

Food Drink &
Hospitality Week

3 THINGS FOOD INDUSTRY PROFESSIONALS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT GETTING PEOPLE TO LISTEN

A practical guide for NPD managers, development technologists and technical leads who are tired of being the most prepared person in the room and still not getting heard.



[FEARLESSFOODIES.CO.UK](https://fearlessfoodies.co.uk)

LET'S BE HONEST

You didn't get into food because you wanted to play politics. You got into it because you love the work. The product development. The technical challenge. The consumer insight. The pace of it.

But somewhere along the way, you noticed something. The people whose ideas get picked up, whose recommendations get backed, who seem to have the ear of the senior team - they're not always the most knowledgeable people in the room. And that's quietly, consistently frustrating.

Maybe you've sat in a gate review meeting and watched a half-baked idea from commercial get the green light while your must more robust recommendation got pulled for 'another look.'

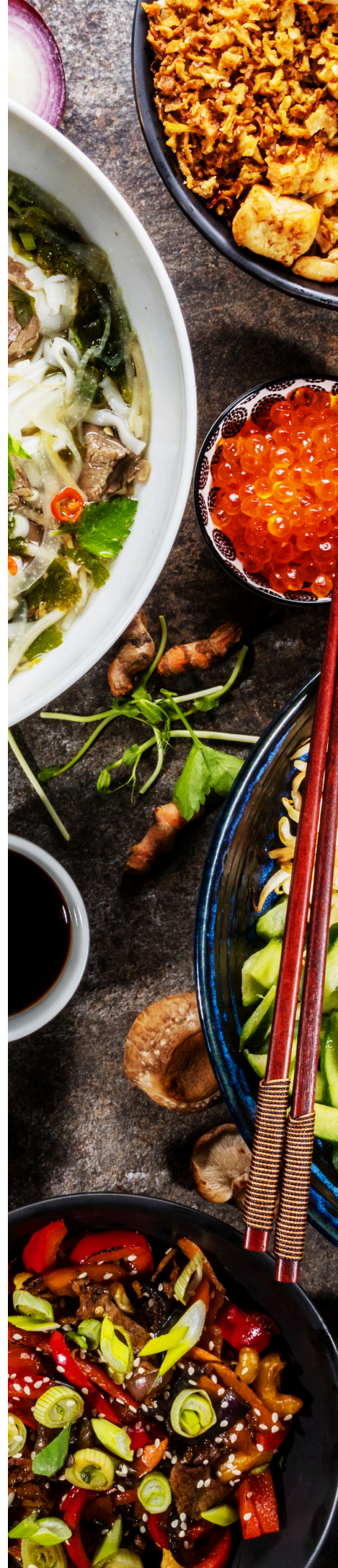
Maybe you've sent the same email three times and still can't get a response from the ops team.

Maybe you've prepared thoroughly for a retailer meeting and still felt like you were speaking a different language to the buyer.

You're not imagining it. And it's not that your work isn't good enough.

What's actually happening is an **influencing gap** and it's one of the most common issues we see in food professionals. The good news: it's completely learnable.

Here are three things that will start to change things - right now, before you've changed your job title, your company, or anything else.





TIP #1

Know what your audience actually cares about before you open your mouth.

This sounds obvious. It isn't.

Most people prepare for conversations by thinking about what they need to say. The recipe detail. The rationale. The data. All of which may be completely correct... and completely irrelevant to the person you're trying to influence.

Your NPD director doesn't think in the same language as your buyer. Your buyer doesn't think in the same language as your ops manager. The question that unlocks influence is not 'how do I explain this?' It's:

"What does this person actually care about, and how does what I'm saying connect to that?"

Try this before your next difficult conversation:

Write down the answers to these three questions about the person you need to influence:

- What is the biggest pressure they're under right now?
- What does success look like for them in their role - not yours?
- What would make them look good (or bad) in front of their own stakeholders?

A technical manager pitching a reformulation to a commercial director who's under pressure on launch timelines doesn't lead with the allergen risk argument - she leads with 'this keeps us on schedule and protects the brand.' The technical rigour is still there. The framing is theirs, not hers.

**That's not manipulation.
That's influence.**



TIP #2

Get your message down to one sentence.

If you can't say what you need in one sentence, you're not ready to say it.

This is uncomfortable for most food professionals - especially those with a technical, category or NPD background - because you've been trained to "show your workings". To demonstrate the depth of your knowledge. To cover all the caveats and variables. And in a written audit report, that's right. In a cross-functional meeting with a commercial director who's already thinking about something else, it buries your point.

The people who get heard in food organisations are not the most thorough. They're the clearest.

Try this:

Before your next meeting or presentation, write down the one thing you need the room to walk away knowing or doing.

Not the three things. Not the context. The one thing. Then build backwards from that.

If you were presenting a consumer insight finding to a senior team, your one sentence might be:

"Shoppers are trading down in this category, and if we don't act on packaging size before Q3 we'll lose rate of sale."

Everything else is the supporting detail. Lead with the sentence.

Most people save the conclusion for the end. Influential communicators put it at the front.



TIP #3

Make it easy to decide - not easy to delay.

Here's something that took most of us years to learn: when someone is making an unreasonable ask or sitting on a decision, pushing back harder rarely works. What works is making the cost of not deciding impossible to ignore.

Most people in food are busy, under commercial pressure, and often conflict-averse. When they're stalling on a reformulation sign-off, asking for a cost reduction that would slice your margin to nothing, or demanding a timeline that's technically undeliverable - the instinct is to explain why it's difficult.

Don't. Instead, give them options that make the trade-off completely visible.

In practice, this looks like:

Instead of saying to a Buyer / Commercial person: "We can't hit that price point without compromising the recipe."

Try this: "We can give you Option A - the original spec at current pricing. Or Option B - we hit your target price point, but we'd need to reduce the hero ingredient by 15%, which will show in the eating quality. Which would you like us to progress?"

You're not being obstructive. You're being clear. You're putting the commercial and quality trade-off where it belongs - in their hands, not yours. A buyer who has to choose between price and product quality can no longer sit on the fence. And if they choose the cheaper option, the decision - and the consequences - are owned jointly.

This works for timeline stalls too:

"We can hit your requested launch date if we bypass the extended shelf-life trial, or we can run the full trial and launch six weeks later. What's your priority?"

Most NPD professionals have been trained to solve the problem before they bring it to the retailer or internal stakeholder. Sometimes that's right.

Sometimes the most influential thing you can do is bring the problem - framed as a clear choice - and let them solve it with you.

ABOUT FEARLESS FOODIES



Fearless Foodies is a leadership development consultancy built specifically for the food manufacturing, FMCG and grocery retail sectors. We exist because the food industry is fast, commercial, and often brutal - and the humans working in it deserve better leadership skills and better-led organisations.

Our team of associates have worked inside food businesses - in NPD, technical, commercial, marketing and operations roles - for a combined total of well over 200 years. We have sat in the stage gate reviews, the retailer / supplier meetings, the cross-functional stand-offs. We know what these environments actually feel like, and we've trained hundreds of food industry professionals to communicate, influence and lead more effectively within them.

Fearless Foodies was founded by **Amy Wilkinson** — a leadership coach with over 25 years of food and grocery experience. Amy built this consultancy after her own experience of burnout in a senior food industry role. She rebuilt her career in Food with a new understanding of what good (and bad!) leadership looks like, and her whole mission since has been to help others have the success - without it costing them their health.

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IF THIS RESONATED, THERE'S MORE WHERE THAT CAME FROM.

Fearless Influence

A two-day, in-person programme for mid-level food industry professionals who are ready to stop holding back in the room.

It goes much deeper than this guide — into the psychology of stakeholder influence, how to handle the conversations that feel impossible, and how to build the kind of credibility that means your recommendations actually land.

Previous delegates have come from Greencore, Bakkavor, Yeo Valley and more.

Who it's for:

NPD managers, development technologists, technical leads and anyone who's good at their job and ready to get better at getting heard.

What delegates leave with:

A practical influencing toolkit they can use the week they get back — not a folder full of frameworks they'll never open again.



Think this could be right for you or someone on your team?

The simplest next step is a conversation. Drop Amy a message and she'll tell you honestly whether Fearless Influence is the right fit.

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Feel free to share this guide with your line manager or L&D lead — it gives a good sense of the kind of practical, food-relevant approach we bring.