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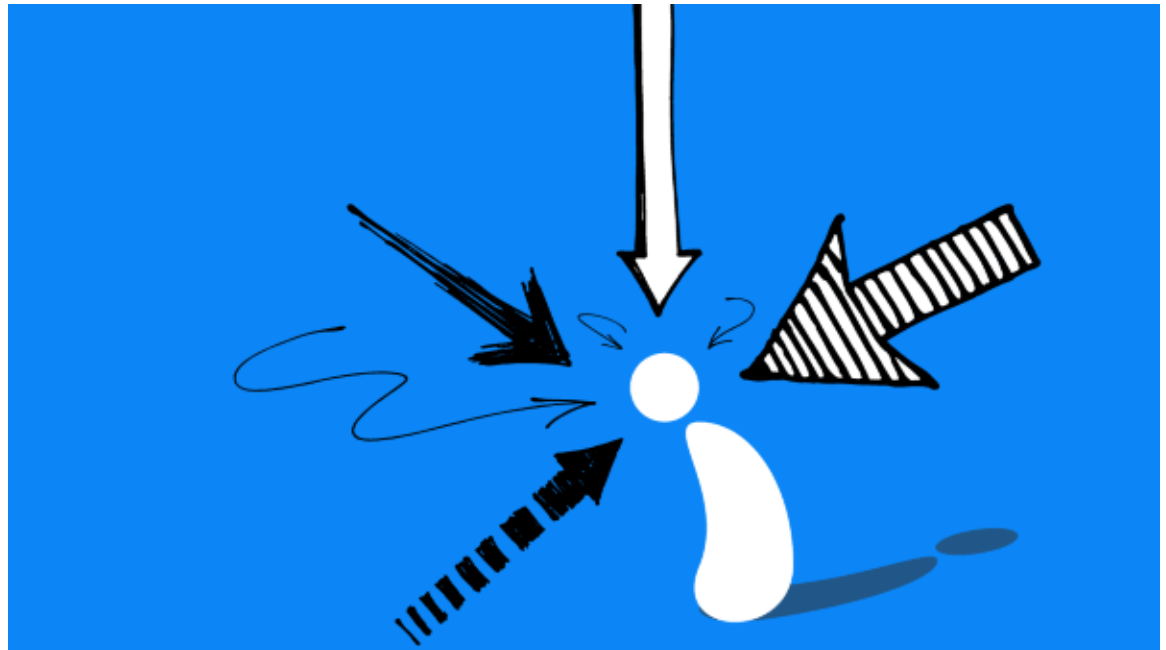
Signs That You're Being a Pushover

by Amy Jen Su

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If collaboration is key to succeeding in organizations today, doesn't it pay to play nice in the sandbox? You have to get along with others to get things done, right? Yes, this is true — to a degree. You want to be a cooperative colleague but you don't want to be seen as an ineffective pushover. Persuading others matters as much as getting along with them.

Rocking the boat or standing your ground may be hard for you but always being the one who's persuaded rather than one doing the influencing has real implications for your work and your career. Here are signs that you've taken being the good guy or gal too far:

- You kick yourself after the fact for not speaking up in a meeting. You only come to realize your point of view on something after the discussion is over.
- You blame your colleagues for not giving anyone the chance to get in a word edgewise.
- You feel overwhelmed and pulled in multiple directions especially as emails and requests for work or input come in.
- Your calendar is full with back-to-back meetings and no time to focus on yourself or critical priorities.
- Your peers get promoted before you.

Chances are that if you're feeling these things, other people are noticing as well. When coaching people who often tend to give in, this is what I typically hear from those around them.

Their direct reports say: *I really appreciate how much he cares, but it's frustrating that he doesn't advocate for me or our team.*

Senior managers say: *I can always count on her when we're in a bind, but honestly I'm not sure she has what it takes to lead and make the tough calls. I don't know that I'll ever see her as a peer.*

Their peers say: *He puts on this nice-guy veneer but he seems pretty passive aggressive. He agrees to something in a meeting and then later you find out he's waffling.*

If this is you, how do you turn things around? Can you be yourself while also becoming less easily persuaded? Can you put your own stake in the ground more often? Here are some suggestions.

1. **Take greater ownership.** Rather than changing who you are, tap into a greater sense of responsibility to the business and those around you. Too often, we assume that it's someone else's job to weigh in and shape key decisions. Instead, assume that it's yours. Don't be afraid to step on toes. There is usually plenty of room at the table for ideas and input. Let go of being an order taker. Rather than waiting to be told what to execute or standing on the sidelines, get on top of the key issues affecting the company or your team, develop a recommendation, and share it with others.
2. **Prepare ahead of time.** Because you are more easily swayed by the opinions of others, spend time in advance of critical meetings to decide what you think. Ask yourself: What are the top three ideas about the topic to be discussed? Write down your beliefs and convictions so that you are clear in your thinking and you can access your ideas more quickly. Think of this like a mental filing cabinet — you are taking an extra step ahead of time to pull out the file you need rather than scrambling around in your mind during the discussion. Of course, when you're in the meeting, don't be so wedded to your ideas that you are inflexible. Listen to others' ideas and use your beliefs to build off of theirs.

3. **Increase your ability to advocate.** You may be a natural in building rapport and connecting with others, but standing your ground requires flexing a whole different set of muscles. Learn how to advocate for your perspective more effectively. Frame your messages so that people immediately understand why they should care and how your idea ties to the bigger picture. Speak in tight bullet points (rather than circling around your viewpoint) so that you are crisp, articulate, and clear. Once you've made your point, invite others to weigh in to further refine your idea. You don't have to be a pit-bull to be an effective advocate. In fact, coupling your good guy or gal demeanor with a sharp approach to communications will make you even more effective at persuasion.

4. **Hold your ground.** Part of making and advocating for your point is holding your ground. When others are challenging you, you might start to feel knocked off center or backed up on your heels. You may be tempted to give into their perspective but that will only relieve that anxious feeling temporarily. Ask yourself: Is guilt, a desire for being liked, or fear of rocking the boat tugging you away from your own convictions?

If a colleague starts to push, dominate, or interrupt, let them finish but then don't drop your idea. Loop back to your point. Or, if you need to, use a non-verbal cue, such as putting up your hand up to signal you are not done speaking. You could also say, "Hang on a minute, I'd like to finish this thought." Stack the odds in your favor. Go to the room in advance and take a seat that is more in the flow of the conversation versus one on the sidelines.

5. **Learn to say no graciously.** If you are easily persuaded by others, chances are that it shows up on your calendar. How often are you being persuaded to attend a meeting or change your schedule to accommodate the needs of others? Never say yes or no in the moment. Buy yourself time to make a thoughtful decision rather than saying yes out of habit. Acknowledge the request, and if you need to say no, offer other alternatives. Watch out for phrases that your colleagues have come to know can easily persuade you, such as "I'm really stressing right now" or "This is urgent for me." Your job is not to rescue or take on others' problems. Offer your counsel, but be careful of always being the one who gives in.

Being less easily persuaded won't make you appear bullheaded or unpleasant to work with. Quite the opposite. By standing your ground and becoming more influential yourself, you do better by your team and the business and increase the overall respect and confidence others have in you.

Amy Jen Su is a co-founder and managing partner of [Paravis Partners](#), a premier executive coaching and leadership development firm. For the past two decades, she has coached CEOs, executives, and rising stars in organizations. She is the author of the HBR Press book *The Leader You Want to Be: Five Essential Principles for Bringing Out Your Best Self—Every Day*, and co-author of *Own the Room: Discover Your Signature Voice to Master Your Leadership Presence* with Muriel Maignan Wilkins.
