
LEADERSHIP UPDATE

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INFLUENCE FOR LEADERS AND NEGOTIATORS

It seems to me that much which is written about influence in the fields of leadership and negotiation, is not actually talking about influence at all.

In leadership, writers regularly confuse soft forms of authority with the exercise of influence. And in negotiations, what many authors call influence is really just manipulation and self-promotion. This is why the list of things to do to be more influential which invariably accompany these writings, are often unhelpful and vacuous.

And often the key missing ingredient in descriptions of influence is any mention of the issue of purpose – I do not believe that you can ever leave purpose out of the equation when describing influence.

When we work with managers we find that most of them want to be more influential, particularly around change, getting people to work really well together, and assisting others to be more creative and innovative about the future. But we find that often the first thing that is missing in order to be more influential is actually Attention. Therefore, I have coined this term “Attfluence” to suggest what is really needed.

Firstly to be more influential we need to get ourselves and others to pay more attention. We need to pay attention to what is really happening, what our true motivations are, how people are thinking, communicating, connecting and creating together, to the real adaptive issues that require hard choices and action. To do this we need to slow down a lot, engage in genuine dialogue and become much more reflective and mindful.

When we are paying attention sufficiently, then we can explore ways to be more influential in relationships, groups and organizations. And what are some of the ways for leaders to be more influential with others, to help them do the necessary work, and make the changes and be more innovative about the future?

Many of my suggestions will never appear on a standard list of Influence Steps for Leaders.

- I recommend that Listening is one of the most influential tools in a leader's kitbag – deep, spacious, still and generous listening helps move groups.
- Ask the tough questions, raise the issues which are being avoided, and don't provide easy answers.
- Be very personal, share yourself, drop your mask, and let yourself be vulnerable.
- Be deeply connected to the group, so that you are not outside the group either above or in front trying to manipulate the group.
- Help others to connect to core values and purpose.
- Help others confront conflicts, hidden agendas and contradictions in values.
- Let yourself be inspired and inspiring.
- Tap into your own intuition and creativity.
- Keep building your own credibility with the group through the value you are offering them.
- Bring your Authority behind your influence, but remember that the authority needs to be in the service of your influence and not the other way around, or it becomes compulsion, reactivity, prescription, and stress.

When it comes to negotiations, we are often attempting to solve problems, resolve conflicts, reach agreements or maximize value, and some useful ways to be more influential include;

- Framing and Reframing of substantive, relational and procedural aspects of an issue. So if the parties are stuck in the nitty gritty of an issue, reframe to first principles or shared values. If the gap looks too big because you are dealing with deeply held beliefs, reframe to small, operational steps. If the relationships are becoming combative, reframe the relationship by listening well and showing respect.
- Try to influence the rules of the game or the norms which are in play. You can do this by appealing to credible external standards, or appeals to fairness or the future or the importance of relationships, or by attempting to get some allocation/decision making rule agreed before the commencement of the bargaining such as "everybody gets looked after" or the like.
- And don't forget your relational influence by building emotional bonds, making genuine attempts to understand the other parties' interests, and acting in a trustworthy, consistent way and with integrity and a reputation for integrity.

The good news for all of us is that we can be far more influential than most of us are being. But there are limits to our influence, so I recommend: Get started and have a go, and don't become resigned when everything doesn't change overnight.