



From Fear to Influence: Breaking Through Your Psychological Blocks at Work

In today's constantly evolving workplace, where organizational restructuring is the norm rather than the exception, the ability to influence others has become crucial for success—regardless of your position in the hierarchy.

Despite knowing we need to collaborate more, many of us find ourselves held back not by a lack of influence skills, but by psychological barriers. The most common of these is the fear of judgment, which can create an invisible wall between having valuable insights and actually sharing them.

This guide offers practical strategies to transform these psychological blocks from limiting forces into meaningful contributions. By understanding and addressing these internal barriers, particularly our fear of judgment, you can move from a place of self-censorship to confidently contributing your unique perspective to your team's success. Here are five strategies and practices:



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1. Use Preparation to Avoid Focusing on Perceptions

What happens when you're stuck in fear: You focus on *how you'll be perceived* rather than *how you can add value*. This can make you either hesitant or overly polished to the point of losing authenticity.

Reframe it: Instead of thinking “I need to sound smart so they respect me,” shift to “I have an insight that can help solve this problem or advance the discussion.”

Practice:

Before a big meeting, ask “What’s the one thing I can contribute that would make this conversation better?”

Afterward, instead of “Did I impress them?” ask “Did I help move the discussion forward?”

- Who were the most influential figures in your early life, and what did they teach you?
 - What childhood or early-adult moments defined your worldview?
 - Can you pinpoint when you first understood the weight of leadership or responsibility?
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2. Detach from the Need for Universal Approval

What happens when you seek approval: You dilute your message, hedge too much, or stay silent to avoid disagreement.

Reframe it: Influence isn’t about pleasing everyone—it’s about making a *clear, well-reasoned contribution*.

Practice:

- Before sharing an idea, remind yourself: “Even the best leaders and ideas face resistance—it’s part of the process.”
- Use neutral observation instead of emotional attachment. Instead of “They don’t like my idea,” think “They just have different priorities; how can I address that?”
- Oh, and you don’t have to take it personally if they have priorities that are different from yours. Sometimes we can be affronted when they can see how important our needs or ideas are, and that becomes another distraction or mental rabbit hole that works against us.



3. Regulate Your Body Before High-Stakes Moments

What happens under stress: Your brain perceives judgment as a threat, triggering a fight-or-flight response (racing thoughts, fast heartbeat, and tension).

Reframe it: These are not signs that you're unprepared or incapable; they're your body's way of getting ready. Instead of suppressing them, channel the energy.

Practice:

- **Box breathing:** Take four seconds to inhale, four seconds to hold, four seconds to exhale, and four seconds to hold. This calms the nervous system before speaking.
 - **Power posing:** Open, expansive posture helps shift your brain from *defensive* to *assertive* mode.
 - **Grounding techniques:** Feel your feet on the floor; press your fingertips together. This keeps you present rather than spiraling into self-consciousness.
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4. Start Small to Desensitize Yourself

What happens when you avoid judgment: Your fear grows. The less often you put yourself in situations where you might be judged, the scarier those situations feel.

Reframe it: You don't need to make *huge* leaps overnight—small, intentional actions retrain your brain to tolerate discomfort.

Practice:

- Speak up once in every meeting, even if it's just to summarize a point.
- Share an idea before it's fully polished. Practice saying "*Here's a rough thought; I'd love your input.*"
- Ask a direct question to a senior leader in a group setting. This normalizes interaction with authority.



5. Adopt a “10-10-10” Perspective

What happens when fear dominates: You overestimate how much people will remember or care about your missteps.

Reframe it: Most people are too busy thinking about themselves to dwell on your mistakes. Use the “10-10-10 Rule”:

Practice:

- Will this moment matter in ten minutes?
- Ten days?
- Ten months?
- If not, take the risk and move forward.

Overcoming psychological blocks—especially the fear of judgment isn’t about eliminating these feelings completely—it’s about recognizing them as natural responses to our brain’s negativity bias and learning to work through them productively.

Our thoughts create our reality, and without conscious awareness, we can let fear-based thinking patterns limit our potential and convince us to “play it smaller.” Remember that your voice matters—not because it’s immune to judgment—but because diverse perspectives and healthy challenges are essential in today’s matrixed organizations.

As you practice these strategies, you’ll likely find that the energy once spent on managing fears can be redirected into meaningful contributions that advance your team’s goals. Be patient with yourself and remember that growth comes from taking action despite the inevitable presence of judgment. The modern workplace, with its constant changes and complex stakeholder landscape, needs your voice more than ever—and with these tools, you’re better equipped to share it effectively.

