

The Impact of Our Influence

I hope this paper is well received and makes you think about your influence. I believe it is important for us to realize that we all have influence, all the time. If we want to help others, and we use our influence positively, we can make a real difference for people individually, for our teams and even our companies.

David Balderston, a highly capable young up and comer in the sports industry management field, gave me a new book, *The Difference You Make: Changing Your World through the Impact of Your Influence*, by one of his bosses at the Orlando Magic, Pat Williams, who has been an extremely positive influence for David.

I was thrilled to read this book, as I firmly believe leadership is influence. This idea is reiterated by Joe Girardi, the Manager of the New York Yankees, in the forward of the book. And Ken Blanchard, renowned leadership expert, agrees when he states, "The key to business today is influence, not authority."

As Pat Williams points out, we all have influence, all the time, whenever we are in the company of others, even if it's just one other person, and even if we're alone with a phone nearby. We can always encourage and help another to do the right thing and do great work. That is leadership.

So true. Leadership comes from our head and our heart – from our attitude! It does not come from our title, our seniority, or our corner office.

Do we want to help others do a good job and succeed? That is what it takes to be a leader. It's not about me; it's caring about the village; it's being all about the team.

The true and effective leader is a servant leader – someone who has that natural feeling that she/he wants to serve others first.

So many businesses are not doing well today. There's lots of blame - the economy, jobs going overseas, even such misconceptions that our younger generations do not have the same work ethic.

I believe the biggest problem in business is senior management – we spend too much time in our offices, in meetings, on conference calls, sending directives electronically. Yes we are very busy, but we are not making time for conversations with our people, conversations that ultimately lead to better financial results.

If leadership is influence, can we have influence by not being present? Does communicating by email earn influence? Hardly.

To influence others, we must have relationships, relationships founded on trust.

We have to care about people before we can influence them. That means being out of our offices and having conversations with our people – our internal clients! If we not in the same location, then we must pick up the phone and call.

Even if we are crazy busy, conversations are the work of a leader. We must realize that genuinely caring about our people and having conversations with them is a top priority for us, just as important as any other.

As Pat Williams says, leaders of influence listen to their people. They listen before speaking. They ask open-ended questions. They listen for feelings, not just facts. They take the time to draw out the opinions and the emotions of their people.

As a leader, we must do the right things, be a role model, and have integrity. We must let people know that we care about them and we want to influence, guide, help, teach and coach them to do the right things and to learn, grow and succeed.

In my research for this paper, I came across this quote by John Hancock that definitely resonated with me, “The greatest ability in business is get along with others and to influence their actions.” That rings true, as I have learned that relationships are everything in business. As Henry Drummond states, “The people who influence you are the people who believe in you.”

In writing this paper, I’ve been thinking about leaders I’ve worked with, there have been many truly great leaders and, of course, many who did not have the influence they wished or thought they had. I’d like to tell you about Christine LaSala, as she has been a tremendously positive influence on many, many people.

Many believe Chris broke the glass ceiling years ago in the insurance and risk management industry. She is now a CEO. The risk management industry field was always heavily dominated by men, with rules set by men. How was she so successful? She was really good at doing her job - and she was always focused on helping others.

Sure, Chris was highly intelligent, very dutiful and always prepared, and she was an exceptional communicator. But she stood out partly because she had no personal agenda! She became a most valuable player because of all that she did and all the help she gave so freely to others. People were constantly coming to her for advice and assistance. Her “I can do”, “you can do”, “we can do” attitude was contagious, actually transformational for some.

Chris became the leader of a very successful office in New Jersey and then led the New York City office. Most of the 1,500 people in those offices still feel she was the best leader they ever worked with and continue to stay in touch with her.

When I was given a promotion at Johnson & Higgins, Dick Purnell, our CEO, said to me that I had a responsibility to be a caretaker, and to do my very best to leave the firm in better shape when I retired than when I arrived. That had an enormous effect - influence - on me, as Purnell was such a great person. Tough, yes, but all about our clients and all about us, our team. I remember that conversation as if it were yesterday, and it has always remained in my mind as something to live up to.

In reading Pat Williams’ book, I’ve thought about those who have influenced me, and why and how. I’ve identified my mother, certainly, and teachers, classmates, friends, coaches, captains, teammates, bosses, colleagues and now my coaching clients. What do they share?

I think it is their quiet confidence coupled with humility, and their commitment to lean in toward me - initiating those conversations that gave me the sense that they truly cared about me and believed in me.

I continue to read and refer to the ultimate book about positive influence, Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, which was written in 1937! It is the ABCs of relationships. Being polite and friendly, smiling, saying thank you, genuinely expressing appreciation, using people's names, not talking behind someone's back, writing notes, being positive and don't complain, genuinely caring about others, asking questions about what is important to them, not being self-absorbed, and being an attentive listener –all of this shows we care and gives us influence.

In fact, to earn influence we want to talk positively about our people even when they are not present.

There's a great story about a naval Captain taking control of a ship with a morale problem. He sent letters to the parents of his crew whenever he noticed them demonstrate good work and character. The crew was appreciative, and their work and morale improved, greatly!

It's up to us to create a culture of positive influence. It's all about our attitude and our heart.

Let's use our influence to inspire and motivate our people, to help them succeed, and oh, along the way, to improve our company's results!

About The Author



John Keyser is the founder and principal of Common Sense Leadership, www.commonsenseleadership.com. He works with executives helping them develop organizational cultures that will produce outstanding financial results year after year, and a striving for continuous improvement, theirs and their team's. His contact information is john@johnkeysercoach.com and 202-236-2800.