

What it Takes to be Influential

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More and more “leadership” isn’t about how good you are at what you do, it’s about influencing others to get work done.

When I speak to audiences, I ask them to call out words that define “a leader” and influential comes up more often than not.

Success Magazine defines influence as: The aim to help others succeed.

So, what does it take to be an influential leader?

Vision

Warren Bennis (1925-2014), in his book *On Becoming a Leader*, stated that the most important factor in being an influential leader is that your followers know you have “some sort of vision” that you are striving for. Another phrase he used that brings this concept home is “manage for the mission.” Decisions that you make and directions that you give should align with the company’s purpose and the short-term and long-term goals to achieve that purpose. And your colleagues should be made aware of the connection.

Build Strong Relationships and Networks

Influence often stems from relationships. More than just asking what someone did over the weekend, learn what motivates them, what they value, and what their goals are both at work and in their personal life – then ask how you can help or support them.

One of the critical components of building relationships is being approachable. Too often leaders “stick with their own”



and that’s when they start being referred to collectively as “management.” You can have two – and even three – networks: peers (other leaders in the company), colleagues (other people in the company), and your community (where you live), all of which can impact and promote your professional influence.

Trust

Bennis also writes that influence and trust go hand-in-hand and there are four ways that you can build trust:


1. Constancy – leaders should remain calm and consistent in their actions
2. Congruity – walk your talk
3. Reliability – support your colleagues in the “moments that matter”

4. Integrity – honor commitments and promises you have made

Communication

Outgoing: Be sure your communications are clear and specific. Asking someone to have a “finalized report, ready to present, by 5:00 p.m. on Thursday” is better than asking them to “pull a report together.” The latter might cause them to think you simply want a draft and that you’ll be providing them with more direction once you see the draft. Or it might imply that they can choose to prioritize when it will be completed.

Incoming: Listening well is as important as being clear when you are speaking. Active listening is about asking questions, and specifically open-ended questions such as: How did you arrive at that answer? If the timeline were reduced by 30 days, what would be the ramifications? What is more important in this scenario – time, cost, or quality?

As you can conclude, each of these four techniques require consistent application to build influence over time, so it’s important to teach these skills and concepts to your up-and-coming leaders ASAP! 



About the Author

Dr. Nanette Miner is a leadership development and workplace-learning strategy consultant. Through her firm, [The Training Doctor](#), she has revolutionized the way that individuals are prepared for leadership roles in their organizations. Rather than a chosen few, her process is aimed at ensuring everyone in the company has the skills and business acumen of a leader. This approach ensures both immediate and long-term return-on-investment (ROI) for an organization.

She has written articles for Chief Learning Office magazine, Forbes, and MBA World and is a frequent guest on workplace training and career podcasts and talk radio such as Inc. Radio and America's Workforce Radio.

Nanette regularly speaks at industry conferences and corporate learning events on how to integrate leadership capabilities throughout an organization. An author of eight books, her most recent is Future-Proofing Your Organization.

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