

PRAESTA

Relationship Authority: How Can You Use It?

Relationship authority can often be more influential than the formal exercise of power.

A formal leader may get compliance with their instructions, but if their followers don't feel personally engaged and heard, they may look for an early opportunity to change leaders.

The informal leader of a network may have few people directly under their control, yet exercise huge influence because others trust their lead to coordinate activity and take good decisions.

In a high-level negotiation, it may be the formal leader who signs the contract, but first they need deputies who develop trust and work out mutually acceptable outcomes with their opposite numbers.

To build your relationship authority, you might:

- Find out where others are coming from, what they care about, and what success looks like for them
- Look for ways that you can help them achieve their objectives, without compromising your own
- Be curious about their personality and what type of approach will get or lose their attention. Do they respond best if they see something in writing before a discussion, or are they never likely to read what you send? Do they expect a lot of detail or switch off after the headlines?

It pays to build trusting relationships with key people before you need to make big requests of them. For example:

- Where you rely on a team or network, can you use 1-1 s and group sessions to get to know how they tick and to build confidence in a shared purpose?
- Where you have key stakeholders, can you find an opportunity to introduce yourself early in the relationship, and gain insight from others who know them?
- If there are multiple relationships to build, can you share responsibility for them across your team?

Relationship authority could be your greatest asset if you work on it.