The HI Factor

The Advancement of Influential Communication

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HORN SALES
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DEVELOPMENT

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Influencing with Integrity

Leading-edge research in the field of influential communication has yielded an innovative approach well-received by experts, practitioners, and academics alike. "Humanistic Influence" or "The HI Factor," involves deliberately embracing the other person's objectives during an influencing interaction, rather than just one's own. Although contrary to popular methodology, adopting a more humanistic approach allows influencers to become more effective.

Many societal roles rely on the ability to influence, including corporate leaders, politicians, therapists, advertisers, educators, and even parents. Success is directly tied to the ability to *influence* others—to shape their views, modify their behaviour, and secure their commitment. Take Pat Smith, for example.

Pat is a typical sales manager in a medium-sized industrial company in Toronto. On a daily basis, Pat must assume the role of leader, trainer, coach, mentor, advocate, counselor, and sales professional. In order to succeed in these roles, Pat must be influential: securing the team's commitment for next year's sales goals, for completing new sales reports willingly, and perhaps, for improving the way they deliver sales presentations.

Traditionally, if skill development were required in order to be able to effectively execute these roles, Pat would attend targeted courses and training. But we seldom identify development efforts in these areas as *influence skills* training.

Although influence is seen as the ability to effect a person or thing (Oxford, 1999), common conceptualization also maintains that influencing involves the ability to persuade others to willingly replace their points of view with those of the influencer. Historically, many have shied away from this discussion due to the perception of influencing as underhanded or manipulative. In addition, improving one's influencing skills can be quite challenging as they are grounded in interaction patterns and philosophies that have been built over time and reinforced by our experiences.

But times are changing. Training programs on *influential communication* are increasing in popularity in the business, education and government sectors. In addition, degree programs in a variety disciplines often include courses in communication and the psychology of human behaviour, in order to enhance learners' influencing abilities. Yet the moral dilemmas persist and the challenges associated with changing entrenched behaviours, such as the way a person communicates, are real.

A Humanistic Approach to Influential Communication

Innovative advancements in the field of influential communication are now addressing these dilemmas. For several years, Arthur Horn (President of HORN and a noted author, trainer, consultant, and executive coach) has been espousing the benefits of deliberately focusing on the other person's perspectives and goals during an influencing interaction, rather than just one's own. By adopting a more humanistic approach, we avoid subordinating either party's objectives, and the influencer becomes more effective at gaining support for their goal – everyone wins!

This is somewhat contrary to traditional influencing models that focus on trying to "win over" or persuade the other person to your perspective at all costs. These methods may be appropriate in rare situations, when the influencer has no care or concern for the other party and attempts to purposefully coerce or manipulate. However, in most situations maintaining good relations between the parties is paramount, and a more humanistic approach proves quite valuable.

Over recent years, Horn's approach has evolved into a formalized model for influential communication known as *Humanistic Influence (HI)*—see Figure 1. Humanistic Influence may provide the answer to two key challenges in the field of influence: a) addressing the moral dilemmas of influencing, and b) helping people change ingrained personal communication.

HI is supported by Daniel Goleman's popularized work in recent years on Emotional Intelligence (1998)—and its relationship to personal and professional success. There are some fundamental overlaps in the components of both models. However, HI remains unique in its focus on influential communication and the approach is gaining support from business leaders, academics, and practitioners alike in North America and Europe. Its components have been utilized to enhance the tactical skills of managers, leaders, sales, and service professionals globally with success.

The HORN Centre for Applied Measurement (HCAM), a division of HORN, worked with Dr. Tony Lam, an Associate Professor at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE/UT), to advance the academic study of HI, formalize its principles, and gather empirical data to test and develop the model. Horn and Lam have written a preliminary academic white paper that outlines the HI model, its application, and its implications on soft skills training. This article draws extensively from that white paper and introduces new concepts developed since its writing, in providing an overview of HI and its components.

The HI Model

Humanistic Influence can be described as the interplay between three key components: *Empathy, Goal Focus, and Agency* (see Figure 1). When influencers exhibit optimum levels of all three elements naturally or unconsciously, their influencing potential is maximized.

The key words here are "naturally" or "unconsciously." Elite athletes who perform at optimal levels often claim to attain a "zone" where they perform on automatic pilot. They don't need to think about *what* to do next or *how* to do it; they just do it. The performance of these athletes becomes seemingly effortless.

A similar distinction can be made with an influencer who attains superior levels of empathy, personal goal focus, and agency at the same time, without having to think about it. This individual will achieve *The Zone* in their ability to influence.

Unfortunately, our natural human tendencies usually dictate unbalanced levels of these elements, inhibiting our ability to optimize performance. In other words, *The Zone* doesn't come easily. In order to heighten one's influencing prowess, *Self Management* must be used to optimize and coordinate the three key components, and the progress of the influencing interaction itself.

Eventually, after years of practice, influencers may find themselves attaining *The Zone* in certain circumstances. However, like a professional athlete, even elite influencers aren't always *on their game*. During these times, *self management* remains the tie that binds the key components of HI.
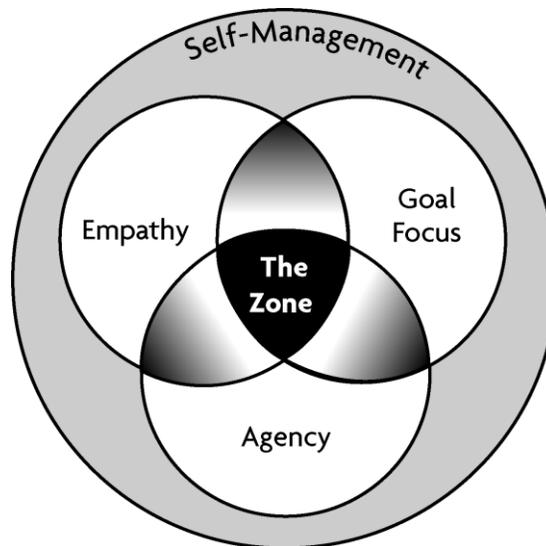

Figure 1

Humanistic Influence Model

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Furthermore, *The Zone* in influencing doesn't represent some idealistic state that is out of reach of the average person, as one may think. Characterized by Csikszentmihalyi (1990) as "flow," it is fully attainable through hard work and self-development.

Empathy

Empathy involves one's capacity and tendency to identify with others and to embrace their perspectives. It is the application of specific interaction behaviours that demonstrate understanding of and identification with the other person's perspective. *Empathy* represents the "humanistic" part of HI, and serves as its foundation. This is a significant departure from most traditional influencing methodologies.

For the purposes of HI, *Empathy* is characterized in two facets:

> o *Identification with others:* The ability and disposition to adopt the perspectives and feelings of others.
>
> o *Engaged Communication:* The tendency and behaviour used to listen actively and to respond with sensitivity.

The HI model assumes that influencees are conscious of signs that the influencer may be trying to manipulate them. Even a small, unconscious statement or action by the influencer can be enough to set off defense mechanisms, resulting in resistance to the influencing effort.

However, when the influencer is able to genuinely *identify with others*, it lowers the natural defensiveness and evaluative tendencies of the target audience and both parties are able to become aligned in their views. Influencers who are strong with others are able to use subtle cues, such as facial expressions and body language, to connect with what people may be feeling or thinking. They can predict how people will react. They are also able to sense the underlying dynamics of a group.

But this *identification with others* must be genuine. Feigned empathy is ineffective—humans are a relatively sophisticated social species and can see through the façade. In a sales context, for example, empathy leads to adopting a genuine care and concern for the product's or solution's impact on the customer. It is an ingredient for stepping outside the role of salesperson, and instead, adopting a third-party impartiality in helping the customer reach her objectives. The key is to find a solution that is ideal for the client's needs—not just one that is highly attractive to the sales representative.

Engaged Communication demonstrates full acceptance, understanding, and commitment to the target audience's goals and needs. Influencers who are strong in this facet modify their approach to adapt to the other person's personality and communication style. They paraphrase and summarize, and don't let thoughts, like what they're going to say next, take away from their focus on what people are saying. They can effectively monitor a conversation to determine if all parties are satisfied and go out of their way to show people they understand their point of view.

On the surface, genuine empathy may appear difficult for influencers to maintain. It seems contrary to the goal of serving one's own interests. During an influencing interaction, when we fear that we are not getting what we want, most of us try harder to push our perspective. The problem is that this creates a naturally combative environment.

Instead, humanistic influencers increase their investment in the influencee's goals when an interaction is not progressing well. Ironically, this approach actually *improves* influencing success. Although this may be uncomfortable and counter-intuitive to prospective influencers, that's the way empathy works. It breaks the combative cycle expected by the influencee and allays the natural suspicions and defenses that typically accompany the interaction.

In HI, so long as the influencer has clearly visualized personal goals, she can afford to place them in the background and attend to the goals of the other person instead. Her intuitive radar won't let her forget her own goals—in fact, that radar will unconsciously search for the link between the goals of both parties during the interaction.

Goal Focus

The second key component of HI, *Goal Focus*, is the disposition to establish personal goals and maintain motivation towards them while addressing another person's goals in a manner that aligns with, and supports, the achievement of one's own goals. It involves using specific interaction techniques to focus one's own goals and another person's goals as efficiently as possible. In HI, the facets of *Goal Focus* are:

> o   *Defining Goals:* The disposition to delineate and clarify one's own goals and another person's short- and long-term goals.
>
> o   *Sustaining Goals:* The tendency to assess progress against, and persist in the pursuit of, goals.
>
> o   *Goal Alignment:* The ability to seek the link between one's own goals and the influencee's goals, to craft a solution in a way that addresses one's own goals and the possible objections of an influencee, and to present the solution in ways that take into consideration the influencee's goals.

Generally speaking, *defining goals* increases the purposefulness of the influencer's statements and actions during an interaction. Influencers who are strong in this facet tend to plan ahead before they do things, and seek to understand and clarify others' goals, and views.

Sustaining goals ensures that influencers are constantly assessing their progress and persist in the pursuit of these goals. Influencers strong in this facet are able to resist distraction and stay focused, following through on their plans. They are skilled at focusing on the goals of a conversation and are able to stay on topic. They continue to try, even when their ideas or proposals are not readily accepted.

In order to ensure success, influencers must focus on *goal alignment* by appealing to higher values, importing unspoken dimensions, and highlighting favourable features relevant to the influencee. Influencers who are strong in this facet are able to present their ideas based on what they predict the influencee will like and dislike. They are able to convince people to change their view by showing how the influencee's view is part of a bigger picture. They are also able to resolve objections of individuals when they disagree.

Goal Focus is likely intuitive to most readers. *Of course*, successful influencers know what they want and constantly push towards that goal. Seeking the proverbial "win/win" may not be as intuitive however.

Agency

Agency, the third component of HI, is the tendency to take personal ownership rather than blaming; to act rather than procrastinate or dwell on analysis or reflection; and to be self assured, optimistic and positive. *Agency* includes four main facets:

> o *Assuming Ownership:* The tendency to assume psychological ownership; to adopt the challenges of another person, a team, an organization or circumstance as one's own, when appropriate.
>
> o *Action Orientation:* The tendency to move into action or "let things go" as opposed to procrastinating or spending excessive time analyzing or reflecting.
>
> o *Self-efficacy:* The perception of one's ability to successfully perform target behaviours to produce outcomes.
>
> o *Seeking Commitment Orientation:* The tendency to solicit commitment to the acceptance of a solution, proposal or conclusion from an influencee.

Assuming Ownership involves an influencer being able to assume personal, psychological ownership of situations and circumstances. Influencers who are strong in this facet dedicate themselves whole-heartedly to fulfilling their responsibilities. They are able to adopt others' problems as their own, take ownership for everything they are involved with and are able to admit when they are wrong or at fault.

Action orientation involves influencers being able to move beyond feelings, circumstance and barriers to make things happen. Influencers who are strong in this facet are able to let their emotions go and move quickly into action, concentrating on the task at hand. When things don't work, or become difficult, they immediately try harder.

Influencers who have *self-efficacy* are confident in their ability to produce successful outcomes. Influencers strong in this facet believe they will succeed at almost everything they try, even when things aren't going well. They are confident in their ability to manage their emotions, and their ability to persuade an influencee to change views.

Seeking Commitment Orientation focuses on the influencer's ability to get an influencee to commit. Influencers strong in this facet are able to assess and explore an individual's buy-in in order to seek tangible commitment, while encouraging and providing opportunities for the individual to voice concerns about full commitment.

Being an agent in the HI model refers to one's willingness and tendency to avoid the role of powerless victim in the influencing interaction. Influencers who do not take full responsibility tend to engage in destructive silent mental chatter. This negative self-talk, which often results in self-doubt, blaming others and/or simply giving-up on the interaction, obviously diminishes one's ability to influence effectively. Influencers must be able to manage this personal mindset through positive self-talk.

Self Management

Self Management is what ties the preceding three components together. It includes the disposition and meta-cognitive capability to monitor and manage one's own state of mind or mental activity in order to optimize empathy, goal focus, and agency.

Often, novices at influencing fail not only because of a lack of interaction sophistication, but also because of their inability to be aware of (and regulate) their own thought processes, emotions, and behaviours, as well as those of others in the room. This concept is sometimes characterized as meta-cognition, and is another example of how HI is supported by Goleman's model of Emotional Intelligence.

Effective influencers possess sophisticated interpersonal communication skills, partly because of their self-awareness. They are able to manage the impact of negative thoughts and stay focused on task. They are also able to self-monitor the effectiveness of their delivery strategy and adjust when needed.

Again, consider the analogy of professional athletes. When they claim to be *in the zone*, they often describe the ability to virtually step outside themselves and watch the play from above. They describe feeling as if everything is operating in slow motion. For example, a common tale about Ted Williams (often called the best natural hitter in baseball history) was that he claimed to be able to watch himself hitting, as well as read the writing on the baseball as it traveled from the pitching mound. This kind of *distancing* and *slow-motion control* is vital to monitoring and managing the influencing interaction.

Ultimately, it is through effective self management that humanistic influencers ensure the success of the influencing effort. Over time influencers can learn to attain *The Zone* where empathy, goal focus, and agency operate at peak levels, and the interaction progresses perfectly, without purposeful monitoring or control. But until then, self management is vital.

The HI Balancing Act

Just consider a highly influential person you know. Can they connect with their audience really well (empathy)? Are they highly focused on goals and moving towards them (goal focus)? Are they confident, do they tend to take responsibility and avoid assigning blame, and do they seem to be constantly moving forward (agency)? And do these traits appear completely genuine, consistent, and at high levels (self management)? Likely, the answer to all of these questions is a resounding, "Yes!"

The real challenge comes in the effort to balance high levels of all three: empathy, goal focus, and agency. As mentioned earlier, human nature almost always dictates inequable levels. The point is, humanistic influencers must strive to maintain superior levels of all three in order to be effective.

The HI Model (Figure 1) illustrates three secondary areas (shaded) where only two of the key components overlap. Certainly, having high levels of two components is better than only one, or worse, none. However, there are also inherent problems caused by the missing (or low-level) element.

For example, possessing high empathy and agency, but low goal focus, may cause warm feelings within the target audience, and they may respect you for taking responsibility, but it likely won't yield the desired results due to a lack of defining and sustaining goals. Conversely, high degrees of goal focus and agency may cause you to move assertively towards your goals in an optimistic manner, however, it could create negative feelings within the audience, a combative environment, and often, a complete breakdown in the influencing interaction due to a lack of empathy.

High empathy and goal focus, without agency, may be the best alternative combination to possessing all three elements. The audience feels heard and cared for, and personal goals are pursued with earnest. However, a lack of assumed ownership, action orientation, self-efficacy and/or seeking commitment orientation will certainly inhibit one's influencing ability and, likely, their overall professional success.

The ideal solution is to employ well-practiced self management to ensure all three components are optimized. Then, and only then, can one achieve *The Zone.*

Applied HI

So, how does HI actually *work*? How does one become a better, more humanistic, influencer? Historically, many experts have advocated sequential communication models for influencers. For example, Figure 2 summarizes the primary steps of countless sales call models.

Imagine, when Pat Smith visits an important prospective client, the conversation will inevitably start with small talk designed to establish commonality and build rapport.
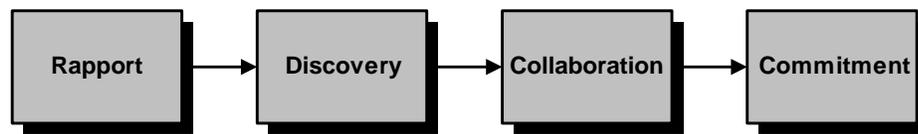
Rapport → Discovery → Collaboration → Commitment

Figure 2

The Basic Sales Call

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Then, Pat may move the conversation forward with the question, "So, what is the biggest challenge you are facing today in your production facility?" The conversation would then continue with further discovery, until Pat recognizes a viable solution that can be offered. Eventually, the dialogue will turn to a collaboration surrounding how Pat can help the prospect achieve his or her goals. Finally, once consensus is reached, Pat will hopefully secure the client's commitment to logical next steps.

Over years of experience and study, HORN has discovered that behavioural models like this alone are not enough. Certainly they are important—they provide a sequential process for practitioners to apply during interactions. However, as Horn and Lam (2001) discuss in their white paper, the real differentiator between highly successful and average influencers seems to go beyond a mere communication process. Time and again it can be seen that superstar influencers all tend to possess the more intangible elements of Humanistic Influence (empathy, goal focusing, agency, and self management).

Consequently, HI dictates that influencers must strive for both – the achievement of *The Zone* while utilizing sequential communication models like The Basic Sales Call to address their and the target audience's goals.

Moving one step closer, we can take a look at the actual application of HI and the interrelationships between the various components (Figure 3) as documented in the HI white paper (Horn & Lam, 2001).

Horn and Lam's (2001) model shows how humanistic influencers come to the interaction with the basic foundations of both an empathetic and goal-focused orientation. Once the interaction begins, they employ various empathetic and focused behavioural techniques, while maintaining a high degree of agency. At the same time, they are constantly monitoring and managing their own mental activities, in order to ensure success.

This interplay between the HI components causes the target audience to feel "at one" with the influencer. This creates a genuine congruence, or commonality, between the goals and perspectives of all parties and results in a profound sense of trust between the influencer and the audience. Once all natural inhibitions and distrust have been dispelled, influencees are much more receptive to the ideas and propositions of the influencer. Finally, assuming that the influencer's recommendations are logical, and they are in the genuine best interest of the target audience, influencing success will result.

For example, consider Pat's hypothetical meeting with the "important prospective client." If Pat comes to the meeting with personal goals clearly visualized, and then focuses the entire conversation on helping the customer reach his or her goals, rather than just on making the sale, while demonstrating agency and using effective conversational models (behavioural techniques), then success will come naturally. This will happen because the customer feels connected with Pat, like "we are in this together" or "on the same wavelength", which makes the customer much more open to Pat's genuine, logical recommendations.

This approach is quite innovative, and certainly more "humanistic", compared to the common impression of what it means to influence others; typically an almost adversarial activity. HI is more like *collaborating* than *influencing*.
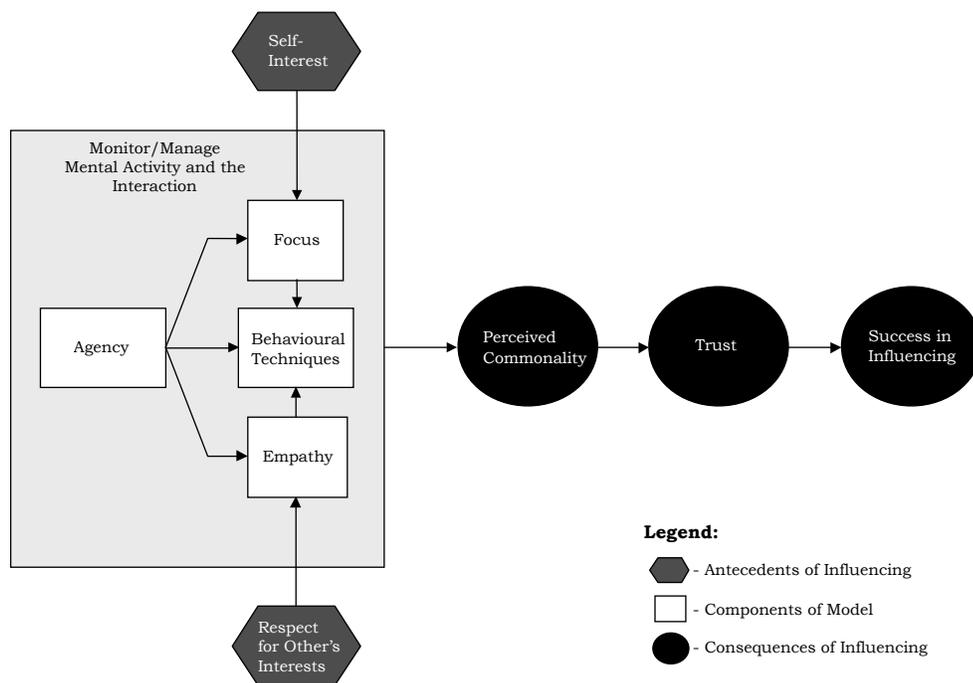

Figure 3

HI Component Interrelationships

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Training HI

But how can Pat acquire these Humanistic Influencing skills?

The very nature of Humanistic Influence also demands a progressive approach to soft skills training. Historically, soft skills training has focused on models that deal with outward behaviours such as posture, eye contact, and facial expressions, as well as process-driven interaction models – say this first, then do that, and finally, when x happens, respond with y. This methodology is strongly rooted in Skinnerian psychology (1950), based on operant learning theory and behavioural instruction techniques.

Behavioural instruction tends to rely on reinforcement for conditioning or modifying behaviour and focuses on lecture, drill, and practice in order to program prescribed responses to environmental events. For example, in training sales professionals to handle customer objections, participants are presented with typical objections and then role-play those scenarios using scripted responses. The aim is to instill in participants the ability to respond appropriately to the situation when it arises in the field.

A popular variant of the behavioural approach to soft skills training concerns Rich's (1998) cognitive-behavioural approach, which relies heavily on observing others and recognizing the value of the observed behaviours. For example, managers and leaders typically role-model the positive behaviours they want their teams to emulate. This helps establish a common value system and encourages followers to behave in ways that promote and maintain the organization's goals and objectives.

However, Horn and Lam (2001) have determined these traditional methodologies alone are insufficient when it comes to Humanistic Influence training, given that HI extends beyond a sole focus on behavioural techniques and process modeling. Instead, HI goes right to one's moral core and root problem-solving processes.

In keeping with this theme, Horn and Lam (2001) subscribe to a modern paradigm-shift in training, away from a behavioural approach focusing on skill development alone, to a more humanistic orientation that emphasizes the learner's detailed understanding and personalization of the learning.

This transition in approaches has been widely embraced in recent years within the adult education community and, similar to the HI model itself, is based on an increased respect for intrinsic humanistic values and integrity.

Consequently, all HI training should employ a truly learner-centred environment where the instructor-learner relationship is built on empathy, trust, and acceptance (sidebar), the core requirements of learner-centred instruction according to noted Psychologist Carl Rogers (1967). Based on several vital tenets of humanistic education, Horn and Lam (2001) prescribe three key requirements for all HI training:

1. The customization of the training to learners' specific needs, interests, and background through comprehensive needs assessment

2. The active engagement of learners in the learning process with instructional strategies such as project-based learning, cooperative learning, team learning, and leaner self-assessment and goal setting

3. The on-going assessment and reinforcement of learners

Having said this, people aren't really interested in training that is merely "touchy-feely." They want to genuine performance improvement from their investment of training dollars and valuable time. Consequently, HI training must remain targeted at behaviour and performance—but using a *humanistic* approach.

Furthermore, since training is a form of influencing, trainers must become proficient at applying HI methodology themselves. HI training should employ the HI model.

This involves being empathetic towards trainees (identifying with them, their perspectives and feelings, and caring for them and their success). It means being highly focused during training; attentive to the goals of the session, and keeping things on time and track. It also means maintaining an agent-like mindset—being confident and avoiding victim-speak, for example. And finally, it means managing the process effectively—constantly monitoring and managing personal mental activities and the session itself. With enough practice, a talented trainer can achieve all of these elements without having to think about it—thus, attaining *The Zone*.

Horn and Lam (2001) summarize that effective training in Humanistic Influence, "*teaches learners how to internalize the ability to achieve an optimal state of performance in work situations and their personal lives. What they learn during training they refine by conscious application and practice until it becomes a seamless approach that they can apply to achieve success*" (p. 17).

> **Vital Tenets of Humanistic Adult Education**
>
> Art Horn and Dr. Tony Lam (2001) document in a recent white paper on *Humanistic Influence* (HI) that according to modern research in the field of adult education, several fundamental tenets of the increasingly popular *humanistic education* model offer significant implications for HI training.
>
> Specifically, the following characteristics are quite relevant:
>
> 1) *Learning must have personal meaning and relevance to the learner.*
>
> 2) *Effective teaching must involve a strong, holistic understanding of the learners, including their perspectives, feelings, thoughts and needs.*
>
> 3) *Students must actively engage in the learning process and take responsibility and ownership for their learning, choosing what to learn and deciding when and how they will learn.*
>
> 4) *Teachers must function as facilitators, taking full responsibility for ensuring 1), 2) and 3) above.*

Perhaps more importantly, the humanistic nature of HI tends to appeal to the personal values of learners—it doesn't offend their social sensibilities. They also intuitively recognize the relevance of HI to their personal lives. For example, they identify with their own struggles over: negative self-talk, a lack of genuine empathy in certain circumstances, and the very real polarity between trying to satisfy personal goals and help others at the same time. Therefore, they tend to internalize HI much more than traditional approaches to influencing—making training more effective.

As mentioned, Horn and Lam (2001) propose that traditional soft skills training programs would benefit from an increased focus on HI training, in addition to the conventional behavioural models taught.

For example, a HI-based training program on *coaching skills* could provide a custom-designed step-by-step model for conducting effective development conversations with employees. The model could prescribe a sequential discussion of the employee's goals, the delicate introduction of a development opportunity or area of concern, the drawing of a link between the opportunity/concern and the employee's goals, and finally, a discussion of a mutually desirable change in employee behaviour. However, the bigger benefit for coaches may come from learning to apply HI during their coaching efforts.

By learning to adopt a truly empathetic approach to helping the employee reach her goals, by remaining focused on the objective of the coaching conversation, by maintaining consistent agency, and by managing the interaction effectively, coaches can create a highly successful environment. The problem is that coaches commonly employ a similar process model to the one in the previous paragraph, but *without* the core intrinsic components of Humanistic Influence. Therefore, effectiveness suffers.

In Summary . . .

The success of HI training can be traced to the fact that it addresses influencing at a root level—the interpersonal dynamics between the parties. It doesn't rely upon rote learning or the mind's imitative faculty. Instead, it engages the intellect and emotions of learners, enabling broader generalizations, deeper understanding, and better retention. When delivered effectively, it causes a genuine awakening or transformational experience in learners.

And success breeds success. The HI Factor has been very well received by HORN's Fortune 1,000 and Global 500 clients in North America and Europe, and within the academic and training industry circles to which it has been exposed. Consequently, the HI model has been used over the past several years as the basis for soft skills training programs for organizations around the world.

However, Horn and Lam (2001) caution, "*To advance our knowledge of influencing and the field of influencing training will require systematic evaluation of the impact of different influencing approaches and determination of ways to improve them*" (p. 19).

Perhaps the HI approach isn't applicable for all situations, where there is little value to the target influencee. But for leaders, sales and service professionals, trainers, and others, where it is important to maintain a healthy working relationship between the influencer and the influencee, HI may be just the ticket.

The necessary research is currently underway and the results are starting to come in. Stay tuned for more details as they become available from the HORN Centre for Applied Measurement.

So perhaps, in the end, The HI Factor will have a profound effect on the way people communicate with each other. And the world will be a much better, or at least humanistic, place to live.

There may be hope for Pat Smith yet!

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