

## **Index**

[PART ONE: Influence: Listen](#)

[PART TWO: Influence: Presentations](#)

[PART THREE: Influence: Networking](#)

## **THE ART OF INFLUENCE**

### **Part 1: GETTING PEOPLE TO LISTEN**

We have Dale Carnegie to thank for one of the top-selling books of the past 70 years. For under \$10.00 you can pick up How to Win Friends and Influence People, a relatively slim volume that will reveal the secrets to financial success through knowledge and give you the ability to “express ideas, to assume leadership, and to arouse enthusiasm among people.” Born in 1888 in Missouri, Carnegie achieved success the hard way – he earned it. He became one of Armour & Co.’s top salesmen by selling bacon, soap and lard and from those humble beginnings he created what is now a national craze for self-improvement programs and franchise operations. His successful program is based on five “course drivers” – self-confidence, basic communication skills, “people” skills, leadership skills and stress-control skills – all of which should sound fairly familiar.

#### **What is Influence?**

According to [www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com), influence is “The capacity or power of persons or things to be a compelling force on or produce effects on the actions, behavior, opinions, etc., of others; the action or process of producing effects on the actions, behavior, opinions, etc., of another or others.”<sup>1</sup>

Influence isn’t about forcing people to listen to you or accept your ideas. It’s about finding the right combination of words, expressed the right way, to make people do something you want them to do – and either embrace your idea enthusiastically or think that it was their idea all long. This is not actually as sinister as it sounds.

Influence is a key element in getting your ideas heard and accepted but how much influence you have and how much you can/should use are more difficult to gauge and implement. Wielding influence is hardly a new concept. According to Aristotle, a successful influencer speaks logically, fluently and confidently to inspire and motivate others by appealing to their hidden interests. To be truly convincing, an influencer uses logic to win over others’ minds, emotion to win their hearts and at least a veneer of confidence to be regarded as authoritative. The great philosopher learned his lessons from his teacher Plato and passed them along to many students including Alexander. Not surprisingly, they are as relevant today as they were back in the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C.

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<sup>1</sup> "influence." Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1). Random House, Inc. 15 Jan. 2007.

< Dictionary.com <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/influence> >

In a perfect world, you would be able to influence everyone around you – your team, your developer (or publisher), and management – to do things exactly your way. If this were *Lemmings*, you'd be able to click on a person, assign a task and know that the worker would continue on the job until it was finished (or something prevented the little guy from working...). But we live in the real world, or a close facsimile of it, so managing a team and wielding your influence requires a bit more effort. No matter how hard you try to click on others, they will probably want to do things their own way.

## **USING YOUR POWERS FOR GOOD**

**Motivate your team:** Once you find out what drives each person on your team, outline the benefits for everyone involved from achieving team goals

**Create a positive environment:** People on your team will get more work done and be happier even in pressure situations when they trust you so focus on how you present yourself and your ideas

**Be open to negotiation:** Achieving positive agreements will enable you to establish positive collaborations, which is crucial on every level of game development

**Be open to change:** Sometimes the right way may not be your way. Regard your situation as an on-going opportunity for learning.

**Build a loyal customer base:** Make the effort to find out what the customer wants

**Improve your career prospects:** Build a strong team and prove that you're a valuable and valued leader

## **Motivation**

Research shows that opinions can be swayed in many ways: how you conduct negotiations, how you present your ideas, the way you look, the way you conduct yourself in business situations and how others react to you. If you can learn to motivate others to define their personal and professional goals, you can energize team members to work toward a common goal, get support for your ideas from your colleagues, management and your customers.

While no one expects you to be a mind reader, it's helpful if you can learn to sense what your teammates are thinking or at least learn to gauge their reactions by their body language. Use your imagination and your own experiences to sense clues that can give you an idea of what other people might be feeling. You shouldn't (and legally can't) pry into your team's personal lives but you can be accessible when they need to discuss a situation that might be affecting their work.

People are most likely to open up to those who act with sincerity. Often people will talk around something that's bothering them rather than addressing it directly. You need to be aware of how team members are interacting with each other, whether there is any factionalizing or jockeying for power behind the scenes. If you sense problems like this, be ready to get to the bottom of the matter as directly and openly as possible. While talking to team members individually is sometimes effective, you run the risk of the first person warning, coaching or even intimidating the second person, so the responses you get may not be valid. On the other hand, talking to each person individually may encourage them to open up and tell you what's bothering them (and what's really going on!). Some helpful questions include:

If you had control of the situation, what would you like to happen now?  
What concerns you the most about this issue personally? On behalf of the team?  
What do you consider to be the most important thing we need to do to resolve the situation?  
Aside from this, are there any other issues that are worrying you about this situation?

To achieve top performance from others, it is necessary to excite their interest in your ideas. Build trusting relationships with individuals, understand their values, involve them in decision making, secure their commitment, and give the necessary support.

### **Lay a Foundation**

You are more likely to gain people's cooperation if you have a good relationship with them. Look for opportunities to establish mutual interests and respect. Offer people support when they need it, and they will then be more likely to respond favorably to your requests for cooperation. When you talk, pay attention to nonverbal behavior. Invest time and care in your relationships with team members and colleagues.

Always aim to engage people's interest. When you give a team member a new task or an additional responsibility, give the details of the whole project to increase a sense of involvement. Knowing the big picture motivates people because they can see how their contribution will support a successful outcome.

People are motivated to do what they like doing. They may not, however, be motivated to do what you want them to do. Discover people's values by asking what's important to them. Stay away from personal questions and focus on career and workplace satisfaction.

### **Get Everyone Involved**

Participating in decision-making motivates people. When you talk to a co-worker or team member about how a job could be done, view it as an exercise in joint problem solving. Explore different approaches and brainstorm about how to achieve a workable agreement. Once you have agreed on a goal, let your colleague have some influence over the process to assure commitment to the outcome.

Discuss mutual goals with team members and how they can be achieved together. When people feel that their input is valued, they will be more motivated.

- Talk about team goals in terms of what needs to be achieved and how
- Identify individual goals and discuss how they can help and be helped by the team's goals
- Work as a group to align individual and team goals, encouraging everyone to give their input
- Cement people's interest by emphasizing what they stand to gain.

### **Adjust to the Team**

Adjust your leadership method to the type of team you're managing. A team that's having trouble achieving results needs someone who will first re-evaluate the goals and then determine

how authoritative to be to set a clear direction and motivate the team to achieve its goals. A team with a lot of strong-minded members needs a leader who can moderate discussions while a team in conflict needs a leader who can re-establish good relationships. Of course, leaders who can combine all the necessary skills are likely to be most influential in the long run.

Getting people to work together as a team isn't easy. Your best chance is to define a common purpose that everyone can believe in. This could be high standards, recognition of good work, a community idea, or mutual growth. Whatever it is, it has to be something people are willing to give up their time and effort to have. Look carefully at the team's function – what is its purpose? What would it mean for it to do well? Then you will be in a position to outline these values to the team.

### **Handle Diversity**

Your team members will differ in their interests, needs, ages, motivations and cultural backgrounds. Your job is to motivate them to work for themselves and for the team. Once you've defined the team's purpose and goals, discuss how each member can contribute. Establish what each person likes to do and most wants to achieve, then provide as many opportunities as possible for these goals to be achieved without losing sight of the overall project goal.

### **Planning Action**

Influence your team's capacity for creativity and ability to process constructive criticism. Direct discussions in a structured way so that you can work together to find solutions and form reasonable action plans.

### **Make It So**

Sometimes it's not enough just to want to **do** a task. People need to know **how** to do it and then get the chance to put their plans into action. Give your team the best chance of success by providing the necessary authority, budget, training and support. If time is an issue, work with them to change priorities, reassign tasks and improve time management. When they're successful, you're successful and they'll appreciate the effort you made on their behalf.

### **Loyalty**

Along with building a reputation of trustworthiness, you want to develop a level of knowledge to support your position as team manager, or at least show that you're willing to get the information or arrange for team training. For instance, if your background is in casual space games and you move over to next gen development, be sure you know enough about the new genre so your team doesn't see you as a newbie who talked his way into the job because someone in management owed you a favor. Even if you already know a great deal about the new venue, there's a fine line between serving as a trust resource and trying to impress with what you know. (And whatever you do, avoid saying, "Well, when **I** was in charge of ..."

People tend to be influenced by those whom they trust. This works on the team level as well as the customer level. A game company that consistently delivers quality product and demonstrates that it listens to players will be more successful than one that doesn't; it's a simple lesson but a true one.

## **FIRST IMPRESSIONS**

The adage “You only get one chance to make a first impression” may sound trite but even in the relatively informal game industry it’s true. Research shows that people tend to make their first impressions within the first three minutes of meeting. Their decisions can be influenced by many visual cues like attire, voice, handshake, grooming, facial hair and facial expressions. People are, after all, still people whether they’re wearing a designer suit or grungy torn jeans.

Company cultures within our industry vary widely. Some are stricter about appearance while others (usually smaller development houses) are more relaxed. Some fall in the middle, requiring “business casual” when the publisher or investor is visiting but permitting “casual Friday” to be really informal. How you present yourself affects the way people perceive and react to you so you need to be aware of what’s required and expected where you work.

In a formal setting, be sure your clothes fit well and are made of quality materials. You don’t need to wear Armani but you want to avoid wearing something that is obviously cheap (there’s a difference between cheap and inexpensive.) You’ll look more polished and professional if you’re comfortable in your outfit, which means breaking in those new shoes before the first day on the job. Savvy senior management will be able to tell whether you’re trying to adhere to the dress code or dressing to impress.

If the setting is informal, even your jeans and t-shirts need to be clean and fit properly. Unless you’re in a position where your skill set is supremely valued no matter what you wear, try not to give in to the temptation to “make a statement” with your attire. You’ll say more about yourself through your work than your logo garb.

What you wear is only part of it. How you carry yourself counts too – your posture can say a lot about your attitude. You don’t need to walk around like a big happy face all the time, but scowling at everyone sends a message too. Unless you’re the famed lone programmer in the room, learn to initiate and return greetings, even if it’s a brief “how ya doin’” around the box of donuts.

Dress codes of dress also vary between countries so you should be ready to adapt to match the practices of those with whom you come in contact, especially if they’re located in another country. If you’re making a business trip overseas for the first time, talk to HR about customs and appropriate attire – you’re not just representing yourself, you’re also the visible image of your company.

## **Managing Yourself**

Good influencers know how to manage their emotions. Even if they’re having a really bad day, they know not to bring that into the office or inflict it on the team; instead they find ways to channel that negative emotion in a positive way.

Relaxation is your most important aid, because when you are relaxed you can think clearly and respond to challenges. Learn to stay cal, whatever the situation, by practicing relaxation techniques until they become second nature. If you make mistakes, see them as learning

opportunities. Detach yourself from the situation and ask, “What did I learn from that?” Learn to switch off negative self-talk such as, “I am no good at this.”

Always retain your composure so that you are better able to deal with any difficult situations that may arise. Learn to be honest with yourself:

I keep being late for meetings including the ones I’ve called  
I get stressed when coping with problems so I don’t listen as well as I should  
I do not like being interrupted so I steamroll over others

Take some time out to think about your talents, strengths and long-term goals. What interests you most about your work? It could be writing, planning, or human relations among many other things. In the long run, you are more likely to be successful at your job if you are interested in what you are doing. Be clear and realistic about your limitations. Ask yourself what support you need from others and then set about getting it.

Think about where you want to be in a year’s time. Imaging what your initial steps could be for achieving those goals.

Believe in your ability to achieve your goals and motivate others  
Welcome new challenges but don’t abandon your commitments  
Always strive to improve your skills and don’t be afraid to learn from others  
Learn from comments about your work even if it’s negative  
Accept responsibility as long as you’re not doing it for the power  
Never become complacent

The mnemonic “SMART” will help you clarify your goals.

Be *specific* about what you want.

Make sure that you can *measure* results.

Be sure that your goal is at least remotely *achievable*.

Ask yourself if the goal is *relevant*.

Always consider the *timing* in terms of the current environment, access to necessary resources, and the team’s ability to reach the goal by a set date.

### **Learn to Listen**

One of the biggest complaints employees have about management is “They don’t listen!” Nothing is more annoying than talking to someone who appears to be listening but pounces on the end of your sentences with a “Yes, but...” and then launches into his own platform. What he’s really listening for are pauses in your breathing so that he can take control of the conversation. Remember to ask other people for their ideas before presenting yours. You don’t have to be right all the time and you don’t have to know everything.

Nonverbal behavior (facial expressions and body language) provides important clues to people’s emotions. By paying attention to these you can fine-tune your approach. Watch out for signals that may indicate a person is drawing away from you or moving toward accepting your idea.

In American business culture, folded arms, hands and a lack of eye contact indicates fear, defensiveness, indifference or withdrawal. (In other cultures these may actually be signs of respect!)

A positive expression, direct eye contact and an open posture signal interest.

Tense posture might indicate fear or withdrawal, but it could also be caused by stress factors outside of work so it's important to look for other non-verbal signs

Forward-leaning posture shows attentiveness

### **If You Lead, Will They Follow?**

Good leaders inspire others to share a vision. They know how to get the job done and still maintain positive relationships. The first step is to be clear about your purpose; this will give you an underlying strength that others will sense. The next step is to be clear about your organization's purpose. What needs to happen in order to overcome the obstacles to success? Once you have identified what needs to be done to achieve results, you are in a position to exert influence.

To be an effective influencer, you need to do more than just wait for opportunities to come to you. Putting yourself at the forefront of projects that are going forward and taking every chance to make contacts is central to influence. People who back away from challenges often see themselves as powerless to influence events. Become more proactive by acknowledging that you are responsible for what happens to you and always assume that life is what you make it. Interpret events positively and take the initiative to make things happen. Learn from your mistakes and ignore situations you cannot influence.

Establish what you want to achieve personally and within your organization. Make your vision more realistic by defining how you and others can work together to build a successful future.

It's ok to have high expectations of yourself but be realistic; don't expect everyone to be just like you

Establish what's important for you but don't assume that what you want is what others want

After you define your intermediate and long-term goals, check with the rest of the team

When you talk to other team members, really listen to what they say

It's ok to envision how things could be but don't create a dream that interferes with reality

Don't play favorites - make everyone on the team feel valuable

People place trust in and are influenced by those whom they regard as reliable. People who do not keep their promises lose the trust of others quickly. Before you commit to new obligations, be sure that you can fulfill them. If you aren't certain that you can, admit it -- it's better to disappoint at this stage than later on. If, despite your best efforts, you and your team are likely to miss a deadline, call the other party and explain what happened. Before you agree to new obligations, be sure you have enough time and resources to get the job done, meet the milestone, honor the obligation, etc.

Describe your idea for team goals in general terms and then ask your team for their reactions. (If it's a brainstorming session, remember that there are no bad suggestions!) Draw out their ideas by asking questions. Take a few minutes to think about it before you respond. Adapt your ideas to incorporate as much of the team's input as possible rather than persisting in your own proposal alone. Respond with questions that will elicit information:

Before we decide on the solution, let's compare notes on what happened.

After we've discussed this, we can call the customer to let them know what we intend to do.

Any ideas on how we can resolve this problem and keep it from happening again?

What do you need to get this done by next week?

Make sure your written and verbal communication is always clear and concise. Don't make your team try to guess what you really wanted or have to hunt you down 10 times a day for an explanation. Presenting a thorough and detailed request not only shows that you're organized but also that you respect your team and that's an important factor in being a successful influencer.

### **Influencing Your Superiors**

You may not think you have any pull with upper management but you won't know until you try. This requires some finesse, but it's a good lesson in learning how to communicate effectively. Work to demonstrate confidence and foresight, identify criteria that either meet management requirements or enable them to assess proposals (like yours!), adapt your influencing style and be care not to force the issue. Bullying upper management rarely works.

You can impress senior management with your ability to handle responsibility. Ideally, you should already have had some success in completing high-profile projects. The better your track record, the more likely that your ideas will get a respectful hearing. People are generally promoted when they have shown that they can work at a level above the one they're on currently. At the very least, try to build a reputation as someone who can be depended on to get results, troubleshoot problems, spot opportunities and successfully manage teams who like working for you.

Be ready to take the lead.

Take time to review how the team is working as a group

Delays can occur so stay on top of that situation – don't push too hard but don't let yourself be sidetracked from finding out what's really happening

Listen to your team before offering your own thoughts

Don't hang on to projects when you can delegate

Don't create barriers within your team by playing favorites

“If it ain't broke, don't fix it!” - don't interfere if the team is working well.

## **THE ART OF INFLUENCE**

### **PART 2: EFFECTIVE PRESENTATIONS**

Arguably one of, if not the best game ever made, Sid Meier's *Civilization* is a complex turn-based strategy game that requires you to manage every aspect of leading your people from inconsequential settlements to domination of the world and beyond. Along the way, you decide how to handle your diplomatic relations with friends and foes. What seems like a simple gift to a neighbor can turn into a blackmail scheme that plunges you into war. You need to be aware of how other civilizations feel about you and how your people feel about you. In other words, you need to learn how to manage Influence.

#### **If You Talk, Will They Listen?**

Being able to communicate effectively one-on-one is an important skill but so is being able to get your message across to a larger audience. That could be your team of four or it could be an auditorium full of conference attendees. Regardless of the size of your audience, you need to hit the ground running and keep them interested from beginning to end.

Before the days of multimedia and "sound bytes," people were more accustomed to listening to a speaker without more than the usual distractions of side conversations, coughing and making shopping lists in their head. Today you've got to compete with laptops, cell phones, text messaging and an audience that fidgets mentally as well as physically, so unless you're a brilliant stand-up comedian, it's wise to do a little prep work.

The importance of managing influence is not restricted to the real world. The venerable board game *Diplomacy* was released in 1959, and since then has been played on table tops, by mail, in fanzines and on computers. If you chose Russia, you had the power to influence world events from the very start of the game. *Vanguard's* focus on Diplomacy (one of the game's three "spheres," along with Crafting and Adventuring) provides players with a chance to acquire benefits like items and money and exert – yep, influence.

#### **The First 10 Seconds**

People respond positively to well-organized, well-presented proposals. You need a "hook" so catch people's interest from the start either with humor, drama, a really good slide or something that will take their mind off the million other things they're thinking about while they're waiting for you to start talking.

Your presentation will have more credibility if you've done your homework. If you want to convince your manager to implement a new procedure, ask her beforehand what she likes about the current methods. Her answers will tell you what she thinks needs to be preserved and what needs to be scrapped. It also alleviates the annoying technique of preening about how management just loved your idea. Bragging about your in with management is a sure-fire way to irritate your co-workers and embarrass yourself (and your manager!) Let management speak for itself.

Engage – Start strong and work to hold their attention

Inform – Describe the facts in an interesting way

Explain – Talk through complicated parts of process but don't explain what they can read about themselves

Project – Visualize the result in terms of your audience

Try to make everyone in the audience feels like you're talking directly to them Ask them to imagine ways in which they could apply your ideas and benefit from them, or what they can do to help avoid a crisis. At a GDC many years ago, a woman got up to go to the ladies room. If your audience is small and intimate, and the atmosphere warrants it, address certain people directly as long as you don't embarrass them or imply an inappropriate relationship.

### **Keep It Moving**

When you're explaining your ideas, keep to the point. If this is your initial proposal, your main objective at this stage is to get your ideas out on the table. If it's a follow-up meeting, you can go into more detail. Use whatever method works to take your listeners step-by-step through to the final goal. Insofar as you're able, talk about who will be involved, where and for how long, what resources and support will be needed, and what the anticipated results are. You'll come across as naturally influential when you show that you're prepared.

Don't assume that people will make connections for themselves but be alert to your audience. If it looks like they get it, don't oversell.

Give your audience time to ask questions, either at the end of the presentation or during it, especially if it's crucial that they understand Point A before you go to Point B

If people start arguing with you or challenging you (or trying to show off) be ready to direct the discussion toward a positive outcome

No plan can address every eventuality, but the more you anticipate, the stronger your presentation will be. Think about the likely obstacles and figure out solutions. Look at your ideas from the viewpoint of your worst critic. Revise accordingly until you've taken into account as many contingencies as you can – and if something comes up during the presentation, be ready to say “That's a good point – I'll definitely do some research on it.”

### **Presentation Styles**

The way you present yourself and your subject can make or break the presentation (no pressure there!) You can inspire and persuade people with a lively style and expressive body language.

Grab your audience's interest by starting with an appealing anecdote, quote or brief story. Popular TV programs, celebrities and admired figures are a rich source of stories and quotes, as long as you remember that political humor usually isn't appropriate for the workplace. So are any related problems, challenges, and rewards you have experienced. Once you've done the “hook,” move quickly into the presentation.

If you are presenting to a group, make your presentation as visually rich as you can. Well-designed slides and flip charts are helpful. One good image or diagram can often get an idea across better than spoken words.

These days, we're accustomed to processing a lot of media images, so use that to your advantage. Create compelling images of the benefits or the risks. Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse – and have back-ups for everything because it's a safe bet you'll have prop and/or equipment failure. Don't waste a time apologizing – just get on with the show!

Use plenty of colors when you draw images or write bullet points. Use anecdotes to give examples of the points you are making and, wherever possible, think of a slogan to unite your material into a common theme.

There is no sure-fire way to make an effective presentation, even if you inundate the audience with chocolate! Find a style that's right for you and appropriate for the subject. For example:

Demonstrative – to give an example of your idea successfully in action. Outline examples of the same idea at work within the organization or in another company

Testimonial – To show the listener that the idea has the support of others. Provide testimonials of support from others or ask people in the audience to participate (but be sure they know about it ahead of time!)

Culture-consistent – To show the listener that your proposal is in line with the company's principles. Angle the proposal to show how it matches the company's needs and goals.

Cost-focused – Emphasize how costs and problems can be kept to a minimum. (This is a case where humor can be very helpful.) Show how your approach resolves problems in a cost-effective but non-repressive way.

Cautionary – This approach can be difficult because you don't want to hide potential dangers but you don't want to over-dramatize to the point where your presentation sounds shrill. Highlight the problems, then present reasonable solutions.

### **Using Humor**

Anyone can tell a joke, but not everyone is funny. Make sure that if you decide to use humor, it's appropriate to the subject and the audience. Jokes about race, religion, sex and blondes are probably best left to open mike night at the local comedy club. Making jokes about a potential snafu in an antiquated system can be funny; making jokes about the people who run the system, not so funny. Avoid humor that relies on embarrassing or abusing your attendees. Many years ago at a GDC dinner, the speaker, known for his caustic humor, called out to a woman who was leaving the room. "Where are you going?" "To the bathroom," she replied. "Bring me back some toilet paper," he quipped. Luckily for him, she returned (with toilet paper). He had managed to insult a fair number of attendees by insulting the industry and even his celebrity status did not protect him from people getting up and leaving before he was done.

### **Engaging the Audience**

As you're talking, you notice a steady increase in low-level noise like coughing, whispering, paper-shuffling and the sound of cells phones on vibrate. Before people start getting up and not coming back, you need to figure out how to get their attention without calling to them. This is

where rehearsing at least once in front of someone who can give you positive feedback is helpful.

A lack of interest may be visible in the nonverbal responses of your managers. If so, draw attention to this and ask for frankness in assessing your ideas. If your plans meet with criticism, do not take this personally. It is much more likely that the reasons for refusal are political and strategic rather than personal. If so, you may need to wait for the climate to change before trying again. If, despite your best efforts, you cannot gain any acceptance by reworking your proposal, then move on to something better. You will gain credit for your professionalism – and future presentations will meet with a better reception.

Some speakers take refuge in presenting endless slides crammed full of details. Yes, it shows that they did their homework, but that's the kind of data best presented in a take-away hand out. When making a presentation, focus on the big picture and give your audience what they need to check on the details themselves. The one type of detail that is effective, however, is financials. Spreadsheets don't make very good slides, but comparisons do. Ben Cohen (of Ben & Jerry's) used Oreo™ cookies to explain ways to balance the federal budget. While it may seem like an oversimplification, it was clever because anyone who has seen the presentation thinks about it every time they walk past a display of Oreos in the market.

### **Keeping the Audience Involved**

We're all about interactivity so engage the audience by turning them from passive to active participants. This works better in a smaller group, but it can work in big groups too.

Ask people to introduce themselves to the person in the chair next to them. This will help to draw your audience in and help them get the networking going.

Encourage your audience to accept the challenges you've presented as their own and assure them that they can effect a positive change by working together. Encourage them to consider the practical, far-reaching and exciting implications of your ideas and proposals. If it's appropriate, walk the audience through a goal-setting exercise so that they feel like they "own" the solution regardless of where they are on the org chart.

If your presentation is part of a team-building activity, definitely do some extra homework! Does the team enjoy this kind of activity or is this the manager's way of creating "corporate culture"? A team at a very large software company had a rah-rah manager who thought that going bowling would be a great activity without realizing that his team was more into current movies than sports activities. When he sensed resistance, he made the activity mandatory, which only made things worse. While you don't want to foment revolt, see if you can come up with something that makes the manager and the team happy (or less miserable!)

Sometimes you may be asked to come in as a "hired gun" to devise new strategies for floundering situations. Chances are that at least one person in your audience is going to be resentful. Do what you can to defuse an adversarial situation. If someone objects to your proposal, respond with an honest question that's obviously designed to get information to help solve the problem. It shows that you listened and you're trying to give a good answer. (It also

shows that you haven't been shot down yet!) Use questions to encourage constructive thinking (and to give yourself a little more time to come up with a reasonable answer.) Be aware that participants may see your presence as an outsider as a way to get their point across to management, so there could be some pretty strong currents of resentment and anger flowing in the room.

No matter how much fun it is to use the laser pointer, remember that sometimes less is more – it's better to give attendees a take-away rather than subjecting them to endless graphs and charts.

- Be prepared
- State your intentions in a positive and upbeat way
- Explain the benefits of your proposal
- Inspire others to take action
- Provide a take-away that summarizes your ideas

### **Adapting Your Ideas**

The difference between superiors and their staff is that the former makes the decisions and the latter has to live with it. That said, consider management's interests too and adapt your proposals accordingly. Those in senior positions often need to take a long-term, large-scale view of an idea, such as how an idea will help the business as a whole, not just this team or department. They will be looking beyond your ideas to assess their impact on the organization as a whole, so show that you have considered these matters also.

Success in an organization comes from collaboration. Everyone, from the CEO to the receptionist, has special interests and concerns. Try to anticipate the criteria any given manager will use to evaluate your ideas, and adapt what you say and propose accordingly.

- If it looks like we can't afford the product, what can we do about the budget constraints?
- If we cannot begin this project now, when would be a good time to start it?
- If the proposal does not meet the requirements, what can be done to ensure that it does?
- If you feel that the procedure is fine as it stands, can you outline what you like about the present approach?

### **Dealing with Dissenters**

Invariably, there's someone in the audience who just has to disagree with you. Maybe because the person has some honest concerns or it may be that someone feels compelled to show off to management. Deal with objections courteously and calmly. The person might be genuinely confused rather than antagonistic. Ask careful questions to establish what the objections are. Probe for the position behind the objections. Whatever the reason, try to respond to the question, not the person (especially if you sense hostility.)

- Look for ways to show how acceptance of your proposals will reflect well on everyone involved
- Be your own toughest critic
- Don't appear over-eager and don't show frustration or impatience.
- Don't forget to have facts on hand

## Be prepared for challenges

To prepare for this, take on the role of your own worst critic and pick holes in your presentation. Write down your answers to the objections. Imagine that you are one of the influential people in the audience. What might this person say? Rehearse your response to the “worst that could happen.” Undoubtedly, something else will come up, but at least you’ll be prepared for some of it.

Interruptions can actually liven up your presentation if you handle them the right way. Listen to the speaker’s comments politely. Check your understanding by summarizing it in your own words. Highlight points of agreement and answer the question. If you don’t have a good answer, offer to get back to the speaker later. Whatever you do, never surrender the marker, the pointer or the floor to the dissenter.

- Do read up on your subject thoroughly and be well-informed
- Do use graphics to emphasize your key points and ideas
- Remain calm and use humor but avoid being sarcastic
- Don’t let the anticipation of objections undermine your confidence
- Don’t be distracted by the dissenters from making your point

## A Note about Cultural Differences

Verbal and physical communication etiquette varies from country to country. In the U.S., we don’t hesitate to get passionate or humorous or dramatic in our presentations. We talk fast and sometimes we talk loud. We get personal. We try to make the listener feel personally involved in what we’re presenting. In Western European countries, however, the style of public speaking is often more factual and very low-key. In cultures where management style tends to be democratic, leaders are more likely to accept feedback in a positive way; however, in status cultures, like Italy, suggestions or criticisms given to managers can be seen as disrespectful.

If you’re making a presentation in a different country or to an audience of visitors from another country, brush up on what’s considered appropriate in their part of the world. You don’t have to give up your unique style but making a few modifications will show your audience that you respect them.

As noted, the effects of influence extend throughout not only real but also constructed cultures in computer game worlds. Dr. Henry Jenkins, Director of the MIT Comparative Media Studies Program and Peter de Florez Professor of Humanities discusses the game *Animal Crossing* (2002 and 2005) in a recent blog entry. “*Animal Crossing* allows one to fundamentally change the space and mood of one’s animal village through textual manipulation. ... Players can post signs, send letters, name the town and engage in other atmospheric manipulations.” In essence, players change the game world through influence rather than force of arms.

## Choreographing Your Presentation

It is not just what you say but how you say it that gets results. It’s all about perception -- when you stand with your weight on one foot, you look indecisive. When you stand in an upright and relaxed stance, with your feet shoulder-width apart, you look confident. How you use your hands

tells your audience that you're terribly anxious, totally flustered or (hopefully) confident and self-assured. Clutching the podium for dear life is just as bad as darting around the stage. Movement should be naturally without distracting your audience's attention away from what you're saying.

Be sure you have water at the podium or table because frogs will choose to take up residence in your throat just when you're about to make the most important point. Take a lesson from actors: props can and will take on a life of their own. The more gimmicks you have, the higher the chances are that they will self-destruct at the worst possible moment.

### **Getting Yourself Ready**

The presentation is written, the visual aids are ready, the room booked and refreshments ordered, the AV equipment in place and everything has been checked and double-checked. What's left? Oh yeah – you!

The night before a big presentation isn't the best time for an all-nighter, whether it's partying with friends and co-workers or staying up to finish the presentation (which should already be done.) It's a time to review your notes, decide what you want to wear to make the right impression (yep, men too) and get a good night's sleep. That haggard “worked on this all night” look is only good in the movies. In real life, it sends a message to management and your audience that says “unprepared” instead of “passionate.” Make a list of what you need and pack your stuff the night before, then double-check the list in the morning. Everything about you should project confidence and preparation.

Part of your back-up plans should be to have a co-worker standing by if for some reason you can't make it to the presentation. If you wake up sick that morning, be honest with yourself about whether you can do your talk justice. If you've got a raging fever or you're covered in spots or you can't breathe without coughing, call your back-up and your manager. If it looks like you're going to miss your plane, train, etc., likewise alert your back-up and your manager.

### **Tips 'n Tricks**

Whether your decision to speak at a meeting is spontaneous or planned, it's not how much you say but how well you say it that's going to count. Some of the noisiest speakers you'll meet are actually the least influential.

Be clear about what you want to say – make notes, do your research, have a point

Consider why you're qualified to speak on the subject – and if you're not, either use that as a humorous intro or decline the invitation to speak

Make sure that what you say is relevant and appealing to the audience

Don't let fear stop you from speaking

If you're preparing a speech, don't leave rehearsals until the last minute. It may sound silly but rehearse the talk in front of the mirror (or the cat, the dog or even the goldfish!)

Humor and self-referent anecdotes are fine as long as they're appropriate

### **Double-Checking**

Do I have objective criteria for success?

Are there too many factoids? Too few?  
Is there enough humor and is it in the right place(s)?  
Have I served “my” agenda or “our” (the company’s) agenda?  
Is my presentation as brief as possible and have I assessed my ideas thoroughly?  
Am I sure about my timing?  
Do my solutions provide a collaborative approach to the situation?  
Have I made my key points and summarized them effectively?  
Will my ideas make other people winners?  
Do I have back-up equipment? Have I backed up my presentation media? Do I have a stand-in in case I can’t make it?  
Have I chosen the right clothes for the environment?

It’s all about the details and when everything checks out, you’re ready to stand up and really be heard!

## **THE ART OF INFLUENCE**

### **PART 3: NETWORKING AND NEGOTIATION**

Social interaction presents designers of online games with some of their most difficult challenges. How do you design a realistic and flexible economy that can survive despite the best efforts of players who use their influence to command the flow of goods and services? How do you provide players with an opportunity to influence the direction and possibly the outcome of the story through their avatars’ actions without weakening the overall player experience or the integrity of the story? These are only two examples that can validate how skillfully the people on all sides of the game’s production have asserted their influence through their communication skills.

#### **NETWORKING**

Today, you hear the word “network” everywhere. Socially networks are more or less organized connections between people with interests in common like MMO guilds, participants in Internet chat rooms or friends and acquaintances at parties, conventions, business meetings. A network can also be a list of names in an address book or people in an online e-group. It also refers to television companies, linked transmitting stations, wires or filaments or veins or even sewers that are linked or interconnected. In the business world, networking involves making contact with other people and it’s one of the most important skills of successful influencers. Some people have made it a habit to form partnerships and cultivate alliances across a broad spectrum of abilities, locations and interests.

Networking opportunities crop up pretty much 24/7 – while you’re waiting for an elevator, standing in line for coffee, traveling, shopping in the supermarket, even going to another floor of the building where you work. If you take even a few minutes to introduce yourself to someone and exchange small talk about anything from the weather to your favorite sports team to who got whacked in last night’s crime drama, you’re networking. More formal opportunities for meeting people include training sessions, special interest groups, media briefings, conventions and of course social gatherings. Helping people connect on the Internet has turned into its own business

with virtual business cards, pop-up reminders and a host of ways to get ahead professionally and socially through others and an opportunity for networking is an opportunity to exercise influence.

### **Making Connections**

While creating connections within any business or social environment is important, maintaining them is crucial. Timing is everything, so it's important to learn how to insert yourself into a conversation. We've all experienced the uncomfortable encounter with someone who barges into the chat, whether virtual or real time, and starts nattering away without regard for what else might be occurring. This is why it's important to pay attention to the ebb and flow of a conversation.

Wait until people are between topics, or have made a definite pause in their speaking before introducing yourself. If you're in a group, match what you say to what has just been said and, if at all possible, do so gently humorously. Non-sequitur introductions are awkward and can make you look insensitive and egotistical. Mention things you have in common like a mutual acquaintance but never imply that you have more of a relationship than you do. This will blow up in your face more times than not. People can usually spot a phony name-dropped a mile away – and with your luck, the person who's name you're dropping is the best friend of the person to whom you are speaking!

Another important part of networking is introducing people to each other. It not only helps build alliances but also shows that you're interested in other people. Help the people who work for you learn the right way to network. Many years ago at a GDC, an industry luminary gave a presentation to a packed house. After the talk, an assistant producer who would never have had the courage to introduce himself to the speaker did so because his executive producer encouraged him – and it turned out that the famous speaker was very gracious, thereby making the encounter even better!

Carry business cards with you all the time. You never know when someone will ask you for one (or when you might need a piece of paper – how convenient that you'll have something with your information on it!) If you aren't so good at remembering names, it will be really helpful to have the business card to jot down a few notes on the back. Maintain contact details of everyone you meet, including phone, email, job title and location. Whether you use one of the networking services or a simple database program, it's useful to be able to sort your contacts in a variety of ways, like companies, area(s) of expertise in the industry or mutual acquaintances.

Remember when you were a kid and your mom made you write thank-you notes? Whether it's a handwritten note or a quick email, that kind of courtesy never goes out of style. Follow up an initial meeting with a new acquaintance as soon as possible. Send a short email to say how pleased you were to meet. The rewards may not be apparent at the time but they're definitely worth the effort. These are great ways to create a positive impression and help people remember who you are in a good way, which is an important part of successful networking.

Let's face it – this industry can be a pretty small world so you never know when you're going to come across someone you used to work with or someone who knows someone. If you've got a

trail of burned bridges and failed communications behind you, the best networking in the world probably won't help – a strong network of friends and colleagues who respect you will!

If the opportunity arises, invite acquaintances to social occasions, especially industry events. Try to get together for a meal or a drink or even coffee when you're in the same city or a conference together. (Even if you're in different parts of the country, you'll probably encounter each other at one industry gathering during the year.). If you know someone is looking for a job and you hear about an opportunity in her area, let her know (obviously be discrete if her employer doesn't know she's planning to jump ship.) Even if she can't apply, she may know someone in her network who can. If you've got a bright young intern who would benefit from additional mentoring, you might know a colleague who's in a position to help – and if he can't, he might know someone who can. It's all about the networking!

Be natural and open – insincerity is off-putting – but also be appropriate and aware.

It's ok to initiate conversations at social meetings but don't intrude.

Get people to talk about themselves without asking inappropriate questions about their work or personal life.

Don't take refusals personally. The person you want to talk to may be late for an appointment or too jet-lagged to make conversation at that point.

Don't volunteer information about your own achievements unless asked and even then be modest (without being too humble – a good influencer knows how to project an air of confidence without taking up the entire spotlight or being annoyingly self-effacing.)

Treat senior management and industry “celebrities” with the respect they deserve, but don't fawn over them or indulge in name-dropping.

Always your business cards ready!

## **NEGOTIATION**

Diplomacy is defined as “...the skill in managing negotiations, handling people, etc., so that there is little or no ill will;”<sup>2</sup> It's about forging alliances, whether in your professional world or your home community or your MMO guild. You never know when you might need some extra support or information, and even with your best networking contacts, you still need tact, diplomacy and excellent “people skills” to handle negotiations well.

The classic approach to negotiation is for two sides to defend their own bargaining positions. While this is easily achieved in a duel outside Ironforge, it's a little more complicated in the real world. Winning a battle of wills can still prejudice your relationship with your counterpart, and could negatively affect the outcome of the project which is why you need to develop productive approaches in which you are clear about your needs and your goals. Being successful in that kind of diplomacy will gain you more influence (and some real gold) in the long run.

Conflict can actually be a source of creativity if you can redirect it to find productive solutions and turn it into an opportunity for negotiation. If you find yourself involved in conflict, take a deep breath and focus your attention on the impersonal issues underlying the dispute. Ask a

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<sup>2</sup> Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1)

Based on the Random House Unabridged Dictionary, © Random House, Inc. 2006.

question that probes for the cause of negative personal criticism. Then delineate the impersonal issues that you think are involved and see if the other party agrees.

Figure out what you want from a negotiation and then roleplay the encounter, including possible counter-offers and other agendas. (Hopefully, this won't become a super-secret dramatic closed-door meeting full of Dire Plots and Rampant Paranoia. Try to restrict that to table-top rpgs!) When you're in the negotiation session, stay focused and calm so that you can identify mutual goals and determine ways to achieve them. Work towards an agreement and make notes so that there can be no misunderstanding. This approach is going to be much better for you and your team than a screaming match in an exec's office followed by door slamming, shouting and a possible escort from the building compliments of Security.

Even with the best intentions, arguments can escalate during the negotiation process so be prepared to bring all your networking and negotiating skills to the table to dissolve conflict by acknowledging differences, validating other people's feelings, creating a dialogue by focusing on neutral criteria and looking for areas on which as many people as possible can agree.

Despite your best efforts, other people involved in the negotiation may become difficult or rather than take responsibility, claim that the final decision really rests with his or her manager. Another scenario may involve other parties saying that if you don't give in to their demands, you'll lose their support altogether. Be strong and try not to get flustered even when you're threatened -- and continue to press gently but firmly for your goals. Avoid making concessions just to avoid further conflict, but if it really looks like the negotiations are at a standstill, be ready to call a moratorium. Walking away from a challenge is harder to do in the real world than it is in an MMO world but it can be done.

It's easy to spot the first signs of dispute if you are alert to nonverbal communication.

If a discussion gets too heated, consider deferring it to another day or move the conversation to more neutral territory.

Try to defuse irritation by acknowledging the other party's feelings and be open about your part, if any, in the misunderstanding

Concentrate on establishing a positive, non-judgmental atmosphere for the negotiations

Try to find a common ground for goals – “win-win” is ideal but not if you don't mean it.

It's not necessary to agree on every point.

Often the negative emotion involved in a dispute can be discharged if you show that you're willing to listen without agenda to the other party's issues, and hopefully the courtesy will be returned. Outline your interpretation of the other person's viewpoint to be sure that you understand and reinforce the message that you are listening.

Identify the interest behind the other party's demands – *Why is that of interest you?*

Clarify any issues that you are not clear about – *What do you mean when you say that?*

Look for common and complementary goals – *It might work out for both of us if ...?*

Find alternative ways of meeting mutual interests – *How else could we achieve our goals?*

Decide on a neutral course of action to reach an agreement – *Let's try to agree on an action plan that works for as many people as possible.*

### **Using Neutral Criteria**

Focusing on neutral criteria can help you move more easily from argument to dialogue to negotiation because these items tend to exist independently of the individuals involved. Disputes about personnel issues should be resolved with help from Human Resources. Frame discussion about personal (as opposed to personnel) issues by suggesting that everyone review available criteria for guidance about the situation – and consider having a neutral mediator present who can help people express themselves effectively.

Aggression – *Isn't there a better way to come to an agreement?*

Different Perceptions – *Hm, I can see how that happened...*

Gossip – *I wonder what that's based on ...?*

Defensiveness – *Blame is unconstructive. Let us focus on solutions.*

Misunderstanding – *What causes you to think that?*

Worry – *How can we work together to resolve this?*

Being Undermined – *What leads you to believe that's happening here?*

Lack of Trust – *Can we put our differences in the past?*

Resentment – *Can we talk about the things that are bothering you?*

Obstacles – *Let's focus on the things we can influence...*

Friction among teams, managers and even departments is an all too common feature of corporate life because people are involved. Conflict erodes the efficiency and morale of the entire organization, especially in small and/or start-up companies where resources are stretched to the max and budgets are small or non-existent. It's one thing to start your new MMO character with nothing but a rusty sword and two coppers in your belt, but resolving conflict in the real world requires more than killing a hundred rats. It requires interpersonal skills and the appropriate use of influence to mediate between adversaries, diffuse anger and bitterness, restore peace and establish a common sense of purpose. The key to doing this successfully lies in helping all parties define what they want and accept that what they need may require concessions. If the calm, reasonable approach doesn't work, you may need to persistent critics to one side at the end of the meeting and work directly with a mediator.

### **Working Through Differences**

If mistrust has arisen, bury the hatchet by first getting everyone together and encouraging them to be open and honest about the situation. Apologize for your own mistakes and ask what can be done to rectify them. Voice your own concerns sincerely and listen carefully to everyone else. Learn to tolerate and explore the reasons behind differences because opposing views can often spark the best and most creative ideas. Allow for different points of view as you explore agreements.

Often, a key to a person's emotions can be found in nonverbal signals. To be an effective influencer, learn to read these nonverbal signs and handle them accordingly. It's more productive to manage emotions than to be lead by them. By paying close attention to the actions of those around you, you can fine-tune the way you manage them, which allows you insights into their

feelings and concerns. This isn't as evil as it sounds – when used properly, this kind of positive influence can actually help the team avoid things that keep it from achieving its goals.

### **Negotiation and Collaboration**

Whether you're working out an employment agreement, a game design or a production schedule, there's also something that needs to be negotiated. Enter each negotiation with a positive attitude and do everything you can to keep the atmosphere from becoming adversarial. This can be a real challenge when a game developer and a publisher can't agree on things up to and including whether the product is beta or pre-alpha.

You get the support from others by mutually respectful and productive dialog that enables you to reach (more or less agreeable) resolutions. Your ability to influence others will increase if you are able to be calm and firm but flexible. Establish the interest you have in common with the other party and aim to meet their needs as well as your own. Always retain your composure to be able to better deal with any difficult situation as they arise.

As a team leader, you can build and manage effective collaborations by being aware of the team's needs and avoiding "positional bargaining," a situation in which both sides present their case with increasingly stronger arguments in favor of their position. Positional bargaining is like playing "King of the Hill" because both sides jockey for top position at the expense of other players (sometimes including their own teammates.) The result is a weakened team, a lot of resentment and impaired productivity that will ultimately hurt everyone's career.

You also want to find solutions that work for the whole team, in part by creating solid agreements and alliances that help build the team's confidence and motivate it to put forth its best effort regardless of challenges. However, before you can resolve the details, you need to be clear about the "big picture" and determine what's best for the project as well as the team.

If you're new to your organization, don't expect to gain the team's confidence overnight. Take it one step at a time so that you can earn their trust and reinforce your position as team leader. People will be more inclined to listen if you communicate clearly and openly.

Before you can have any influence with senior management, you need to develop sufficient confidence in your ability to get your ideas across successfully and by motivating your team to meet deadlines in a timely and productive way. A key part of achieving this requires that you be clear about your goals and your motivation. Take every opportunity to demonstrate that you can be trusted with challenges and authority. Exercise your powers of persuasion through mature judgment, evident knowledge about issues and potential resolutions, and the ability to put your ideas across clearly and dynamically.

Identify the interests and concerns of those you hope to influence.

Be aware of other people's responses to your communication style.

Watch for clues that tell you that your approach might not be working.

Be ready to junk a suggestion if you're not getting any response (at least a negative response tells you something!)

## **WAYS TO USE INFLUENCE IN POSITIVE WAYS**

There are lots of good ideas here – you don't have to implement all of them at once but keep coming back to this list regularly and often, especially if you're running into roadblocks:

Recognize that influence comes from developing good relationships and sharing ideas.

Understand that effective influence stems from dialogue.

Be flexible in your approach and consider the concerns of others.

Remember that people respond well to honesty and courtesy.

Many objections can actually contain ideas that will improve things for your team.

Always keep your cool, no matter the provocation – your poise will work in your favor.

Be confident and relaxed – basically, never let 'em see you sweat!

Take a deep breath before you react to a criticism.

You don't have to grovel to the decision-makers.

Be an optimist – look for solutions rather than dwelling on problems.

Observe what good leaders do and aim to follow their lead.

Ask for feedback about your strengths and abilities – and your weaknesses.

Understand that setbacks will happen and don't let it get you or the team down.

Listen to your instincts when you are making difficult decisions but don't let the drama and politics get you down.

Try to be aware of other people's preconceptions. Listen carefully to voice tones and notice if someone starts to get upset.

Be aware of body language in meetings – yours and others.

Avoid giving advice unless you're asked for it and then be sure that it's relevant for the person and not an opportunity to grandstand.

Vet your intuitions by asking questions on the relevant points.

Don't agree to demands that aren't right for your team.

Use "we" rather than "you" when seeking the support of others.

If you want to bring contentious issues into the open, do it gently and without rancor.

Keep the goal in mind when you're explaining ideas.

Remember that junior staff members are tomorrow's bosses.

Be open to new opportunities and new colleagues – and share them with others.

Keep in regular contact with your acquaintances through emails, telephone calls, or cards.

Find out what interests team members have outside their work.

Build confidence by focusing on people's strengths.

Keep your team informed about developments insofar as you're able.

Motivate quieter team members by asking them for their ideas.

Look for signs of doubt, such as lack of eye contact.

If you cannot achieve big goals, try smaller ones.

Be fair when you assess others' ideas – give them the same respect and courtesy that you want them to give you.

Show enthusiasm when you talk about your ideas or when you work with your team – energy is contagious.

Notice how the most influential person in a group isn't always the leader.

Make sure that everyone on your team feels valued.

Help your team figure out why they dislike something and then help them find positive ways to deal with it.

Ask your team to suspend personal judgment and focus on what's the best for the project. Build consensus by listening to everyone's input and encourage your team members to do the same.

Work to gain the respect of your superiors but don't fawn over them or be obnoxious.

Imagine how you would react to your own proposals and give other people the same respect you want from them.

If someone objects to your proposal, ask for their ideas on how it could be improved.

Gain respect by addressing issues and working towards mutual concessions rather than winning arguments by brute force or talking over the opposition.

Handle deadlocks by being firm but still flexible and gentle.

Stay focused on your goals when you are faced with conflict.

Find the cause of a problem and if it was your fault, do something about fixing it rather than acting defensively.

Respect diversity and everyone's right to their own opinion.

Remember that the best views are a synthesis of many people.

Learn from the way you dealt with past conflicts.

Examine the causes of a misunderstanding thorough and do your homework.

Be ready to adapt your manner to match your audience's response.

Also speak with an upbeat tone when describing solutions.

Start networking today – pick up the telephone or send an email!

## Biography

***Marc Mencher** is a specialist in game industry careers who has helped thousands of jobseekers land positions with the hottest gaming companies. Before founding GameRecruiter.com, he worked for such game companies as Spectrum Holobyte, Microprose, and 3DO. Marc is the author of "Get In The Game!" -- an instructional book on careers in the video games industry. He has been an Executive Producer on several games. He is a curriculum advisor to colleges offering Game Development degrees. Marc speaks at many of the Game Industry conferences around the world. His firm, GameRecruiter.com focuses on unique and un-advertised game industry jobs. He can be reached at <http://www.gamerecruiter.com> or 866-358-GAME (4263).*