



U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Donald Snow, operations noncommissioned officer for the 200th Military Police Command, wears the Sergeant Audie Murphy Award on Sept. 16, 2017. Military Police Soldiers across the Army Reserve will have a shot to compete for one of the most prestigious leadership awards in the Army, the Sergeant Audie Murphy Award, beginning next year. (U.S. Army Reserve photo by Master Sgt. Michel Sauret)

# The Value of Influence

*By Sgt. Maj. Kenneth Farley*

4th Infantry Division, G2 Sergeant Major

**I**nfluence is the ability to alter another person's beliefs, values, actions, or thoughts. This ability is based off of a trusting relationship that can take time to establish and maintain. According to Cameron Bishop at *Forbes*:

“Leadership is more than just having authority over other employees; strong leadership exists at every level of an organization. Effective leadership positively influences your team and others around you. As an influencer, you naturally move people toward success by the way you carry yourself, your reputation, your credibility and how you communicate. Influencers exhibit behaviors that people appreciate and want to replicate. (2018, para. 1)”

## Exercising Power to Influence

The power of influence is not something that automatically comes with the position of leadership. There are two ways to get people to do what you want them to do. A leader exercises either their *personal power* or their *positional power*. Influence and power are the invigorating forces that get things done, and they are the necessary tools of a leader (Dennis & Meola, 2009). Positional power derives from the organization or the position that the leader holds. Personal power exudes from the leader's expert knowledge or their motivating personality. Susan Steinbrecher from *Inc.* states that "it is about building relationships that result in authentic engagement" (2014, para. 6)





Command sergeants major and sergeants major of the 2nd Infantry Division and Republic of Korea-U.S. Combined Division low crawl under concertina wire during the 2018 Spartan Race Sprint Aug. 25, 2018. They participate in the 2018 Spartan Race as a team-building exercise to inspire esprit de corps and challenge themselves, both physically and mentally. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Raquel Villalona)

### Personal Power

*Personal power* is the ability of the leader to inspire others to commit to the team's needs. Getting an individual to commit to a common cause is based on trust with that leader. In order for leaders to gain commitment, they have to have ownership of their cause. When leaders foster commitment, they are able to inspire others. This style of leadership works to build trust in and from subordinates. This relationship becomes the catalyst that encourages and inspires teams to go above and beyond the minimum required of them. A leader is only as powerful as their team.

*"One of the great leaders of my career, and personal mentor, showed me what effective leadership through personal power was through his daily and consistent actions. He would go out of his way to greet every Soldier he came in contact with. This command sergeant major explained to me that respect is not deserved or granted, it is earned. Soldiers will do absolutely anything for a leader whom they respect and trust. To this day, I make a constant effort to earn the respect and trust of my subordinates."*  
— Sgt. Maj. Kenneth Farley

Leaders who use personal power generally build teams with people who are committed to the organization's goals

and benchmarks. Effective ways of building trust amongst a team involve activities that rely on teamwork. Leaders have to be creative in generating ideas to bring the team together such as scheduling team building events offsite. According to Lindsay Kolowich, "team outings are a great way to facilitate bonding with your team members, reduce stress, and give them the chance to know one another outside the office" (2018, para. 2).

When a team works together to achieve a common goal, it builds a sense of cohesiveness. The more people that a leader gets commitment from will equate to a greater amount of passion and energy during mission accomplishment. Leaders are inherently in positions of authority, but it is up to the leader to earn the trust and respect of their subordinates to commit.

### Positional Power

In contrast to personal power, *positional power* is simply authority automatically provided by a position or station. It requires zero effort, trust, or unit cohesion, and often leaders who rely solely upon their positional authority fail to improve their unit. Influencing subordinates using positional power causes them to accomplish tasks through intimidation or fear of repercussions.



U.S. Army 1st Sgt. Danny Chappell motivates Staff Sgt. Granger during the 2nd Battalion, 39th Infantry Regiment's marksmanship competition, Feb. 9, 2018 at Aachen Range, Fort Jackson, S.C. (U.S. Army photo by Robert Timmons, Fort Jackson Public Affairs Office)



U.S. Army Rangers from 3rd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment and the Ranger Recruiting Liaison office participate in a 12-mile ruck march with trainees of infantry One-Station Unit Training (OSUT) at Fort Benning, Ga., April 18, 2019. In collaboration with OSUT leadership and the Ranger Recruiting Liaison office, the Rangers are joining OSUT field exercises and fitness events to introduce trainees to the Ranger ethos, build camaraderie and answer questions about the Regiment. (Photo courtesy of Ranger Recruiting Liaison office, Fort Benning, Ga.)

*"It is not only important to learn from great leaders, but just as important to learn what you don't want to become by poor or "toxic" leaders. Back when I was a first sergeant there was a command sergeant major in a nearby unit that was the type of leader that preached one thing but did the opposite. He used the power of his position and not the power of influence to frighten others into doing what he wanted. On a daily basis, this command sergeant major would talk down to Soldiers, smoke close to the building, stand with his hands in his pockets, and continually use profanity toward Soldiers. And while this was a negative style of leadership, it was important for me to witness because I don't ever want to become like that."*

— Sgt. Maj. Kenneth Farley

When people follow leaders because they have to, the leader only gains short-term compliance, not engagement. When this style of leadership is exercised, there is little incentive to work beyond immediate directions, as their only personal goal is to complete the minimum tasks required so as to not be punished. This also results in a unit's top talent leaving as quickly as possible.

Jim Harter and Amy Adkins state, "workers want to feel connected to their jobs, managers, and companies. If those ties are not there, they have more incentive to quit," (2017, para. 12). And while Soldiers can't up and leave a unit as easily as a civilian can leave a workplace,

they can make sure they transfer out as fast as possible in order to find a unit whose leader does promote morale and motivation.

## Characteristics of Influence

When leaders create an environment for subordinates to express initiative, it allows the subordinate to feel a sense of empowerment. Jake Herway from *Gallup* says "an organization full of employees who believe they belong is an organization full of employees who feel purposeful, inspired and alive—in other words, engaged" (2018, para. 7).

Leaders are more capable of influencing subordinates by being persons of character, integrity, trustworthiness, and service. According to Susan Steinbrecher, "model the way. This means if you want your employees to care, show enthusiasm and appreciation, you must behave in the same manner" (2014, para. 11). One of the most important traits an influential leader has is integrity. Integrity leads to trust, trust builds influence, and influence fosters commitment.

## Conclusion

When your subordinates accomplish their tasks because of who you are and not because of what rank you are, you have gained the ability to influence through personal power. Leaders who influence others with personal power lead by example and are the positive blue print for others as they mature and become leaders themselves. As best-selling author and leadership expert John C. Maxwell once stated, "A leader who produces other leaders multiplies their influences" (Economy, 2015, para.7). ■



---

## References

- Bishop, C. (2008, November 14). Influence, not authority, shows solid leadership. *Forbes*. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbeshumanresourcescouncil/2018/11/14/influence-not-authority-shows-solid-leadership/#3bbe90c35eac>
- Economy, P. (2015, June 5). 44 inspiring John C. Maxwell quotes for leadership success. *Inc.* Retrieved from <https://www.inc.com/peter-economy/44-inspiring-john-c-maxwell-quotes-that-will-take-you-to-leadership-success.html>
- Harter, J. & Adkins, A. (2017, February 24). Are you star employees slipping away? *Gallup*. Retrieved from <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/236351/star-employees-slipping-away.aspx>
- Herway, J. (2018, March 6). How to bring out the best in your people and company. *Gallup*. Retrieved from <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/232958/bring-best-people-company.aspx>
- Kolowich, L. (2018, August 29). 27 fun corporate team-building activities & outing ideas everyone will enjoy. *Hubspot*. Retrieved from <https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/creative-team-outing-ideas>
- Steinbrecher, S. (2014, July 28). How to use your power for good, not evil. *Inc.* Retrieved from <https://www.inc.com/susan-steinbrecher/using-your-superpowers-for-good-not-evil-positional-power-vs-personal-power.html>

---

**Sgt. Maj. Kenneth Farley** is a military intelligence senior sergeant in the United States Army. Farley currently holds a Bachelor's Degree in Business Management and is working towards his Master of Science in Management — Organizational Leadership. He is the 4th Infantry Division G2 sergeant major and is currently deployed with U.S. Forces Afghanistan.

---



<https://www.armypress.army.mil/Journals/NCO-Journal/>  
<https://www.facebook.com/NCOJournal>  
<https://twitter.com/NCOJournal>

**Disclaimer:** The views expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the NCO Journal, the U.S. Army, or the Department of Defense.

