



Influence and Impact: How to Affect Those Around You

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It's time to work on YOU. So sit back and listen to practical, actionable advice to accelerate your progress.

In this lesson, we will look at a critical requirement for business success – the ability to influence and impact those around you.

The need to influence people around you is one of the skills that any leader must continue to work on throughout their career. Without it, making a genuinely positive impact on the world is nearly impossible.

But what is influence? Influence can be defined as the ability to positively affect the behaviour, development and character of someone through a strong emotional connection. [1]

Influence expert, Dorie Clark, author of *Entrepreneurial You* [2], explains the tremendous value of influence when she says that with it, "You get more done, and you advance the projects you care about and are responsible for," which means "you're more likely to be noticed, get promoted, and receive raises."

However, some experts also warn that influencing people has never been more challenging. We're all battling information overload and dealing with the new normal that has left many working from home.

Essential face-to-face time has been significantly reduced.

Before you concern yourself with influencing others, you must work on yourself and consider your motivations.

Do you feel genuinely passionate about your role? Are you dedicating your life to something with meaning and purpose?

To be someone who commands influence, someone that people will want to follow, you need to be authentic and motivated [3]. You will need the inexhaustible drive provided by a strong feeling of purpose to succeed.

Another question to ask yourself is, 'Do you truly wish to affect change?' The whole point of being a leader who influences people and takes them on a journey is that you reject conformity when you know there is something better out there. If you prefer going through the motions and being comfortable, you probably aren't a leader.

Are you taking care of yourself? As a source of influence, you will have to regularly be there for other people, which without proper consideration, can end up being at the cost of your own well-being. Your team and organisation need the best you, which means looking after yourself.

Assuming you are doing so, let's look at the skills and behaviours you need to bring to the table as a master of influence.

First up, you must be an expert in your area.

Research and read everything related to your area of expertise [4]. Keep on top of trends and forecasts so you're always ready to adapt and make a positive impact [5]. Become a thought leader by sharing your thoughts. Knowledge gives authority, and once you prove you know your stuff, you will gain the respect of those in your sphere and be a go-to person when they need some wisdom in that area. This will lead to your reputation growing within your organisation and industry.

Leading on from this, you should also know to stay in your own lane.

Know what you're great at and leave everything else to the relevant experts. Think of it as your own personal brand. Nike makes products connected to sports. They don't get involved with designing furniture. Taking work you don't excel at will dilute the perception that you're an expert.

Be authentic. This means being yourself. You may be able to look at someone you admire and adopt some of their techniques, but at the end of the day, you have to be you. Why are you unique? This also connects with having a purpose and personal brand.

If you only do what you think people want from you or make decisions to be popular, you will be revealed to be inauthentic. If what you say contradicts what you do, people will notice and lose faith in you.

Always act with integrity regardless of the situation or context. Believe in yourself, and others will believe in you, too. Honour your commitments. Under-promise and overdeliver. People will want to work with you and be part of your journey.

This also means leading by example in all areas. If you wish for people to treat each other with empathy, so must you. If you tell your team to ensure their area of the shared drive is tidy and up to date, then make sure yours is as well.

Our next piece of advice is to listen.

People want to feel heard. If, while someone is speaking to you, you're preoccupied with trying to influence them towards your agenda, then you aren't listening. That doesn't mean you should always agree with their point of view, of course. It just means that it's essential that *they* know that you are trying to understand them. Otherwise, you'll create a barrier between yourself and the other person.

Always give people you are speaking to your undivided attention. This also requires you to use open, "I am here and ready to listen" body language. Sit up straight. Turn entirely towards the person. Keep your arms uncrossed, as that creates a barrier, and try to paraphrase what has been said to check your understanding and show you have been paying attention. Paraphrasing means repeating back to the person in your own words what they have just said to clarify that you received their message.

You should also search out the successes of others. Rather than only looking for where people have made mistakes, look instead for when people have done a great job and then be public and effusive with your praise.

Having this kind of positive impact on someone's working life is free, easy and very powerful. It will enable you to build stronger relationships and get a reputation as someone who refuses to steal the limelight.

A person who feels appreciated this way is much more likely to go the extra mile for you down the line.

The Center for Creative Leadership has argued that the best way to influence others is to appeal to their logical, emotional, and cooperative needs [6]. You need to understand all those you work with on these three levels. What drives them, and how can you give that to them?

Like most skills, this is multi-faceted, requiring listening, emotional intelligence and a keen eye for when those around you seem unsettled or unhappy. Always know your audience.

Another major asset when attempting to influence those around you is to be intentional. This means being deliberate with what you say and do, which will inspire confidence in you amongst those you work with.

In addition to these skills, which are mainly emotionally based, you will also need strong diplomatic skills to influence your organisation.

Organisational intelligence means clearly understanding how your organisation operates, the politics of the place, and how best to move your initiatives forward [6].

By understanding the mechanics of the place where you are building your career, you will be better positioned to promote yourself and your team's successes and abilities. Don't be afraid to put on a show for your superiors when your team has achieved something special.

Growing your understanding of the organisation's operations, particularly above your current pay grade, will require strong networking skills. No leader is an island. You will need strong connections with leaders of other teams and functions up through the levels all the way to the C-suite to plan and manoeuvre accordingly.

However, you also must be strategic about tapping into your network. You will have a certain amount of credit in the bank, which you must only withdraw from when it will give you the most benefit. It may sound a little cold, but everyone is just looking to achieve their goals and enact positive change.

Help someone move their passion project forward, and they'll likely reciprocate when you need support getting a new initiative off the ground or stakeholder buy-in on a product.

Influencing those around you in a way that delivers a positive impact is one of the essential parts of leading. It's also one of the toughest.

It will take focus and practice as you develop all the areas we have covered, and you may sometimes feel like you're dancing through a minefield. But, if you maintain authenticity, resilience and integrity while developing people and pushing forward with projects you are passionate about, you will find success for yourself and your team.

So, feel ready to get out there and start influencing? To put a spin on a famous quote from Marcus Aurelius, "Waste no more time arguing what an influential leader should be. Be one."

That's all for today. Thanks for listening, and remember: keep building the best you.

[1] *How to Increase Your Influence at Work*, Rebecca Knight (2018)
<https://hbr.org/2018/02/how-to-increase-your-influence-at-work>

[2] *Entrepreneurial You: Monetize Your Expertise, Create Multiple Income Streams, and Thrive*, Dorie Clark (2017)
<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Entrepreneurial-You-Monetize-Expertise-Multiple/dp/1633692272/>

[3] *9 Core Behaviors Of People Who Positively Impact The World*, Kathy Caprino (2014)
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/kathycaprino/2014/06/02/9-core-behaviors-of-people-who-positively-impact-the-world/?sh=2b4386c86b41>

[4] *How to Influence People and Make Them Feel Good*, Jennifer R. Farmer (2019)
<https://www.lifehack.org/844016/how-to-influence-people>

[5] *The secret behind how to influence people*, Lois Melkonian (2021)
<https://www.betterup.com/blog/the-secret-behind-how-to-influence-people>

[6] *How to Influence People: 4 Skills for Influencing Others*, Center for Creative Leadership (2023)
<https://www.ccl.org/articles/leading-effectively-articles/4-keys-strengthen-ability-influence-others/>