The Value of Influence

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Influence 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)
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.

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.

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)

“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

“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).


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