

INCREASE Your INFLUENCE at WORK



Book Increase Your Influence at Work

Richard A. Luecke and Perry McIntosh

AMACOM, 2010

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Recommendation

In simple, straightforward prose, business authors Perry McIntosh and Richard A. Luecke define a clear, easily implemented program for gaining and keeping influence at work. This book, part of the Work Smart series, reads quickly. Its tactics and techniques are memorable and not difficult to put into practice. To maintain their rapid pace, the authors keep examples to a minimum, and those they include do a good job of illuminating their strategies. McIntosh and Luecke propose methods anyone can understand and retain, and even provide a moral primer to guide readers who might go astray in an overenthusiastic pursuit of influence. That the authors take great care to refer to readers and examples alike by both “he” and “she” proves how attuned they are to their own advice and to the exigencies of the modern workplace. Even though some introductory ideas reappear in similar form in the later chapters, *BooksInShort* recommends this book to those who crave more power, influence and advancement at their jobs. And who doesn’t?

Take-Aways

- The building blocks of influence are “trustworthiness, reliability and assertiveness.”
- To gain influence, you must create reciprocity, enable collaboration, be assertive, and set the context for discussing issues. Use these six supporting tactics:
- First, earn credit for the favors you do for others. Don’t be afraid to cash in. Asking for a favor can render a peer more helpful than offering to do him or her a favor.
- Second, exploit your expertise. If others find it important, you will gain influence.
- Third, build collaboration with other staffers or departments by demolishing silos.
- Fourth, form a network of people with ambitions that resemble yours. Try to encompass influential individuals.
- Fifth, listen carefully to others and understand what concerns them. To persuade people at work, you must comprehend their wants and needs.
- Sixth, become a “thought leader” whom others see as important. Map paths of influence within your firm and get to know the most prominent people.
- Never show off to your boss, particularly if you want to exert upward influence.
- Ensure that you always act ethically when attempting to influence others.

Summary

“Power, Influence and Persuasion”

Anointed power means little in the workplace. A title alone, however grand, does not make people obey the titleholder. People all want power, influence and persuasion, but they don’t like to have those forces brought to bear on them. Orders won’t make staffers work better. They have to want to improve.

“Power, influence and persuasion have one thing in common: each is something we use to get what we want from others.”

Power springs from many sources. Influence and persuasion are two ways to get it. Influence gets you what you want without having to order anybody to do anything. Persuasion differs from influence in that persuasion is “merely a tool” in the service of influence. Persuasion “enlists logical or emotional appeals...to affect the beliefs and behaviors of others.” The most intelligent, effective holders of power understand that they do not want to be seen as wielding an obvious cudgel. For instance, crucial technical knowledge can grant a worker more “real” power than his or her manager has, but the smart worker would never tell the manager that outright.

Influence Basics

Behavior that proves your “trustworthiness, reliability and assertiveness” is the basis of influence. Alone, these traits won’t earn power for you, but you can’t gain power without them. They’re your “ante.” Once they’re in place, you can use them as the foundation for deploying “supporting tactics” that will garner influence, but to be ready to play.

“Every newly minted manager quickly discovers that formal power is overrated.”

You’ll need these three assets:

1. **Reliability** – Prove that you are dependable by never opening your mouth if you cannot back up what you say. Always check your facts; gather all possible data before you speak. Do not promise what you cannot deliver. Deliver what you promise. Persevere. Work hard. In time, your co-workers will regard you as reliable, and they will listen to you when you speak.
2. **Trustworthiness** – Like reliability, trustworthiness depends on how people perceive you and is a function of behavior measured over time. To gain trust: Avoid lying, never sugarcoat when events go poorly, never exaggerate when they go well, honor the worth of ideas that compete with yours, be cautious in your analysis, subordinate your goals to your firm’s objectives, never betray a secret, and admit when you don’t know something.
3. **Assertiveness** – Stand up for yourself and what you want in a clear, forthright manner. If you conceal your talents, denigrate your achievements or let others bully you, your influence will dissipate. Being assertive requires self-esteem. An assertive person likes working with others and wants to stand out in the organization.

“Influence is a means of getting what we want without command or compulsion.”

Assertive people avoid passivity, “a condition characterized by submissiveness and a fear or unwillingness to stand up for one’s needs and interests.” Passive workers allow other people’s wants to take precedence over their own. Fearful of confrontation, they stew about their unfulfilled wishes or complain instead of going after their goals.

“Once you understand how decisions are made, your task is to identify the key players and thought leaders.”

Aggression, the flip side of passivity, is equally destructive. Whereas a passive person goes along to get along, an aggressive person ignores the collaborative gestalt to pursue his or her agenda. Aggressive people push their own concerns to the front of the line, and don’t care if they displace or undermine other people. A fine line separates aggression and assertiveness. To gain influence, you must walk that line.

“Organizational life doesn’t always provide a level playing field for competing ideas.”

An assertive worker often influences others by being open to their influence – not pushed around, just attentive. If you stand up for your beliefs in a reasonable way and listen to others just as reasonably, they will listen to you. Avoid micromanaging, bullying and ordering people to do things. Talk in such a way that your co-workers will listen. Making confident statements in “brief declarative sentences that are specific, concrete and to the point” is pivotal in gaining influence. Don’t dilute the power of your ideas or questions with introductory phrases like “If you don’t mind” or “Pardon me for bothering you.” Such lead-ins make you seem weak. When you have something to say, come out and say it directly.

Strategy and Tactics

After you have established your foundation as someone who is trustworthy, reliable and assertive, add to your influence by being strategic about the tactics you use.

“Like laboratory mice, people respond to signals of reward and punishment.”

Take these steps:

- **Earn credit for reciprocity** – When did you do a kindness for someone? When did somebody help you? Keep track. Be unafraid to call in a favor from someone who owes you, but take care to use that IOU with tactical goals in mind. Remember that a favor counts only when it matters to the person who received it. Don’t waste your time and energy doing small tasks that someone will take for granted. And don’t ask for a favor in return that’s out of proportion to the one you provided. Favors that make a difference include helping with work, enabling people to progress toward a goal they want and making sure co-workers know you honor them for their efforts. If you want to influence someone in particular, think about what you can do for him or her, and vice versa. Map out a long-term plan for helping those from whom you want help in return. If you listen with care, you can learn other people’s real interests and desires. Once you know what your colleagues want, set about finding a way to provide it for them.
- **Become a figure of knowledge** – If you know how to do something no one else can do, you are a knowledge provider. Handle your ability as a valuable commodity. Once you develop an expertise others deem important, share it with those you want to influence.
- **Provide data and solutions** – Do you “control key information or resources”? Are you a techie who can save the day when everyone else is baffled? Then you can offer know-how and solve problems to build your scope.
- **Enable collaboration** – To gain power by fostering collaboration, try to break down “the silo mentality” that takes over when workers stay within their own units or divisions of responsibility and expertise. Remind your co-workers of the firm’s broader goals, and focus on how you can nurture cooperation. If you have the expertise to act as a bridge between departments, you will gain influence and both sides will listen to you. Create alternatives to silo-think, and devise new ways around problems.

- **Contextualize issues to your advantage** – Become the person who frames the workplace discussion, and urge your colleagues to see important issues the way you see them. A frame is a structure composed of the context of a proposal and your self-interest. If you can steer the discussion into your framework and have it take place on your terms, you can gain a lot of influence.
- **Build your network** – Organizational life, even in the most enlightened workplace, can be a Darwinian struggle. To succeed and protect yourself, you need a tribe, a gathering not necessarily of like-minded souls, but of souls with similar ambitions. This crucial network can include colleagues who share information, peers you call upon when you're in a tight spot, co-workers whom you "make look good," teammates who share your work-related goals, and other folks you simply like or get along with best. A network does not spring from a flowchart; it's a living, improvised, constantly changing interaction. Sometimes the participants recognize that they form a network, more often they do not. Your network will be more influential if its members have independent influence, if their contributions matter, if their knowledge is recognized and sought out, if they are reliable and worthy of trust, if they help you, and if they have the ear of people higher up in the organization.
- **Utilize persuasion** – Being persuasive doesn't mean being a fancy talker. To change the way others think and act, you must have insight into what they care about and desire. Aristotle said that for speakers to be persuasive, their audiences must believe them, they must understand the audience's thoughts and feelings, and they must employ "logical reasoning." For instance, good salespeople listen more than they speak; they study their potential customers and let the clients explain what they need so they can offer benefits that match the buyers' wants. The three most important listening tactics are "probing," asking people what they think or want; "clarifying," discussing issues with people to be sure they can define their own desires; and "signaling," making it clear that you are attuned to the spoken and unspoken content of someone's answers.

Mapping Your Influence

To become a "thought leader," someone others see as influential, you must figure out who already influences whom in your organization. An excellent way to determine the structure of how influence flows is to draw an "influence map." Write the name of a co-worker. Then, using arrows of varying thickness to connote differing levels of influence, connect that co-worker to others in the organization. Note with care which person ends up in the center of your map with the thickest arrows going from and toward his or her name. That is the person you want to influence first.

"A successful appeal to the heart will outweigh weaknesses in the logical case."

No one becomes persuasive without connecting to people's emotions and their inner logic – their rational problem-solving processes. Logic only works to a certain point; appeals to the heart have limits, too. When you skillfully combine these two elements, they are usually irresistible. To present an idea persuasively, outline its "benefits" and "features." Benefits are the perks others will derive from your actions. Features are the actions' major characteristics. Beware of confusing the two; never make an important appeal without addressing both. Many unpersuasive speakers fall in love with the symmetry of their own ideas and do not spend enough time addressing what others will gain. Avoid that pitfall. Pay attention to what those around you need and want. Speak to them simply, declaratively and confidently. State your case plainly and let others embellish it for you as they listen and contribute.

Influencing Your Peers and Subordinates

Contemporary workplaces specialize in equality. Many firms seek input from workers on all levels. This means that gaining influence is a matter of affecting not only your boss but also your peers and those who report to you.

"If you want to influence peers...through example, whatever you're doing must be visible."

To steer a subordinate, you must have demonstrated your trustworthiness over time. Avoid directly bossing people around or reminding them that they are below you in the hierarchy. From time to time, do the dirty jobs they usually do. Show them you are committed to their progress. If your company practices "open book management," let your employees see the good things you have said to your higher-ups about them. Use the pressure of peer opinion, or "peer influence," to get your staff members to do their work. Once one or two employees show their willingness to go the extra mile, others will follow.

"Even when our ends are ethical, there are plenty of temptations to achieve them through unethical means."

When you must wield power, do so gently. The threat of the power you might possess can be much more persuasive than actually using that power. Figure out who in your firm depends on you – and how. Research indicates, surprisingly, that if you get someone to do you a favor, that person is more likely to do you another favor later. The converse is also true: Doing someone a favor makes him or her less likely to do a favor for you in return. So, if someone has power over you, ask him or her for something.

Bossing Your Boss

Bosses need seconds-in-command. Bill Gates had Paul Allen; Warren Buffett has Charlie Munger. Before you can move into such a position or influence your boss at all, he or she must trust you, follow your reasoning, like you and feel liked by you. The executive has to believe that you know what you're doing, that you know information worth knowing, and that you devote your work time to projects he or she finds meaningful.

"Influence is a work in progress."

To influence your manager, learn what problems he or she wants to solve. Understand the executive's wishes, pressures and demands, so you can try to help meet those demands. When your boss speaks, listen. When you talk to your boss, never show off or draw attention to yourself. Let your boss be the point of the conversation.

Influencing Ethically

As you seek to influence the people that you work with, be sure to maintain your ability to evaluate your own actions in terms of morals and ethics. Make sure that your

quest for influence doesn't hurt someone else. Ensure that you always behave truthfully. Gaining influence over others will do you little good if you lose influence over yourself in the process.

About the Authors

Business authors **Perry McIntosh** and **Richard A. Luecke** co-wrote *The Busy Manager's Guide to Delegation*.
