



Elise
Sullivan

enabling individuals to
contribute autonomously
to powerful collaborations

Thought leadership – the key to influence

If you want to take control of your professional life, design your work to suit your strengths, make a difference, and work with people who value what you know and who you are, then you need to ramp up your thought leadership.

Why becoming a thought-leader matters

In a world of information overload, change and competing priorities, you won't matter until you can convince others that you are the thought leader. This is a pretty audacious idea. What makes you a thought leader? Someone who is known for what they know. They can work inside organisations or run their own business and practices. But why might being a thought leader make a difference to you?

Your job does not allow you to express yourself or your ideas

You might have been employed for your expertise, experience and overall brilliance – but once in the job, the opportunity to express these diminishes with each week, month and year, and so does your shine. The job starts to define who you are.

You might be at a point in your career when you are questioning your worth and what is next. The problem is that you may have been doing the job for so long that you can't imagine doing anything else. You know you still have a lot to offer, just not sure you can do it in the job you are in, and not sure who else will value what you have and who you are.

You are not at the table

You have ideas that will make a difference but no way of getting them out there. It is impossible to make a difference if you don't have the ear of the people who make the decisions. But if you are not in a position to take a seat at their table, how do you get their ear? The secret is that you don't need to be at their table for them to hear you. But you do need to have something worth listening to, and be presenting it in ways that gets their attention and that they can hear it –

You have to lead transformation

You have the job of leading change that you just know will be met with no small amount of resistance. How do you convince them to get on board and work with you not against you? Charismatic leaders throughout history have lead people to do great and evil things. How? They lead from a point of passion – they seemed to know more than anyone else and they were able to express this in a way that resonated with their followers.

What difference can I make when no-one is listening

You know the answers and have the solutions to many of the issues that are cropping up in your organisation, work place or even in larger society, but no-one seems to be that interested in them.

Does it sometimes seem that your ideas are not listened to until they come out of someone else's mouth? It's like you are a ventriloquist. Pop your hand on someone else's back, put your words in their mouth and off you go – at least your ideas might get traction. If only you could feel OK about this. But you want your ideas to be listened to because they are your ideas, right?

Others may not be listening because familiarity breeds contempt – or it may be the way you are packaging up your ideas and delivering them.

The Influence Factor

The capacity to have an impact and leave a legacy is largely defined by your capacity to influence others. And this means engaging them sufficiently to want to listen to you.

Irritating

While the average 3 year old learns quickly that they get what they want if their incessant nagging is irritating enough not to ignore, this wears thin over the years as their charm and cuteness diminishes. So if you are banging on about your needs and what you think with little consideration to their relevance to others, you might just be irritating. The problem for irritating people is that others will actively avoid them, which significantly undermines their capacity to influence.

Invisible

We all have great ideas but often our fear gets in the way of expressing them openly. What would others think? What if they don't agree? How would I feel if they don't agree with them? The reality is that if we all have great ideas, then of course they will also be different. Until we express our own, how can we know they are worth sharing? How can we develop our thinking even further? There are many people who are quite content and extremely good at being the 'ghost' behind famous people, feeding them their best ideas. Consider Tony Abbot's political advisor, Peta Credlin. She is an incredibly powerful and influential woman who is largely invisible – well until now that is. But one thing is

for sure, Peta will no doubt be working on how she can stand on her own thought leadership as her influence within politics wanes. I am not sure Tony can say the same.

But for the average person, being invisible means not having a voice and making no difference at all. In fact, it is like you are not even there much of the time. Your capacity to influence when you are invisible is zilch!

Interesting

It's always nice to know that when you open your mouth to speak people are interested, they stop talking and they listen. Great start and at least if they are interested you have a good chance of saying something that might influence their behaviour. Interesting people win the right to say something more – they get the interviews. Holding people attention and actually getting them to buy into the idea you are pushing is not assured but with effort your chances of influencing them increase 5 fold.

Intriguing

I sometimes think that people follow me because they are curious to see what I am going to do next. When your ideas are deep, you feel passionately about them and are clearly driven to make a difference, just the force of your energy can pull people along with you – even if they are not so sure of the destination. But this is usually limited to the people you know well and who are always a bit intrigued with the direction you heading in. If you want to have a broader impact on those who think quite differently to you, then being intriguing is not enough. Incredibly intriguing people can be akin to the avid researcher who wants to tell you about a cure for a disease that he has discovered, but you don't have the disease.

Inspiring

If you want to convert people to your cause and you want to motivate them to action, then you need to be truly inspiring. And this does not necessarily mean becoming an amazing orator (although it certainly helps!). It actually means presenting your thinking in ways that resonate with the needs of the people you are trying to influence. It means having a deep understanding of your subject and also the needs of those who will most benefit from them.

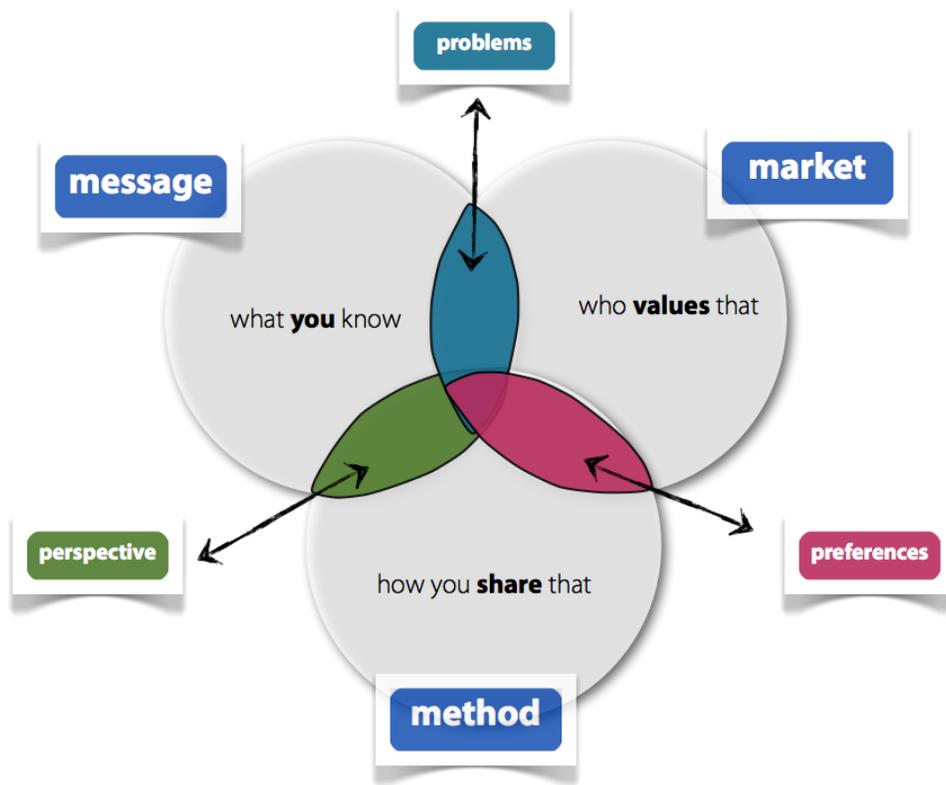
When you are known for what you know, you are a thought leader. People come to you seeking your advise, wanting to know what your think. You are positioned to pull people to your cause, rather than pushing it down their throats!

Pull	Inspiring	100x
	Intriguing	10x

Push	Interesting	5x
	Invisible	0x
	Irritating	- 10x

Ramping up your influence

To ramp up your influence, and inspire action in others, you need to develop your thought leadership, understand your stakeholders and deliver your ideas in convincing ways that they can consume them.



The steps to becoming a thought leader, and growing your influence is:

1. Distilling what you want to be known for
2. Capturing what you know and turning this into your expertise
3. Identifying who will benefit from this knowledge and how to click with them, whether
4. Develop a range of methods for delivering your message to be truly inspiring. This might be speaking, writing, consulting, advising, mentoring, or presenting a business case, facilitating, managing or teaching.

Flick me an email if you are interested in ramping up your influence, developing your influence thought leadership, or want to build a case for change.