



Building and Maintaining Influence

Building and Maintaining Influence Defined

The key to successful leadership in today's business world is influence, not authority. Successful business leaders at all levels are masters of influence. They are adept at motivating others to accomplish objectives, even without the direct authority to do so.

Astute business leaders understand this dynamic, regardless of whether or not they are in positions of formal authority, and they work to develop the organizational equivalent of "trade routes" to get things done. Within this context, informal flows of mutual influence serve to motivate others, help them conceptualize and complete projects faster, and broaden networking avenues.

In any organization, building and maintaining influence runs along a continuum of calculation and desire, with individuals tending to fall into one of the following three categories:

1. Those who have little-to-no influence over others and do not aspire to gain any—people who come to work, do their jobs, ask no questions, and go home.
2. Those who gain influence through the quality of their work, the extent of their expertise, the impact of their questions, their abundance of energy, or their ability to empower others.
3. Those who deliberately plot to gain influence by gaining favor, networking, signing on for high-visibility projects that will bring them instant recognition, etc.—all in an effort to advance their careers or improve their positions in the workplace.

Impact

Empowering others to accomplish goals is key in gaining overall influence in any workplace. With increasing frequency, leaders are asked to oversee a more complex corporate structure characterized by partnerships and alliances, virtual teams, and outsourcing. In such an environment, the ability to get things done through other people counts as one of a leader's most essential skills.

Individuals gain influence by virtue of their ability to understand what motivates people, and their ability to engage them in accomplishing mutually beneficial goals. People who have influence empower others to accept change, draw upon strengths they did not know they had, reach ends they had not previously considered, and be their best.

Such influence demands great people skills, including the ability to engage others in a meaningful way about their interests, relationships, goals, and work in general. Those who have this skill converse freely and openly, understanding intuitively the need for others to be treated with fairness and respect. They gain credibility by means of their intelligence, willingness to work hard, and capacity to see a project through to the end. They gain allegiance through their ability to make people feel valued for who they are and what they do.



Techniques for Development

Building and maintaining influence comprises a wide range of capabilities, including:

- Networking.
- Coalition building.
- Persuading.
- Negotiating.

True and lasting influence is primarily a function of common courtesies and a sincere interest in others. Taking the time to know what is important in people's lives, understanding the fundamental values that motivate them, listening to their ideas and acknowledging their worth, and extending to them the same kind of concern for their welfare as one would expect for oneself are what makes an individual at any level influential.

The following six strategies will help anyone become more influential in the workplace:

1. Create a broad network of professional relationships inside and outside the organization.
2. Think of negotiation and persuasion in terms of mutual benefit rather than manipulation.
3. Solicit the opinions and perspectives of the people whose support is essential.
4. Build a partnership with the people who will be most affected by an initiative and whose buy-in is crucial to success.
5. Be transparent about any personal motivations, and never hesitate to "over-communicate."
6. Share credit with others.

Related Reading

- *Influence* by Robert B. Cialdini, Ph.D., Business Book Summaries
- *Maximum Influence* by Kurt W. Mortensen, Business Book Summaries
- *How to Influence Your Bosses, Workers, and Customers* by Robert D. Ramsey, *Supervision*



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