

By KIMBERLY ALYN, Ph.D.

Leadership and the Power of

INFLUENCE

Real Leaders Rely on Positive Forms of Influence

*You can make
a choice to
influence people
cohesively or
forcefully.*

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Leadership is the ability to influence others. You can make a choice to influence people cohesively or forcefully. The use of forceful influence is manifested in people who use positional leadership to get things done through others. They use their title, position or badge to get people to comply or follow policy. Forceful influence actually does cause people to follow policy – in your presence and to your face. However, in your absence, people will undermine your authority and resist following policy.

There are 10 ways to influence people, and you should never have to resort to two of them. Combinations of these approaches can sometimes be effective as well. Consider how you go about influencing people and see which approach might be the most effective for the situations you face.

I. LOGIC

The concept here is using a step-by-step factual reasoning process to convince someone. This is an effective approach for very analytical people who need to see the logic of why they should or should not move toward your point of view. Logic is usually the foundation of an influential approach. If something makes sense to people, they are more apt to continue listening to your idea or your argument.

This approach can backfire if you do not actually have the facts or evidence to back up your argument. If you are attempting to use logic and someone asks you for "proof" that you cannot produce, you have lost your ability to influence the person in that particular situation.

2. VISION

This approach entails getting someone to envision what could happen instead of using factual reasoning. This approach appeals more to the emotions of an individual. An example of using vision to influence people is saying something like, "Imagine what our department would look like if we implemented a strong leadership mentoring program. We would have a department full of principle-based leaders who use our core values as the basis of the actions they take. This is my vision for this program, and your involvement is imperative to its success."

This approach can backfire if you're not clear in your vision or passionate in your presentation of a vision. People find it very difficult to follow leaders who are vague in their vision and expectations.

3. INSPIRATION

The concept here is that you are showing someone that something is possible by your own role model example or the example of someone else. Inspiration can include your current and past successes that encourage others to reach higher. Your work ethic and passion for the job can also serve as a form of inspiration for others and influence their behavior. People get inspired by people who overcome great obstacles to succeed. When you show tenacity, character and integrity, people are inspired by your example.

This approach can backfire if your actions contradict your words – that does not inspire people. People respond more to what they see from you than what they hear. People do not care what you hang on a wall and call a mission statement. They want to see that mission statement lived out every day. People do

not care what you call your core values and put in a pretty frame and hang on a wall. They want to see those core values come to life in every decision you make and every action you take. That is what inspires people.

4. PARTICIPATION

This concept involves asking other people questions so they can participate in the process. People find it very difficult to buy into missions, visions and goals that they didn't help create. It is much easier to influence people when they are involved in the brainstorming, planning and execution of important projects or changes. By letting people participate, you will gain much more support in the process.

This technique can backfire if you have no intentions of taking their input or using any of their ideas. People become very frustrated when leaders project an air of "openness to input," but then do nothing with the input that is provided.

5. UPLIFT

This approach addresses the concept of praising people if you want to influence their behavior. Providing positive feedback often results in increased positive behavior. Some leaders do not need a lot of positive feedback or uplift, so they make the wrong assumption that everyone is that way. Some people truly appreciate being acknowledged for what they have contributed before you ask them to contribute more.

This approach can backfire if it is laid on too thick. People will feel like you are trying to "butter them up" if you pay them compliments only when you want something. Being consistent in your praise of others is the key to positive influence.

6. DEAL

The idea with this approach is to strike a deal with someone to get a specific desired action: "If you do this,

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I will do that.” This can be an effective approach when you are dealing with someone that you may not have a strong relationship with. It is also effective for people who tend to have the constant mentality of, “What’s in it for me?” Unfortunately, this mentality is prevalent in the younger generation.

This approach can backfire if you do not follow through on your end of the deal. People will lose trust in you, and your ability to influence in the future will be compromised. Do what you say you will do, when you said you would do it and how you said it would be done.

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7.

FAVOR

With this approach, you are simply asking someone to do a favor as a way to influence their actions. If asked humbly, people generally want to help. If you continue to tap the same people over and over for favors, it will compromise your ability to use this influence approach in the future. Unfortunately, 20% of the people on teams do 80% of the work. That becomes increasingly frustrating for the 20%! Spread the favors around so the workload doesn’t fall on the same people every time.

This approach can backfire if people expect a favor in return and you do not provide one. The next time you ask for a favor, you will probably not get it.

8.

COLLECTIVE

This approach involves the process of letting someone know who else is doing what you are asking them to do. It’s a form of positive peer pressure. An example would be saying something like, “Here are three other departments that have implemented the same program I am proposing. I am going to provide you with names and phone numbers of people you can talk to so you can find out what their experience was with the program.”

This approach can backfire if you are dealing with people who want to do things their own way and refuse to listen to what other people or organizations might be doing. These types of people will often reject what other departments are doing just because they didn’t think of it themselves. Situations like this may require several approaches to influence the behavior.



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9. POLICY

The concept here is using policy to influence behavior. An example would be using department policy to correct the behavior of a firefighter who has been late on a few occasions. Using policy would be sitting the firefighter down and saying, "Our department policy is that we are here, ready to go, turnouts on the rig by 0800. You need to be here on time."

This approach can backfire if you attempt to shove policy down people's throats. People will comply in your presence and undermine you and the policy in your absence. Policy should be used in conjunction with mentoring and coaching. Instead of just using policy to change or influence behavior, you would want to let the firefighter know how lateness affects other crew members and find out what some of the underlying issues may be that are contributing to the tardiness issue.

10. FORCE

This approach involves the use of positional power to influence behavior. You force people to do what you ask by shoving a badge in their face: "I am your captain and you will listen to me." Force should be saved for extreme situations.

This approach will easily backfire if force is indicative of your overall approach. People do not respond well to the use of force. As with policy, when you use force, people will do what you want in your presence, but will then undermine your leadership in your absence.

Real leaders use positive forms of influence. If you can master the cohesive forms of influence, you can gain the support of those around you.



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