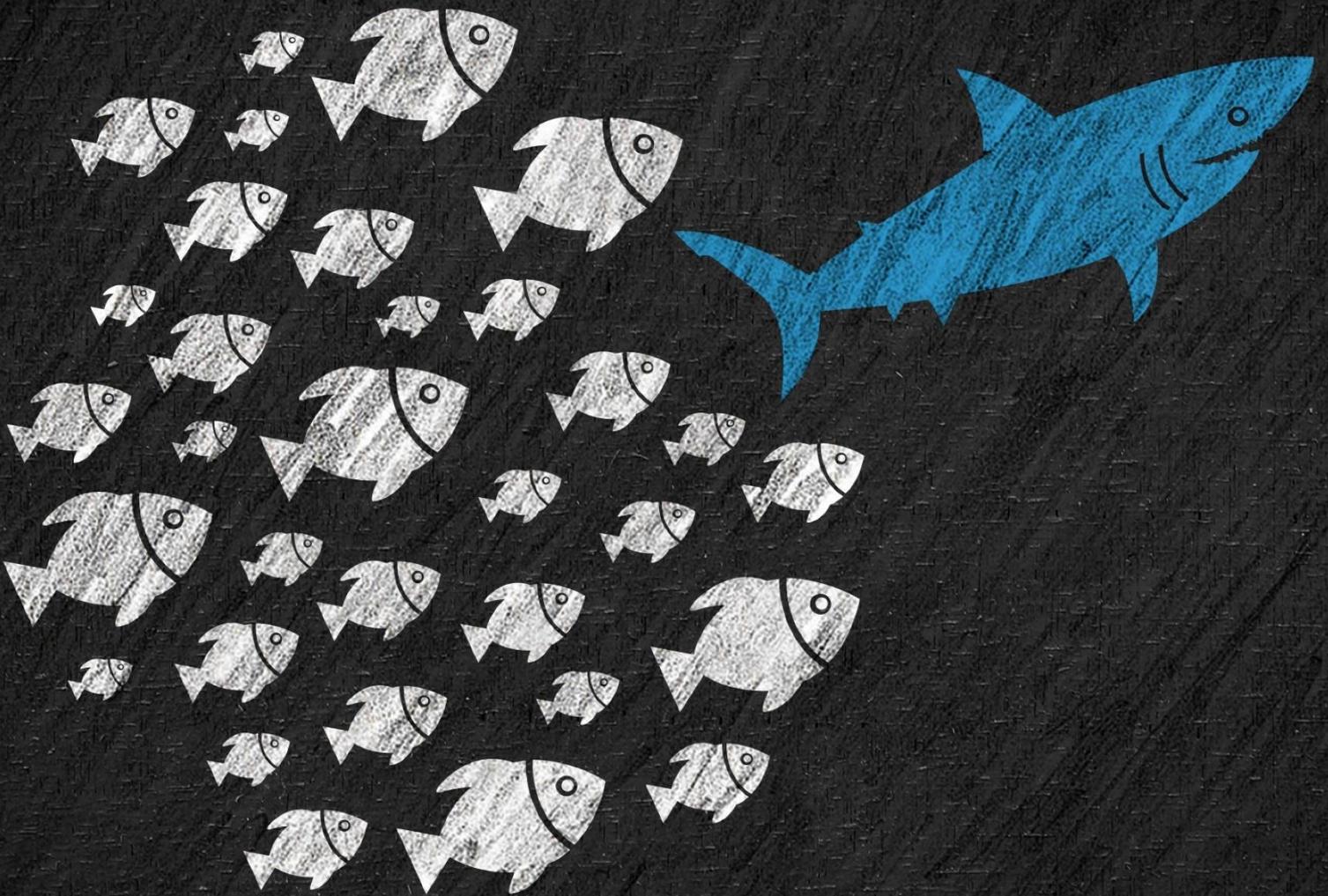


The Art of Persuasive **INFLUENCE**

What works and why in positively influencing
people and outcomes



By Glen Sharkey

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“Glen is perfectly placed to write this important book on influence largely because he is someone that has lived it out. He is a leader whose care for those he leads is genuine, empowering and persuasive.”

Michael McQueen, 5-Time Bestselling Author, Nevin Award Winner

"The Art of Persuasive Influence is leadership distilled down into easy to grasp key principles that will serve you whether you're an emerging or experienced leader in any field - a salient reminder of what really matters for us all. I love this book!"

Simon Wickham, Ex CEO of Yachting NZ, CEO of The West Auckland Trusts

“Many books promise to change your life. This one will also enable you to influence other people’s lives as well. Clear, succinct, and born from a lifetime of experience, Glen writes not only to the intellectual mind but heart also.

Allison Mooney, Award-Winning Professional International Speaker/Author

"This is an essential read if you are in any position to work with or indeed live with other people to whom you influence.”

Karen Tui Boyes, NZ Business Woman of the Year, CEO Spectrum Education

“Glen makes us reconsider our decision-making process and factor in simple truths. He makes us want to make better decisions. Big ones and small ones. Glen Sharkey does indeed walk the talk, he influences us. Better than anyone else I know.”

David Nottage, World Toastmasters Champion, Director of Torque Business

This book is loaded with down to earth examples and easy to implement ideas to help increase your influence. So many valuable lessons that it will be your new “go to resource” that you can use time and time again.

Warwick Merry, President Professional Speakers Australia, CEO of Get More Pty Ltd

The Art of Persuasive Influence offers invaluable advice to deal with all types of leadership challenges. The book is written to be accessible to everyone, whatever their leader role may be. I would strongly urge anyone who is a leader to read, learn and grow in their role.

John Shackleton, Masters Swimming Champion and Award-Winning Speaker

CHAPTER ONE

ATTITUDE

“Positive thinking will let you do everything better
than negative thinking will.”

Zig Ziglar

INTRODUCTION

I love delivering leadership training. It's been my career now, in some form or other, for the past thirty years of my life. I've delivered leadership training to children, teenagers, adults and the elderly, across diverse ethnicities. I've given training to people who never even completed their schooling, and those with PhD's. I've presented to the poorest of the poor and to CEO's of multi-million dollar corporations. After all these experiences one thing has become patently clear to me: *leadership is influence*.

Influence is defined as 'having an effect upon' people, objects, or circumstances. When we influence another person, we have an effect upon them – on their behaviour, thinking, and emotions. As a result of this effect, a ripple on effect often occurs where the situations and circumstances surrounding these people are also influenced. Influence is powerful. It has the power for tremendous positive impact in an ongoing manner across multiple domains.

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines influence as: “The act or power of producing an effect without apparent exertion of force or direct exercise of command”. This definition reflects the aim of this book to help you reduce your effort when it comes to influencing others, so that influence is accomplished 'without apparent exertion', and to create a change in others without commanding it or forcing it. This book is about the *power of influence to create self-responsibility in others*.

Of course, it is possible to influence people to their detriment, which might more accurately be termed 'manipulation'. Manipulation is using influence to get people to do what is beneficial for yourself. Influence, in my definition, is motivating people to do what is beneficial

for themselves and those around them. Manipulation is dis-empowering. Influence is empowering. This book expresses continually that these tools be used to influence people both for your betterment and theirs.

Some of the work that I do involves facilitating programs with operational staff who are not in any form of official leadership. When I deliver leadership programs to “pre-leaders” I emphasise that before we can lead others we need to learn to lead ourselves. Leading and influencing others, and even accepting the influence of others, are behaviours determined in part by an individual’s ability to influence themselves. This book will share valuable insights as to what constitutes influence, and how we can more effectively learn to hone our abilities in this area for our own benefit, and for the benefit of those we’re attempting to influence.

1.1

CHOOSE YOUR MOOD

To be effective and maximize your leadership influence on those around you it is necessary that you choose your attitude. As a leader, you are not only required to model great attitude, but also to model and coach others in the process of choosing their attitudes. *Fostering a culture where people take responsibility for their own attitudes is a key to effective leadership.*

Choose Your Mood

I was taking a leadership program some time ago and I had a subject matter expert come and speak to my group on sales and marketing. This person was a key account manager for a business with thousands of employees. He dealt with very large customers and very large contracts. Because the business was part of was a logistics company, it was not always possible to deliver to customers as per arrangement because of human shortcoming and external factors such as adverse environmental conditions. The manager would therefore find himself from time to time in the frustrating and embarrassing position of having to face customers with the news that his company had failed to deliver. Being aware of this I asked the manager how he managed those situations where he was essentially the meat in the sandwich between the client and his operators, knowing that the failure to deliver was almost never his fault directly. I’ll never forget his response, which I immediately wrote onto the flipchart that I was using in the classroom, and which became a course mantra amongst the participants. His reply was *“I choose my mood.”* It was such a simple but profound response.

The manager was aware in those situations that he had very little to bargain with, other than apologies and plausible reasons, however, he was also aware that he could choose the way that he felt, and that this choice would influence the overall result. He was much more likely to constructively influence the situation by shifting his mood from being embarrassed, frustrated, and even potentially ashamed, to being as positive as he could and adopting a ‘can do’ attitude. He knew that the embarrassment, frustration or guilt that he felt as a result of his company failing to deliver to the client would not do anything to change the circumstances. In fact, those feelings might motivate him to deflect the problem or deny responsibility for it. Instead, the manager chose an attitude of positivity and a focus on problem solving.

When someone comes to me with frustration about their team’s inability to deliver, it feels to me like they are actually adding to the problem rather than trying to deliver me a solution, and in that case, I can’t help but trust the person a little bit less. ***People don’t like to be influenced by those who are unwilling to take ownership.*** In fact, not only do I prefer to deal with someone who is willing to take ownership for providing a solution rather than excuses, but when I see someone who has chosen a positive mood in the light of very challenging circumstances, that’s precisely the type of person that I want to work with, and will be willing to be influenced by.

A Positive Attitude Changes Everything

Attitude is the ‘be all and end all’ in terms of influencing ourselves and those around us. A positive attitude is one of the most influential attitudes of all. I am personally much more open to the influence of positive, ‘glass half full’ people than I am to those who have a negative attitude and are gifted at seeing problems rather than solutions. When someone is trying to influence me, particularly when they are trying to shift my thinking or my behaviour, it can be hard enough for me to accept their influence without the additional burden of having to also wade through their negativity. Positivity opens both my ears and my heart to other people’s thinking and perspective, whereas negative attitudes are much more likely to result in resistance and defensiveness.

I regularly train people who are frustrated in some way with their manager or up line leader. We all know how demoralizing it can be working under negative, dishonest or self-centred managers. But one thing I say to people who bring up their frustration is that as leaders ourselves we must take ultimate responsibility for our own attitude first, regardless of the external pressures to act otherwise. In the classroom, I will discuss the kinds of strategies that can be employed to manage our attitude, such as being solution focused, not sweating the small

PEOPLE WHO CAN INFLUENCE THEMSELVES HAVE A MUCH GREATER CHANCE OF INFLUENCING OTHERS.

stuff, maintaining patience, seeing issues from other people's perspectives, and maintaining gratitude. Above all of these is the simplicity of realizing that your own attitude may have slipped, and making a straightforward decision to turn it around.

Alcoholics Anonymous uses an acronym; "HALT". HALT outlines the circumstances in which AA members are most likely to have their sobriety tested: when they are Hungry, Angry, Lonely, and Tired. Similarly, it's important that you and I know our 'touch points'- those triggers which can and most likely will lead to a downward slide in our own attitude. It's much easier to turn a slipping attitude around when it's early into its slide, before it builds up momentum and we're trying to undo an avalanche.

Every person will at some point find themselves struggling with a negative attitude. We are all infallible humans. It gives us grace for ourselves when we recognise that sometimes our attitude is faltering simply because we are experiencing normal human stressors – such as hunger, frustration, isolation or tiredness. Sometimes our attitude slip is not because we are a bad person but because we are human. If we address the stressors, we often find it a lot easier to address our attitudes. But stressors aside, we are all capable of attitude change. Like most things in life, sometimes we just need to practice in order to build up our capacity in this area.

I wonder if, like me, you've ever been feeling grumpy, stressed, or upset, while sitting in a public place - maybe in an airport lounge or in an event venue where you had your guard down? I've been at the end of a long day sitting in an airport lounge – finally finishing up my phone calls and emails - finally alone with my tired-out attitude - when someone suddenly calls out my name and I'm face to face with a major client. What do I do – I put my 'game face' on! I make sure my attitude lines up with what this person deserves from their interaction with me. We've all done it. The key point is that we are capable, in a split second, of altering our mood and our attitude. In fact, sometimes the change is 180 degrees from dark to light (and if the client could have had a good, long look at our face prior to calling out, they'd be able to attest to the tectonic shift). This is a classic example of our ability to quickly shift our attitude and change our mood when we have a good enough reason.

A few years ago, I was working with a new client delivering customer service training. My wife's uncle, who was a reasonably young and very high profile Supreme Court judge, had died

overnight. This was a complete shock for the family. Within hours of his death, my wife's aunt, the judge's sister, also died. Another complete shock. Two unexpected close family deaths within 24 hours of each other. Obviously, it was harder on my wife, but I really felt it also as I'd known and cared for both of them for over 25 years by that stage. It was a devastating blow to the family, and yet I had to carry on and facilitate the training I was contracted to be doing. It certainly wasn't easy delivering happy, bouncy customer service training to this group when I was feeling grief over the loss, but I was compelled to choose my mood so that I might maximize my impact and influence with the client. I'm not unique in going to work and delivering a service shortly after losing a close family member - many people have done it under far more trying circumstances than mine. It just serves as another reminder that we **do** have the ability to choose our mood.

Being able to choose the mood that you are feeling, or at the very least believing that it is possible to shift our attitudinal state, has two applications to the concept of influence. The first is that if we believe we can, and are, able to choose our mood then we have influence over ourselves. People who can influence themselves have a much greater chance of influencing others because they are role modelling the ability to change. Secondly, through the practice of choosing their attitude, these people become more cognisant of the process of change than those who are resistant to shifting their own behaviour or attitude.

Go to Your Room!!

When I was very young I worked for an organisation where I noticed what, I felt, were questionable decisions being made in terms of financial administration at a governance level. This bothered me to the extent that, along with another staff member, I questioned the senior management on their financial principles. My questioning became so troublesome to the management that finally they decided to dismiss every staff member and have them reapply for their jobs in an effort to fire me and the other protagonist (without actually legally firing us). It was certainly a dubious move for them to make from a legal standpoint, not to mention the distrust it generated among all the staff, yet it happened and every staff member found themselves being interviewed for exactly the same job they had just been made redundant from. Every single staff member that is except the two of us who had questioned their financial practice.

As I was actually very good at my job, I was eventually made an offer of being reinstated into my position if I would cease my protests and questioning. In those days, I wasn't one to back down from a confrontation. As I processed through what to do I found myself at home

one evening discussing the situation with a good friend of mine. My friend was older than me - and unquestionably wiser. He advised that I should learn to pick my battles – to be more strategic about what was really important to me and what I could learn to live with given it wasn't my responsibility or position to run the business the way I felt it should be run. In fact, the words that he used were, "You don't have to die on every cross - on every hill", and because I trusted and respected him I decided to drop my questioning, accept the reinstatement of my position and tone down my protests. Despite this my attitude was still not what it needed to be.

At the time, I was responsible for a large team of people and because of the way in which I structured the team and my work, every six weeks or so I would have a week break from organising my team members when they worked remotely. I would simply be responsible for catching up and planning for the next six-week period. I had enough autonomy in the position to be able to organise my work this way normally, but because management was still unhappy with my attitude and with my unwillingness to align myself with their decisions, I was told to use my week without my team around to spend some time cleaning up the organisation's resource room. I didn't respond well to this request - deeming the task irrelevant to my job description. It was the kind of job that would normally be given to interns or people from school on work experience, and I understood it to be a test of my willingness to submit to authority. It started to chew me up inside. I felt my motivation drop and my mood darken.

Despite, or maybe because of this I managed to have some kind of revelation that my attitude is *my* responsibility and mine alone. While I had originally intended to contest the request, I instead adjusted my plan to 'gritting my teeth and bearing it'. However, that did little to address the ensuing resentment I felt towards management. Fortunately for me, the 'light went on' inside me and I suddenly thought to myself; "Why am *I* allowing my attitude to be effected so dramatically?" A menial task, regardless of the agenda of those making me do it, was actually insufficient reason to alter my mood so dramatically. Ironically, at that time I had a quote on my wall at work which said; "Chasing the snake that bit you will only push the poison faster through your system!" So, I opted instead to make a 180-degree change in my attitude, and rather than do the bare minimum, I would perform the best resource room clean up that I was capable of. With my reformed attitude, I undertook a task which should have taken no more than half a day, and spent three solid days - not only tidying up a shambles but also formulating and implementing new and helpful processes such as a video cataloguing system. At the end of the three days I felt proud of the job I'd done and the attitude I had maintained. Management were shocked at the turn around in my attitude and I felt 'in control' once again.

As a side note, before my turn-around I had applied for another job – hoping to escape the situation I was in. It wasn't necessarily a job that I wanted, I just knew where I didn't want to be and saw it as a 'get out of jail' card. I never heard back regarding my application but it didn't matter - things had significantly improved and tensions had all but disappeared in my current role after I had managed to turn my attitude around. As it so happened the vacancy that I had applied for closed up so an appointment was never actually made, but seven months later I was called up and asked if I was still interested in the position. By this stage I had actually developed an excellent working relationship with management where I was and there was no longer a need to leave to 'escape'. However, I decided to accept the new position with the new company but this time had the full support of my current management and left on very good terms. In hindsight, I'm glad I didn't get offered the position prior to having the enormous attitude adjustment which was an incredibly important life lesson for me.

Most of us are much more willing to deal with and be influenced by someone who is cheerful and positive than by someone who is critical and negative. People will always prefer to be influenced by someone who is willing to take ownership by providing a solution to the problem at hand. When they see someone who has chosen a positive mood in the light of very challenging circumstances, it inspires trust. That is precisely the type of person that I want to work with, and someone I am open to being influenced by.

1.2

ATTITUDE DETERMINES ALTITUDE

The attitude with which we approach people will define the degree of influence we have with them. In the previous story regarding my own 180-degree shift, if I hadn't made such a shift I would have had absolutely no ability to influence my management because my poor attitude would have meant that I had behaved in a way that would have completely shut them down to anything I'd have to say. One of my favourite quotes is that of South African president Nelson Mandela who, after 27 years of being unjustly incarcerated said; "Resentment is like drinking a cup of poison and hoping it will kill your enemies." Mandela was well aware of the capacity for his own bitterness to ruin his life. He had, however, practised having a positive attitude so many times, that when it came to choosing his attitude towards the members of a racist regime that stole almost three decades of his life, he could choose forgiveness. This capacity for choosing and maintaining a positive and constructive attitude meant that he was able to exercise seismic influence on an entire nation.

No one wants to listen to someone with a bad attitude. The irony is that when you think you're right and everyone else is wrong, no one wants to hear about your superior way of

thinking anyway. Being right on its own may not give you influence with others, but being right while practising a positive attitude very often will. You may well have the best idea since sliced bread, or have the answer to everyone's most important questions, but the human hearing system seems to have a way of filtering out the opinions of the conceited. It may seem counterintuitive to an egotistical person but the fact of the matter often is that if they were to downgrade their opinion a notch or two, they would increase their chances of being heard and thereby of influencing those around them.

My childhood was not easy. I didn't have positive role models to show me how to choose my attitude early on. I grew up with a lot of negativity and learned to be quite a practitioner myself. My adult life has been a long journey of becoming increasingly aware of my negative tendencies and developing and utilising strategies for overcoming them. By the time I had reached my early twenties I genuinely thought that people were impressed by my knowledge and that it didn't matter *how* I voiced my opinion. As long as I was convinced that my thinking was superior to the opinions of those around me, I thought I had all that was necessary to influence those people to change. How very wrong I was!

I do love to problem-solve, and I have offered some people some tremendous solutions over the years, only to be surprised by their inability to receive my generous offers of advice. I remember visiting a friend's house in my early twenties and seeing that it had been renovated in a particularly poor fashion. The renovation would need to be maintained regularly because of the nature of the refurbishment. I felt the need to let them know how they could have done the renovation better. I made a good job of criticising their workmanship, and in so in doing so I inadvertently criticised my friend's most significant possession and something that he was very proud of. Rather than coming across as helpful, I came across as arrogant and insensitive, and it is unsurprising that my friend rarely sought my advice (or even my company) thereafter. When we value our own opinion over our connection with others, our relationships inevitably suffer. When we lose connection with others, we lose our ability to positively influence them.

Over the years, I have formulated a saying; "Unsolicited advice is seldom heeded." I could improve that quote now by saying "Unsolicited advice is seldom appreciated, let alone heeded!" Not only is unsolicited advice seldom followed, but if people aren't asking for advice they generally don't appreciate it being given without invitation. The problem is that advice often comes across as criticism, and nobody ever enjoys being criticised. It makes sense when people react poorly to a negative or critical attitude in which unsolicited advice is delivered. They are not reacting to the information, they are reacting to the negativity.

In the previous story I thought management were my biggest enemy, whereas I realised over time, and with the assistance of a good friend, that my negative attitude was in fact my biggest enemy. At the time, I didn't understand that my attitude was working against my ability to have harmonious relationships - and that I was the one who was suffering more than anyone else because of this. When management made the decision to dismiss all staff and have us reapply for our jobs I was able to change my *behaviour* by being more compliant but I hadn't really shifted my *attitude*. Sometimes a shift in behaviour is enough to cause the attitude to shift along with it, but where people are passive-aggressive in their approach, behavioural change may not necessarily be reflective of attitudinal change. It wasn't until I was challenged with the very menial task that I could actually see that my attitude was causing me to be stuck.

Negativity, combined with a sense of superiority or contempt, is a toxic combination for turning people off to what I have to say. If I approach people with a positive frame of mind that is considerate to their needs as well as my own, I know that I have a much greater chance of getting a constructive outcome than if I approach them with a negative and critical mindset. A positive attitude and a sensitivity to others is foundational to your ability to influence them for good.

CHAPTER TWO

LIVING ABOVE THE LINE

“The price of greatness is responsibility.”

Winston Churchill

INTRODUCTION

When we are presented with an issue or a problem that we are required to take responsibility for, we have the choice to either respond ‘Above the Line’ or ‘Below the Line’. These terms were popularised in the book, *The Oz Principle*, written by Connors, Smith and Hickman. The term ‘Responding Below the Line’ means responding in ways that are more likely to be knee-jerk reactions rather than carefully considered actions. ‘Above the Line’ responses tend to be less reactionary and are more likely to be thoughtful and considered.

2.1

ABOVE AND BELOW THE LINE RESPONSES

‘Below the Line’ responses commonly include; blaming others, making excuses, denying there is an issue, deflecting, derailing, and ultimately avoiding or even overtly failing to take responsibility. Defensiveness is a key ‘Below the Line’ response. It is an emotional response that often manifests itself in our body language, our tone of voice, and the actual words we respond with. Unfortunately, defensive responses will always cause the issue to grow and increase in complexity, leaving the recipient with an even bigger problem than they first reacted to. Ultimately, “Below the Line” reactions diminish trust in relationships.

‘Above the Line’ responses are the antithesis of their ‘Below the Line’ counterparts: rather than denial - there is an openness that leads to a full awareness of the issue being presented. The key aspect of ‘Above the Line’ thinking and behaviour is the recipient taking

responsibility and ownership for resolving the problem rather than blaming others, or getting defensive in some way.

When we are dealing with a problem that requires our ownership in order to see a resolution to that problem, (in other words, it is *our* problem), we need first to become *aware* of the problem. The leap from ‘awareness of the issue’ to ‘ownership of the issue’ is a significant one and tends to require that people use the stepping stones of ‘acknowledgement’ and ‘acceptance’ - *acknowledging* that there is a real issue to be responded to, and *accepting* that ownership will be the key factor in change. Naturally it’s not enough simply to verbally take responsibility, we need to walk the talk and come up with an active solution or response that will at least cause the issue to diminish in intensity, if not resolve completely. This kind of response builds trust in relationships.

Reading Between (and Above) the Lines

Many years ago, I was working in a business in which I had a friendship with the senior manager in charge of key accounts. An internal email was circulated concerning a meeting that several of us needed to attend regarding a certain client. I was managing a team at the time and in classic, playful Glen Sharkey fashion I sent a ‘reply all’ email that included humorous comments to a fellow manager. The senior manager became concerned about my humorous comment given that I seemed to have overlooked that the original email included the external client being copied in. I received a voicemail message in which the senior manager expressed her concern at the inappropriateness of my humour given that the external client had been copied in.

I had to work hard in this situation against feeling defensive. It was a mistake after all. But I recognised my ‘below the line’ reaction immediately and worked hard to counter it. I acknowledged that the Senior Manager had a genuine issue, accepted her perspective, and ultimately took as much ownership for resolving the issue as I possibly could. I phoned her back as soon as possible and accepted that there was room in my communication to be more professional than I had been. I then offered to email all the staff concerned and apologise for my flippancy and said I was also happy to apologise to the staff face-to-face when we came together for our meeting.

When I talk about this scenario in my training I ask participants: “What do you think my senior manager’s response was?” More often than not someone will volunteer the answer; “She told you not to worry about it”, which is exactly what happened. Despite my manager being perturbed by my email ‘reply to all’, because I so quickly and clearly accepted responsibility for the issue she felt no further course of action was required.

Here's the fascinating aspect of this story: the manager's concern was that I had copied in the external client when I hit 'reply all', and this client would then have read my humorous 'in-house' comments. However, I hadn't copied in the external client at all! When I hit the 'reply all' button, I deleted his address from the email so that it ultimately was only sent internally. So why didn't I stick up for myself and tell my senior account manager that there was really nothing to worry about at all, and she had no grounds for being concerned? Because rather than having an unconsidered reaction, I stopped and thought to myself; "This seems like a strong reaction given the circumstances – so what might be going on here between the lines?" I concluded that the manager had probably had a concern about the professionalism of my communication for some time, and that this email to (apparently) an external client had tipped the scales for her and caused her to voice her unease. I believe the actual issue was my tone of communication in general, and when I responded to that and took ownership for it, she was more than happy for me not to have to do anything further because I'd acknowledged, accepted, and taken responsibility for her core issue. This ultimately put her at ease and her concerns rapidly diminished. She felt heard and acknowledged regarding a real issue in her own mind. It was really about her, rather than the client, so it still required a response from me. 'Below the Line' reactions would have impaired our relationship, but because I chose to respond 'Above the Line', her trust in me increased through this episode.

Ironically, in being prepared to accept her influence about my manner, and acknowledging her perspective, I gained a greater ability to influence her and our relationship continued in a stronger fashion. Influence is mutual. When we accept the influence of others trust is created which opens the door for others to accept our influence.

A Sorry State of Affairs

**INFLUENCE IS MUTUAL:
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Sometime ago I was in a leadership position and I had handed over an area of responsibility to one of my team members. She had always had an issue with punctuality and this new area of responsibility did nothing to change that. On one occasion, I needed to cover for her because of her tardiness. After the event, I took

her aside and we had a quiet chat. I made a complaint to her about her ongoing tardiness. She was verbally apologetic, as she always was, but failed to really listen to my complaint, acting in a closed off manner towards me. When I found out that she didn't have a good reason for being late I said to her, "I think I know what the issue is here - you just don't care about the people you are holding up because of your lateness." She was absolutely irritated by this comment and flatly denied that that was the case. My team leader was a university graduate and so I asked her if she had ever been late for a university exam. She replied that she had not. I then went on to say to her that she had never been late for an exam because she cared enough about herself, and about the way that passing the exam would affect her future, to make sure that she could get to the exam on time. Until she acknowledged that her tardiness showed she didn't care enough about the people she was managing, she wouldn't seriously consider the need to change her behaviour. This was a shocking revelation for this person because she considered herself to very caring, but she wasn't at all aware that in this circumstance her lack of punctuality and preparedness clearly communicated a different message.

I was never going to have any influence on this person's lack of punctuality while she was in denial as to how she actually felt about the people she was managing. It was necessary to share with her the harsh reality that she was disrespecting those people, to help her get to a place of acknowledgement and awareness of the issue and its key causal factors. Only then would I have any chance of influencing her to take ownership for her punctuality.

Come on Up - The View's Spectacular!!

I had a team leader on my course speak to me a few years back regarding one of his team members who he found incredibly frustrating to deal with. Whenever he would sit the person down for a one-on-one conversation about their behaviour and their attitude, he felt they side-lined his concern and deflected from the issue he was trying to raise with them. The team leader would find himself getting more and more wound up to the point where he could no longer speak to the person. I asked him for more details regarding what the person was doing that made it so difficult for him to remain calm. He replied that he struggled to keep the conversation on track because the team member's responses were typically defensive. They engaged in a lot of blame shifting and attempting to deflect the issue on to other teams. The team member would argue that the behaviour they were now being pulled up for was being consistently demonstrated by members of other teams. This would cause the team leader to become derailed from focusing on the real issue at hand and go into a lengthy discussion regarding the issues that the team

member raised about other people's behaviour. That was until I made the team leader aware of his defensive team member's clever strategy.

I asked the team leader why he thought that this team member was responding in such a fashion - what did he think their goal was? The leader replied that his team member believed that they were being treated unfairly when people on other teams got away with similar actions, so he thought their goal was to expose a flaw in the company's people management. I explained that the team member's real goal was actually to *avoid* taking ownership and to walk out of the meeting without having to do anything in terms of changing their own behaviour or attitude. Their goal was the exact opposite of what the team leader required, which was taking ownership of the problem and ownership of the subsequent solution. Their strategy was very clear regardless of whether it was conscious or subconscious: to deflect the conversation away from the need for them to make any personal changes. I then discussed with the team leader the strategy that he needed to have to keep the conversation on track, and to remain calm and in control. This required that he not engage in matters that were irrelevant to their discussion, and that each time the team member attempted this strategy the team leader was required to calmly and briefly dismiss the deflection and come back to the core issue.

Several weeks later I met up again with the team leader for leadership training and asked how his relationship with his 'challenging' team member was going. He responded that there had been an amazing turnaround! He said that when he remained calm and kept bringing the conversation quickly back on track, despite the team member's attempts to deflect blame and responsibility, it was like a tyre being slowly deflated. The strategies that had worked previously for the team member were no longer working and they were now forced to face the core issue on the table in front of them. This demanded that they focus on addressing their own behaviour and attitude. This was a real win-win for the team leader, because not only did he learn that he can shift someone from lacking responsibility to owning a situation, but he also realised that he could do it whilst remaining calm and in control, which is a vital attribute of effective leadership and important in the ability to influence others over the long-term.

When Will I Ever Learn?

A couple of years ago, I was working on the manuscript for my first book and I thought to myself "What would my teachers think if they could see me now?!" My personal story is not quite one of 'rags to riches', but it is most certainly one of 'unconstructive school room distractor to focused author and award winning educator' (well, sufficiently focused anyway!) I was kicked out of class even from pre-school days, for my constant talking and distracting

behaviour. I got through Year 12 English by reading the comic and movie versions of Shakespeare! Yet here I was, writing my third book, educating people for a living, and having recently won “The Educator of the Year” for the National Speakers Association of New Zealand.

I was clearly an obnoxious pupil throughout my schooling years. I’ve had quite an educational journey of my own in my adult years. This journey has reshaped my values to taking ownership and responsibility for my attitude and behaviour. I realised, as I thought about how far I had come since my school days, that I had never formally taken responsibility for my irresponsible behaviour and attitude despite the way they must have negatively affected each one of my teachers. So, I took it upon myself to write a letter of apology to my teachers, both for my behaviour and my poor attitude, particularly towards what I deemed to be the ‘softer subjects’ (and therefore, in my opinion, the ‘waste of time subjects’) such as English. What I found most convicting was that if I had not attended school at all I would certainly not have been able to read and write and go on to complete several tertiary qualifications, nor would I have had the ability or the confidence to produce my own books. In addition to apologising, I really wanted to encourage the English teachers that although some of their worst pupils seemed unable to get anything out of their subject, it was clear that I must have derived some value from them to have gone on with the confidence that I had regarding the English language. I sent the letter off to the Principal of my old school. He found it an encouraging letter and asked me if he could read it out to staff prior to the school year starting. I’m pleased to say that the staff also found it an encouragement for what can be a very thankless task at times, but for me it was primarily an opportunity to act ‘Above the Line’ and take responsibility for a very irresponsible time in my formative years.

These Boots were Made for Licking!!

Richard Branson is both Britain’s entrepreneur of the decade and is also renown for being something of a ‘loose cannon’, at least in his earlier days. He tells the story of being invited to be part of the team attempting to break the world record for the fastest speedboat crossing of the Atlantic Ocean. Having accepted the invitation, he began to make enquiries regarding fuel sponsorship and managed to secure a generous offer from a major petroleum company, British Petroleum (BP). Branson was called in to meet the members of the BP board, and as part of his presentation he began to thank BP for their willingness to be involved in the venture. He was somewhat surprised when the executives sat there in front of him unengaged, yet he proceeded to express his gratitude and informed them that this world record attempt would not be possible

without the generous sponsorship of BP. At this point the members of the leadership team sitting around the board table became decidedly cold and almost antagonistic towards Branson, and the unimaginable finally dawned on him as he glanced up at the wall and realized that the petroleum company that he had been acknowledging and showing gratitude towards was in actual fact the competitor of the company whose board he was addressing! He had used the wrong name in his entire presentation! Horrified by his own unforgivable mistake, he then did what only Richard Branson would think to do - he dropped to his knees, crawled under the board table and as he articulated his deepest and sincerest apologies, he began licking the shoes of the executives around the table. The final outcome was that the members of the board were able to graciously accept his apology and decided not to withdraw their offer of funding the fuel for the/his world record attempt!

This is such a wonderful story of Sir Richard Branson facing a horrible, self-authored 'issue' but taking extreme action to accept responsibility for his problem and doing whatever was necessary to take ownership and make the issue de-escalate. In doing so he was able to influence the directors back into the project when they had been all but lost to the cause.

2.2

THE FOUR CRITICAL FACTORS

Dr John Gottman is one of the world's leading relationship experts. Through his extensive research, he has identified four key factors leading to marriage breakdown. He has defined these four factors as being: criticism, defensiveness, contempt, and withdrawal. When all four horsemen are present in an interaction, both parties have all but lost the ability to take, or have influence over, the other. When these factors are present in interactions in an ongoing manner, inevitably the marriage relationship breaks down completely. Obviously, the work that I do in the business world does not require me to teach on marriage, but people are people and their intimate relationship styles affect their working relationships in a similar way. These four factors are classic 'Below the Line' responses.

As leaders, we are looking for the positive workplace correlations to these four corroding factors – we are looking for the 'Above the Line' responses. The constructive alternative to the first factor - harsh *criticism* or personal attack - is the raising of an issue in a manner where the person's dignity is respected but the behaviour or attitude is very clearly addressed. Whereas harsh criticism is likely to lead to an unconstructive defensive response, the genuine raising of an issue in a respectful manner is much more likely to solicit an open response. This is deemed a complaint, as opposed to a criticism. Issues in the workplace need to be addressed and not swept

under the carpet where they can fester and grow, but taking the personal criticism out of the complaint means the hearer is just having to deal with the problem at hand, and not having to defend their value and self-esteem as well.

The second negative factor - *defensiveness* - is possibly the most unhelpful response in workplace relationships. The line between a criticism and a complaint may be hazy at times, but people are always clear on what a defensive response is. Some people have set up defensiveness as their 'modus operandi', perhaps because of repeated life experiences where they have been put down and criticised as a norm of human interaction. Often these people find it difficult to identify their own negativity. It is easily identified by others though by asking this question: is this person open to taking influence from others? The positive corollary to defensiveness is for the recipient to be open to feedback – open to taking influence.

Ongoing defensiveness eventually leads to the third negative factor – *contempt*. The constructive opposite to contempt is mutual respect – both shown by the person raising the issue, and on the part of the person whose behaviour is being addressed. Contempt is an attitude that may develop when a person has had a past of regular criticism that they have responded to with defensiveness. Over time, to protect their ego from seeming constant attack, they raise their ego up above anyone who attacks them. They begin to look at 'attackers' as people not worth listening to as a way of protecting themselves from having to become vulnerable to their words. An attitude of contempt is generally a poor means of self-protection. Unfortunately, it shuts down the relationship and the taking of influence. Contempt is therefore toxic to all relationships.

If things get to the fourth stage of shut down – *withdrawal* and stonewalling - then the relationship has deteriorated to the point where it is almost unsalvageable. This is where people who work together or who have some working relationship start to ignore phone calls, emails, and in the very worst cases literally each other in face-to-face encounters. The constructive opposite to stonewalling is for both parties to remain engaged and to begin the difficult but worthwhile process of being open to the initial issue that was raised - keeping communication going, to work out a win-win solution for both parties.

Spiralling Up

I had a leader on my course who inherited a severely dysfunctional team. The team was so far down the 'spiral of doom' that two of the four members had completely withdrawn from each other. Despite working together on a daily basis in the same office they were no longer talking or engaging together. They were genuine 'enemies'. It was so bad that if one of them

went to collect the mail they would collect everyone else's - except the 'enemy's'. If one went to get coffee for everyone they would refuse to get it for the 'enemy'.

The leader who had inherited this dysfunctional team came to me desperate for help with how to get them out of this negative spiral and back into a functioning state. She was a shy person herself and up to this point had not done anything to curb the behaviour. My first piece of advice to her was: "DO SOMETHING!" When we allow poor behaviour to continue unchecked we are simply agreeing with the ones perpetuating the behaviour that it is acceptable within our team. She was the leader – she was responsible for deciding the culture of her team. What we allow or disallow determines the culture that will be created. So, in the first instance the team leader had to re-engage the pair in a conversation. If people refuse to engage together there are only two choices if you want to develop a healthy, enjoyable and sustainable team culture: someone needs to go, or both parties need to begin to communicate again. Once she had re-engaged the pair, she could then begin to work on reversing the downward spiral they had gotten themselves into. No doubt it was brought about by: criticism, defensiveness, contempt and ultimately withdrawal. To reverse it they would need to reverse these behaviours with engagement, respect, openness and non-judgemental conversation.

Restoring a relationship that has become this damaged in the workplace is not always a simple task. Both parties need to be willing to do the hard work of mending the broken fences. It is up to them, prompted by their leader, to make it work. Both parties need to have the humility to own their part in the damage – and this is not always a 50:50 equation - so both parties need to have the grace to allow for an imperfect process with an imperfect person. It is completely possible to restore such a broken relationship, but generally only when those conditions are mutually met. If one party isn't willing, then it may be more effective to remove one of the parties from your team. This is what the team leader in the previous anecdote eventually had to do, and it resulted in a great leap forward for her in team productivity and morale. Her responsibility was not to resolve their differences for them, but it was certainly to take back control over her team culture and redefine it according to her own plan, rather than theirs.