



# INFLUENCING WITHOUT AUTHORITY

## Informal Influence

Many professionals today are asked to influence in situations where they lack formal authority. Results, in these situations, are achieved only with the willing cooperation of others. In other words, our success is dependent upon others. People may, or may not, choose to act interdependently. This creates both a challenge and an opportunity to lead.

Leadership is the process of influence. Defined as such, every attempt we take to influence is an attempt to lead. Since power is our influence potential or capacity to influence it is important to think about power in assessing our success as an influencer. The actual success we experience while influencing is directly related to the power others give to us.

There is a reason behind why we allow ourselves to be influenced by someone. Power is that reason. And, it is other people who choose to give it to you. They also choose to take it away. If someone thinks you have power you have power. If someone thinks you lack power, you don't have it. So, it is what people perceive that guide their actions.

### **Power Bases**

Effective leaders are seen as powerful people, with the ability to influence. They earn their power through their actions and behaviors, the way they act and how they talk. All leaders earn their power day to day. The capacity a leader has to influence comes from a variety of sources. The two principle sources stem from the leader's position and the leader himself or herself. No source of power is purely positional or purely personal. It is a matter of how much influence potential comes from each source (see Figure 1).

Legitimate power is the closest type of power based solely on position. If you have legitimate power, you will find others willing to follow you due to the importance they give to the role you play in the organization.

Remember, everyone in the same position does not share the same degree of legitimacy. Other people allow you to influence them because they feel it is appropriate given the role you play. Like all power, legitimacy is earned. Reward power is found in giving others what they want and taking away from others things they do not want. Both actions are rewarding (the opposite of these actions is punishing). There are always ways we can reward others.

Information power is simply access to information. Connection power is who you know that others either want something from (a reward) or want to avoid (a punishment). Information power is the possession of some information that is both hard to get and important. Expertise, on the other hand, is specific talents, abilities, knowledge, or skills



that are needed by others. The final power base is charisma. It is the closest source of power to being purely personal. Psychologists call this “referent” power. It is based on a “reference to” or “association with” a person. This is a bonding process, a process of identification. This association is created by a sense of common purpose, beliefs, views, and interest.

### **Power Bases:**

Legitimate  
Rewards/Punishments  
Information  
Connections  
Expert  
Charisma

Anyone who leads possesses one, or more, of these various power bases. The more effective leaders possess all the power bases, not just a few of them. It is important to develop your power in order to influence others effectively.

### **Keys To Success**

How leaders come to possess these power bases is largely the byproduct of their own behavior. There are a half dozen components of behavior that help influencers earn the right to lead. Each of these components can stand alone. Yet, when systematically used together they become a reinforcing cycle (see Figure 2).

Where you start in developing your power is up to you. What is important is to start by using the success factors. In a new situation, a logical first step is to establish your personal credibility. The kinds of actions that help build credibility include: seeking out others who can help give insight about the situation (i.e., tapping the expertise of others); conveying your own expertise in a positive way vs. “I know it all;” demonstrating sincere enthusiasm toward what you are doing; and, seeking personal feedback and taking it in a constructive fashion.

In the process of establishing your credibility, an effective influencer more or less at the same time begins to help others. Helping others is what sound interpersonal influence is all about.

Influencing others is best accomplished by taking the first step to understand others and what is most important to them. You are not nearly as successful when seeking others assistance for what you are trying to accomplish before helping them with their needs and agenda. In helping others it is useful to: share your expertise and support to goals others find important; respond quickly and constructively to requests others make of you (thus setting the stage for reciprocity); and keep others posted of what is happening. Keeping others “in the communication loop” is usually appreciated.



Building relationships are essential to constructing the foundation for the give and take essential to all relationships. Treating every individual as an ally, and as a person deserving respect, sets the stage for trust and cooperation. It can be the little things like how others are talked about in their absence that

Either builds respect or undermines the whole relationship.

Almost every behavior either adds value to a relationship or detracts from it. Additionally, the wise person takes into account the pressures others face prior to any request for assistance, not putting his/her own needs ahead of others' needs and priorities.

Working diligently to establish credibility, helping others, and building the relationship all lay the groundwork for the remaining three components of the keys to success.

### **Keys to Success:**

1. Establish your credibility
2. Help others
3. Build relationships
4. Take appropriate action
5. Provide value
6. Earn trust

In almost all work environments, the favorable execution of results is what we are paid to do. Taking action by: concentrating on what is most important; communicating priorities; and, being a catalyst to removing the obstacles that are in the way of completing tasks, all contribute to being known as a "doer."

Needless to say, all action should ultimately be focused on a customer/client. Serving the client, in the eyes of the client, is a potent instrument in the tool kit of an effective influencer. Be known for the one who provides value to the customer. The cycle comes around to the beginning with a person who earns the trust of those around them. Be known for your commitment, dependability, and generosity. It keeps the cycle progressing.