Influencing the interview

Do you want to discover the 11 secrets of influencing people at interviews? Science has shown that it is possible to guarantee a successful response from an employer by following a few easy steps. How to achieve a sure-fire way of winning people over can be demonstrated in this personal guide.

Hooked yet? If that paragraph succeeded in grapping your attention, it may help explain some of the success behind the ability of Reader's Digest to influence buying decisions. It used a variety of key words and phrases that have proved powerful stimuli in Reader's Digest advertising. Apparently it is important to attach a number to the 'secrets' that are being revealed because people are often enticed by the challenge to remember them all.

But the words have their own power, and one word is more powerful than any other in influencing people, according to John Caples, an advertising copywriter who studied words in advertisement headlines that most often captured buyers. That word is 'you'. He found that the second most powerful word was 'your'.

Caples' observations are recalled in a new book by Tom Lambert called The Power of Influence which examines the use of influencing skills in the workplace.

While words have their place, he also makes a point about influencing people using body language, and suggests trying out the following experiment in social discourse the next time you are sitting across the desk from someone in the office.

Find a colleague who is alone and take up a position, not too obviously, in their line of sight. Carefully mirror their position, paying attention to posture, facial expressions and the way that arms and legs are folded. The more detailed the copy, including mirroring the subject's apparent disposition, the more physically and emotionally you have become attuned to their pose, the more likely you are to succeed with the next stage of the experiment.

After a few minutes, move an arm or hand and see if they follow. If they do not, return to the previous mirroring position and try again when you judge the time is right. Lambert insists the subject will follow your action.

You are then in a position to use your power over them constructively, lightening your expression and posture. 'You may be doing them more good than you will ever know,' writes Lambert.

This is the first stage, he writes, of building an effective rapport with another person. This mimicry in rapport-building is achieved by some people quite naturally. Copying accents, gestures and postures is not uncommon. Recognising that someone is copying your mannerisms or movements is an important observation that tells you that you are in a position to exert further influence. The technique is used by psychiatric nurses in calming over-emotional patients.

To lapse back into the language of Reader's Digest for a moment, medical evidence has shown that if you accurately copy the posture of another person it is not only your habits that begin to empathise. Breathing and heartbeat become synchronised and pupil size becomes the same. Lambert ventures that in those circumstances, it
may be possible to share thoughts and feelings. Suddenly all those hours spent watching Star Trek on television seem worthwhile.

But none of the former is science fiction. It is a lesson drawn from neuro-linguistic programming, or NLP for short. Nor is it confined to humans. Ducks do this sort of thing all the time before they mate.

Techniques useful for making friends with an interviewer are just part of the repertoire of professional influencing skills covered in Lambert's book which makes some of the more interesting psychological observations in the field accessible to the general reader.