



The #1 Challenge to a Leader's Ability to Influence

If you are a senior executive leader, you already know that the higher you go in an organization, the more you use influence instead of authority to get things done. And your personal ability to influence people can make or break your leadership success.

Think of the challenges you face everyday:

- How do I get my staff to produce more results faster with less resources?
- How do I get my peers to collaborate on projects and be a real team on projects?
- How do I sell my vision to the company when people are resisting change?
- How do I show bosses that I really am ready for promotion?
- How do I get people to perform at a higher level without my constant supervision?
- How do I manage conflict with difficult people?
- How do I get my opinions really heard at meetings without repeating myself?
- How do I get people to sit up and take notice when I walk into the room?

Almost every senior executive leader that I work with has to create solutions for these types of questions on a daily basis. And if you do not have a strong ability to influence people, these challenges

can become very painful problems. The short term costs for leaders who have weak influence skills are poor business results, frequent anxiety and self-doubt. The longer term cost of weak influence skills is usually your survival in a senior leadership role.

Many leaders think that the obstacles to having influence as a leader are things like:

- the staff you inherited
- the glass ceiling
- the difficult boss
- the state of the marketplace
- the limits of your job description
- the politics
- personal limitations (being too young, too old, female, minority, disabled, too new to the industry, etc.)

These factors often do play a role in a leader's ability to produce results. However, what I have seen over 12 years of coaching senior executive leaders is that these are not the root causes of a leader having less influence than she/he would like. What I have learned from my executive clients is that the number one obstacle to a leader's ability to influence is a leader's own reactions to other people and events. In short, it is when leaders "react" (instead of "act"), that their power to influence rapidly and sharply declines.

Think about the last situation at work where you "reacted": became annoyed or angry; felt threatened, disappointed, frustrated, stressed or anxious.

Even if you did not display anything publicly; just having these feelings are indicators that you are no longer in the calm neutral place of strong leadership and strong influence. In that moment, in that “state of react,” it is very difficult to display powerful influence.

Many leaders would agree with this assessment; but would also say that these reactions are human and inevitable: part of daily corporate life and cannot be prevented.

However, I have seen leaders reduce both the number of reactions they have and the intensity of their reactions. It is true that corporate life offers an endless number of situations to upset you. But the key to success is how you manage yourself to immediately recover and return to the calm neutral place where leadership solutions can be seen.

So how do you avoid reacting in ways that are not useful? The first step is to adopt a new paradigm: Over reacting is about your own perceptions much more than it is about the other person or the event. So your “story” about what is happening is the key to your reaction. It’s all in how you write “your story” (your perception) about the meaning of your experiences.

Most leaders do not get much training or even a place to have a conversation about how to examine their own stories and reactions. For many leaders there is even less training and development on how to change your story (or your perspective) so that you don’t react so much or so often.

This is why I have worked with senior executive leaders over the last 12 years to find simple, clear strategies for identifying the

story that is at the root of their leadership experience. That same story, when examined, is often the biggest obstacle to their ability to influence. The good news is: When we shift the story, the power of their influence automatically expands.

So in summary, if you want to get out of react, so that you can have more powerful influence, the solution is 3 steps:

1. Shift from focusing on external events and people to focusing on identifying your internal story.
2. Examine the benefits and the limitations of your story.
3. Create a new more empowering story (perception).

So what stories (perceptions) do you have about what leadership means and who you are as a leader? How are your stories helping you or holding you back as a leader? On a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being highest, where are you with your own power to influence?

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Val will lead a webcast on March 18
about influence and overcoming reactions.