsciously want to be seen as “ right,” or you may want to have the “ last word.” These personal motivations often get in the way of effective negotiation.

Focus on your work goals, and leave personal motivators or drivers aside. 3. Diagnose the World of the Other Person In this step, you need to understand your potential ally's world, and understand how he or she is judged. For instance, what performance metrics do they work by How are they rewarded These factors play an important role in what your ally can give, and

what he or she might want from you in return. To evaluate this, ask yourself the following questions: 1. How is this person “measured” at work 2. What are his or her primary responsibilities 3. Does this person experience peer pressure from his or her boss or colleagues 4.

What is the culture of this person's organization 5. What does this person's boss expect from them 6. What seems to be important to this person You can also use empathy to step into the world of your potential ally, and to understand what drives his or her behavior. This step can be challenging; and it will determine whether or not you can identify this person's relevant “currency”, which is the next step. 4. Identify Relevant “Currencies”; Theirs and Yours This is likely to be the most important step in the Influence Model. Here, you need to identify what truly matters to your potential ally.

If you pay attention, you should be able to hear or see the currency that this person values most. Cohen and Bradford identified five types of currency that are most often valued in organizations. These are: * Inspiration-related currencies. * Task-related currencies.

* Position-related currencies. * Relationship-related currencies. * Personal-related currencies. a. Inspiration-Related Currencies These currencies are all related to inspiration, vision, and morality/strength. People who value these currencies want to find meaning in what they're doing. They may go out of their way to help if they know in their heart that it's the right thing to do, or if it contributes in some way to a valued cause.

You can appeal to these people by explaining the significance of your project or request, and by showing that it's the right thing to do. Appeal to their

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sense of integrity and virtue. b. Task-Related Currencies These currencies relate to the task at hand and to getting the job done. Here, you'll want to exchange resources such as money, personnel, or supplies. You could offer to help these people on a current project they're working on.

Or you could offer your expertise, or your organization's expertise, in exchange for their help. Task-related currencies are often highly valued in new organizations, where supplies and resources may be scarce, as well as by organizations or teams that are struggling to get the finances, supplies or information that they need. Keep in mind that an important task-related currency is challenge. Many people, especially those who want to test or expand their skills, value the opportunity to work on challenging tasks or projects. Tip: Be careful, here, not to engage in anything that may be seen to be bribery.

See our article on Gifts in the Workplace for more on this. c. Position-Related Currencies People who value this currency focus on recognition, reputation and visibility. They want to climb the organizational ladder, and to be recognized for the work they're doing. Here you'll want to appeal to this sense of recognition by publicly acknowledging their efforts. You could offer them lunch with your CEO, or the opportunity to work with a high-profile team. Or, convince them that the project or task will be recognized by respected people in your industry. d.

Relationship-Related Currencies People who value relationships want to belong. They want strong relationships with their team and colleagues. So, make these people feel they're connected to you or your organization on a

personal level. Offer them emotional support and understanding. Use active listening, so that they can talk about their problems. And say “ thank you” to show gratitude for the good work theyre doing for you, or have done for you in the past.

e. Personal-Related Currencies This is probably the simplest currency of the five. These currencies relate to the other person on a personal level.

You can appeal to this person by showing them sincere gratitude for their help. Allow them the freedom to make their own decisions if theyre helping you on a team. Keep things simple for them, so they dont feel hassled helping you. Note: A common mistake in indentifying someones currency is underestimating its importance to them. Just because you dont need to feel important, be recognized, or feel loved by your team doesnt mean that no one else does. Make sure you keep an open mind when identifying other peoples currencies. 5. Deal with Relationships In this step you need to analyze what kind of relationship you have with this person.

If you know him or her well and youre on good terms, you can directly ask him or her for what you need. If youre not on good terms, or youre a complete stranger, then you need to focus on building trust and building a good relationship before you move on to the final step. To do this, take time to get to know the person youre interacting with. Make sure you use active listening techniques when youre speaking with him or her. Also, develop your emotional intelligence skills, which will help you recognize not only your own feelings, but the feelings of those around you. 6. Influence Through Give and Take Once you feel you know what your ally wants or needs, and youve

determined what you have to offer, you can make “ the exchange” and put your findings into action.

(Our article on win-win negotiation can help you with this.)Make sure that when you make the offer or exchange, its done in a way that builds trust. Show respect, empathy and understanding to the other person. Show your gratitude to them for helping you, and keep looking for ways to help others.

ExampleMark works in the accounting department in his organization. Hes implementing a new software package that will streamline the collections process, eliminating several unneeded steps. However, he needs help from his colleague, Rob, to solve a problem. Rob has exactly the expertise Mark needs. The problem is that Rob is extremely busy with his own projects, and has so far been unwilling to help. So, Mark uses the Influence Model, as follows: 1. Assume All are Potential AlliesMark already knows that Rob could be an ally; theyve always gotten along in the past.

The only reason that Rob is unwilling to help is because hes “ snowed under” with his own projects, most of which have tight deadlines. 2. Clarify Your Goals and PrioritiesMark takes a moment to clarify his goals. Why does he need to influence RobThis is simple: Rob has the expertise Mark needs to overcome a problem hes stuck with. His goal is to gain Robs help, perhaps for half a day, to solve the problem. 3.

Diagnose the World of the Other PersonMark looks at the professional world that Rob, who works full time in IT, works in daily. Mark knows the IT department is deadline driven. Rob is often under immense pressure to troubleshoot problems as they come up, but also to deliver major projects

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that have quick turnaround times. As a result, Rob frequently stays late and comes in early to meet all his demands. 4. Identify Relevant “Currencies”; Theirs and Yours Mark believes that Robs currency is task-related. What he needs most is another set of hands to help him complete some of his current projects. If he could catch up, hed probably be willing to help Mark with his own project.

5. Deal with Relationships Mark is already on good terms with Rob. They dont talk often since they work in different departments, but theyve chatted a few times in the hallway, and Mark would consider Rob a friend. 6. Influence Through Give and Take Mark decides on his exchange. Hes going to offer Rob a full day of his own time to help him catch on his projects.

In return, hell ask for half a day of Robs time to help him with his own project. When he approaches Rob, Rob looks surprised at the offer. But, he accepts immediately.

Mark shows his appreciation by showing up early on his day to help Rob, and working hard the entire day. When the time comes for Rob to help Mark, the same holds true: Rob shows up early, and the two get the problem figured out by lunchtime. Mark then takes Rob out for lunch to show his gratitude.

Key Points: The Influence Model can be an effective tool for helping you influence others. Its especially effective in situations where you have no authority over the other person, or where he or she seems unwilling to help you. The model has six steps.

These are: 1. Assume all are potential allies. 2. Clarify your goals and priorities. 3. Diagnose the world of the other person.

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4. Identify relevant “ currencies”; theirs and yours. 5. Deal with relationships. 6. Influence through give and take. Once youre familiar with the model, its not necessary to think through each step consciously.

Apply This to Your Life Although you might not need to use the Influence Model right now, chances are there will come a time when you need something from someone, without using any authority: * Start preparing now. Pay attention to your colleagues and other key stakeholders in your organization. You can use Steps 3 and 4 to do this. * Focus now on building good relationships with others in your organization. * Help others whenever you can. Helping your colleagues not only feels good; your colleagues will likely be happy to repay the favor later.

Building Self-Confidence Preparing yourself for success! Build your self-confidence with James Manktelow & Amy Carlson. From the quietly confident doctor whose advice we rely on, to the charismatic confidence of an inspiring speaker, self-confident people have qualities that everyone admires. Self-confidence is extremely important in almost every aspect of our lives, yet so many people struggle to find it.

Sadly, this can be a vicious circle: People who lack self-confidence can find it difficult to become successful. After all, most people are reluctant to back a project thats being pitched by someone who was nervous, fumbling and overly apologetic. On the other hand, you might be persuaded by someone who speaks clearly, who holds his or her head high, who answers questions assuredly, and who readily admits when he or she does not know something. Self-confident people inspire confidence in others: their audience, their

peers, their bosses, their customers, and their friends. And gaining the confidence of others is one of the key ways in which a self-confident person finds success. The good news is that self-confidence really can be learned and built on.

And, whether you're working on your own self-confidence or building the confidence of people around you, it's well-worth the effort! So how confident do you seem to others? Your level of self-confidence can show in many ways: your behavior, your body language, how you speak, what you say, and so on. Look at the following comparisons of common confident behavior with behavior associated with low self-confidence. Which thoughts or actions do you recognize in yourself and people around you?

Self-Confident	Low Self-Confidence
Doing what you believe to be right, even if others mock or criticize you for it.	Governing your behavior based on what other people think.

Being willing to take risks and go the extra mile to achieve better things.	Staying in your comfort zone, fearing failure and so avoid taking risks.
Admitting your mistakes, and learning from them.	Working hard to cover up mistakes and hoping that you can fix the problem before anyone notices.
Waiting for others to congratulate you on your accomplishments.	

Extolling your own virtues as often as possible to as many people as possible.	Accepting compliments graciously. "Thanks, I really worked hard on that prospectus. I'm pleased you recognize my efforts."
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"?" Dismissing compliments offhandedly. "Oh that prospectus was nothing really, anyone could have done it."	As you can see from these
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examples, low self-confidence can be self-destructive, and it often manifests itself as negativity.

Self-confident people are generally more positive ??“ they believe in themselves and their abilities, and they also believe in living life to the full. What is Self-Confidence Two main things contribute to self-confidence: self-efficacy and self-esteem. We gain a sense of self-efficacy when we see ourselves (and others similar to ourselves) mastering skills and achieving goals that matter in those skill areas. This is the confidence that, if we learn and work hard in a particular area, we will succeed; and it's this type of confidence that leads people to accept difficult challenges, and persist in the face of setbacks.

This overlaps with the idea of self-esteem, which is a more general sense that we can cope with what's going on in our lives, and that we have a right to be happy. Partly, this comes from a feeling that the people around us approve of us, which we may or may not be able to control. However, it also comes from the sense that we are behaving virtuously, that we're competent at what we do, and that we can compete successfully when we put our minds to it. Some people believe that self-confidence can be built with affirmations and positive thinking. At Mind Tools, we believe that there's some truth in this, but that it's just as important to build self-confidence by setting and achieving goals ??“ thereby building competence. Without this underlying competence, you don't have self-confidence: you have shallow over-confidence, with all of the issues, upset and failure that this brings.

Building Self-Confidence So how do you build this sense of balanced self-confidence, founded on a firm appreciation of reality? The bad news is that there's no quick fix, or 5-minute solution. The good news is that building self-confidence is readily achievable, just as long as you have the focus and determination to carry things through. And what's even better is that the things you'll do to build self-confidence will also build success. After all, your confidence will come from real, solid achievement. No-one can take this away from you! So here are our three steps to self-confidence, for which we'll use the metaphor of a journey: preparing for your journey; setting out; and accelerating towards success.

Step 1: Preparing for Your Journey

The first step involves getting yourself ready for your journey to self-confidence. You need to take stock of where you are, think about where you want to go, get yourself in the right mindset for your journey, and commit yourself to starting it and staying with it. In preparing for your journey, do these five things: Look at what you've already achieved: Think about your life so far, and list the ten best things you've achieved in an "Achievement Log."

Perhaps you came top in an important test or exam, played a key role in an important team, produced the best sales figures in a period, did something that made a key difference in someone else's life, or delivered a project that meant a lot for your business. Put these into a smartly formatted document, which you can look at often. And then spend a few minutes each week enjoying the success you've already had! Think about your strengths: Next, use a technique like SWOT Analysis (explore personal SWOT Analysis here) to take a look at who and where you are. Looking at your Achievement Log, and reflecting on your recent life, think about what your friends would consider to be your strengths and weaknesses. From these,

think about the opportunities and threats you face. Make sure that you enjoy a few minutes reflecting on your strengths! Think about what's important to you, and where you want to go: Next, think about the things that are really important to you, and what you want to achieve with your life. Setting and achieving goals is a key part of this, and real self-confidence comes from this. Goal setting is the process you use to set yourself targets, and measure your successful hitting of those targets. See our article on goal setting to find out how to use this important technique, or use our Life Plan Workbook to think through your own goals in detail (see "Tip" below). Inform your goal setting with your SWOT Analysis. Set goals that exploit your strengths, minimize your weaknesses, realize your opportunities, and control the threats you face. And having set the major goals in your life, identify the first step in each. A tip: Make sure it's a very small step, perhaps taking no more than an hour to complete! Start managing your mind: At this stage, you need to start managing your mind. Learn to pick up and defeat the negative self-talk which can destroy your confidence. See our article on rational positive thinking to find out how to do this. Further useful reading includes our article on imagery "this teaches you how to use and create strong mental images of what you'll feel and experience as you achieve your major goals" there's something about doing this that makes even major goals seem achievable! And then commit yourself to success! The final part of preparing for the journey is to make a clear and unequivocal promise to yourself that you are absolutely committed to your journey, and that you will do all in your power to achieve it. If as you're doing it, you find doubts starting to surface, write them down and challenge them calmly and rationally. If they dissolve under scrutiny, that's great. However if they

are based on genuine risks, make sure you set additional goals to manage these appropriately. For help with evaluating and managing the risks you face, read our Risk Analysis and Management article. Either way, make that promise! Tip: Balanced Self-Confidence Self-confidence is about balance. At one extreme, we have people with low self-confidence. At the other end, we have people who may be over-confident. If you are under-confident, you??™ll avoid taking risks and stretching yourself; and you might not try at all. And if you??™re over-confident, you may take on too much risk, stretch yourself beyond your capabilities, and crash badly. You may also find that you??™re so optimistic that you don??™t try hard enough to truly succeed. Getting this right is a matter of having the right amount of confidence, founded in reality and on your true ability. With the right amount of self-confidence, you will take informed risks, stretch yourself (but not beyond your abilities) and try hard. So How Self Confident Are You Take our short quiz to find out how self-confident you are already, and start looking at specific strategies to improve your confidence level. Step 2: Setting Out This is where you start, ever so slowly, moving towards your goal. By doing the right things, and starting with small, easy wins, you??™ll put yourself on the path to success ??” and start building the self-confidence that comes with this. Build the knowledge you need to succeed: Looking at your goals, identify the skills you??™ll need to achieve them. And then look at how you can acquire these skills confidently and well. Don??™t just accept a sketchy, just-good-enough solution ??” look for a solution, a program or a course that fully equips you to achieve what you want to achieve and, ideally, gives you a certificate or qualification you can be proud of. Focus on the basics: When you??™re starting, don??™t try to do anything clever or elaborate. And

don't reach for perfection" just enjoy doing simple things successfully and well. Set small goals, and achieve them: Starting with the very small goals you identified in step 1, get in the habit of setting them, achieving them, and celebrating that achievement. Don't make goals particularly challenging at this stage, just get into the habit of achieving them and celebrating them. And, little by little, start piling up the successes! Keep managing your mind: Stay on top of that positive thinking, keep celebrating and enjoying success, and keep those mental images strong. You can also use a technique like Treasure Mapping to make your visualizations even stronger! And on the other side, learn to handle failure. Accept that mistakes happen when you're trying something new. In fact, if you get into the habit of treating mistakes as learning experiences, you can (almost) start to see them in a positive light. After all, there's a lot to be said for the saying "if it doesn't kill you, it makes you stronger!"

Step 3: Accelerating Towards Success

By this stage, you'll feel your self-confidence building. You'll have completed some of the courses you started in step 2, and you'll have plenty of success to celebrate! This is the time to start stretching yourself. Make the goals a bit bigger, and the challenges a bit tougher. Increase the size of your commitment. And extend the skills you've proven into new, but closely related arenas.

Tip 1: Keep yourself grounded" this is where people tend to get over-confident and over-stretch themselves. And make sure you don't start enjoying cleverness for its own sake!

Tip 2: If you haven't already looked at it, use our How Self Confident Are You quiz to find out how self-confident you are, and to identify specific strategies for building self-confidence.