



STEPHEN COVEY:



Thirty Methods of Influence

We all want to have positive influence with certain people in our personal and professional lives. Our motive may be to win new business, keep customers, maintain friendships, change behaviors, or improve marriage and family relationships.

But how do we do it? How do we powerfully and ethically influence the lives of other people? I submit that there are three basic categories of influence: 1) to model by example (others *see*); 2) to build caring relationships (others *feel*); and 3) to mentor by instruction (others *hear*).

The following 30 methods of influence fall into these three categories.

Example: Who You Are and How You Act

1. **Refrain from saying the unkind or negative thing**, particularly when you are provoked or fatigued. In these circumstances, to not say the unkind or critical thing is a supreme form of self-mastery. Courage is the quality of every quality at its highest testing point. If we have no model of restraint to follow, we will likely take out our frustration on our fellow workers. We may need to find new models, new examples to follow, and learn to win our own battles privately, to get our motives straight, to gain perspective and control, and to back away from impulsively speaking or striking out.

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2. **Exercise patience with others.** In times of stress, our impatience surfaces. We may say things we don't really mean or intend to say—all out of proportion to reality. Or we may become sullen, communicating through emotion and attitude rather than words, eloquent messages of criticism, judgment, and rejection. We then harvest hurt feelings and strained relationships. Patience is the practical expression of faith, hope, wisdom, and love. It is a very active emotion. It is not indifference, sullen endurance, or resignation. Patience is emotional diligence. It accepts the reality of step-by-step processes and natural growth cycles. Life provides abundant chances to practice patience—to stretch the emotional fiber—from waiting for a late person or plane to listening quietly to your child's feelings and experiences when other things are pressing.

3. **Distinguish between the person and the behavior or performance.** While we may disapprove of bad behavior and poor performance, we first need to communicate and help build a sense of intrinsic worth and self-esteem totally apart from comparisons and judgments. Doing this will powerfully inspire superior effort. The power to distinguish between person and performance and to communicate intrinsic worth flows naturally out of our own sense of intrinsic worth.

4. **Perform anonymous service.** Whenever we do good for others anonymously, our sense of intrinsic worth and self-respect increases. Moreover, we gain insight into the worth of others by serving them without expectation of publicity or reward. Selfless service has always been one of the most powerful methods of influence.

5. **Choose the proactive response.** Why do so few of us “do” as well as we “know”? Because we neglect a connecting link between what we know and what we do—we don't choose our response. Choosing requires us to gain perspective and then to decide our own actions and reactions. Choosing means to accept responsibility for our attitudes and actions, to refuse to blame others or circumstances. It revolves a real internal struggle, ultimately, between competing motives or conflicting concepts. Unless we exercise our power to choose wisely, our actions will be determined by conditions. Our ultimate freedom is the right and power to decide how anybody or anything outside ourselves will affect us.

6. **Keep the promises you make to others.** By making and keeping our resolves and promises, we win influence with others. To be and do better, we must make promises (resolutions, commitments, oaths, and covenants), but we should never make a promise we will not keep. Using self-knowledge, we can be very selective about the promises we make. Our ability to make and keep promises is one measure of faith in ourselves and of our integrity.

7. **Focus on the circle of influence.** As we focus on doing something positive about the things we can control, we expand our circle of influence. Direct control problems are solved by changing our habits of doing and thinking. Indirect control problems require us to change our methods of influence. For instance, we complain from time to time that “if only the boss could understand my program or my problem...” But few of us take the time to prepare the kind of presentation that the boss would listen to and respect, in his language, with his problems in mind. With no control problems, we can control our reaction to problems, deciding within ourselves how anything or anybody will affect us. As William James said: “We can change our circumstances by a mere change of our attitude.”

8. **Live the law of love.** We encourage obedience to the laws of life when we live the laws of love. People are extremely tender inside, particularly those who act as if they are tough and self-sufficient. And if we’ll listen to them with the third ear, the heart, they’ll tell us so. We can gain even greater influence with them by showing love, particularly unconditional love, as this gives people a sense of intrinsic worth and security unrelated to conforming behavior or comparisons with others. Many borrow their security and strength from external appearances, status symbols, positions, achievements, and associations. But borrowing strength inevitably builds weakness. We all distrust superficial human relations techniques and manipulative success formulas that are separated from sincere love.

Relationship: Do You Understand and Care?

9. **Assume the best of others.** Assuming good faith produces good fruit. By acting on the assumption others want and mean to do their best, as they see it, you can exert a powerful influence and bring out the best in them. Our efforts to classify and categorize, judge, and measure often emerge from our own insecurities and frustrations in dealing with complex, changing realities. Each person has many dimensions and potentials, some in evidence, most dormant. And they tend to respond to how we treat them and what we believe about them. Some may let us down or take advantage of our trust, considering us naive or gullible. But most will come through, simply because we believe in them. Don’t bottleneck the many for fear of a few! Whenever we assume good faith, born of good motives and inner security, we appeal to the good in others.

10. **Seek first to understand.** Seek first to understand, then to be understood. When we’re communicating with another, we need to give full attention, to be completely present. Then we need to

empathize—to see from the other’s point of view, to “walk in his moccasins” for a while. This takes courage, and patience, and inner sources of security. But until people feel that you understand them, they will not be open to your influence.

11. **Reward open, honest expressions or questions.** Too often we punish honest, open expressions or questions. We upbraid, judge, belittle, embarrass. Others learn to cover up, to protect themselves, to not ask. The greatest single barrier to rich, honest communication is the tendency to criticize and judge.

12. **Give an understanding response.** Using the understanding response (reflecting back feeling), three good things happen: 1) you gain increased understanding and clarity of feelings and problems; 2) you gain new courage and growth in responsible independence; and 3) you build real confidence in the relationship. This response has its greatest value when a person wants to talk about a situation laden with emotions and feelings. But this response is more attitude than technique. It will fail if you try to manipulate; it will work if you deeply want to understand.

13. **If offended, take the initiative.** If someone offends you unknowingly and continues to do so, take the initiative to clear it up. Consider two tragic consequences of not taking the initiative: first, the offended one often broods about the offense until the situation is blown out of proportion; second, the offended one then behaves defensively to avoid further hurt. When taking the initiative, do it in good spirits, not in a spirit of vindication and anger. Also, describe your feelings—when and how the offense took place—rather than judging or labeling the other person. This preserves the dignity and self-respect of the other person, who then can respond and learn without feeling threatened. Our feelings, opinions, and perceptions are not facts. To act on that awareness takes thought control and fosters humility.

14. **Admit your mistakes, apologize, ask for forgiveness.** When we are party to seriously strained relations, we may need to admit that we are at least partly to blame. When one is deeply hurt, he draws back, closes up, and puts us behind prison bars in his own mind. Improving our behavior alone won’t release us from this prison. Often the only way out is to admit our mistakes, apologize, and ask forgiveness, making no excuses, explanations, or defenses.

15. **Let arguments fly out open windows.** Give no answer to contentious arguments or irresponsible accusations. Let such things “fly out open windows” until they spend themselves. If you try to answer or reason back, you merely gratify and ignite pent-up hostility and anger. When you go quietly about your business, the other has

to struggle with the natural consequences of irresponsible expression. Don't be drawn into any poisonous, contentious orbit, or you'll find yourself bitten and afflicted similarly. Then the other person's weaknesses will become your own, and all this will sow a seed bed of future misunderstandings, accusations, and wrangling. The power to let arguments fly out open windows flows out of an inward peace that frees you from the compulsive need to answer and justify. The source of this peace is living responsibly, obediently to conscience.

16. **Go one on one.** An executive might be very involved and dedicated to his or her work, to church and community projects, and to many people's lives, yet not have a deep, meaningful relationship with his or her own spouse. It takes more nobility of character, more humility, more patience, to develop such a relationship with one's spouse than it would take to give continued dedicated service to the many. We often justify neglecting the one to take care of the many because we receive many expressions of esteem and gratitude. Yet we know that we need to set aside time and give ourselves completely to one special person. With our children, we may need to schedule one-on-one visits—a time when we can give them our full attention and listen to them without censoring, lecturing, or comparing.

17. **Renew your commitment to things you have in common.** Continually renew your basic commitment to the things that unite you with your friends, family, and fellow workers. Their deepest loyalties and strongest feelings attach to these things rather than to the problems or issues around which differences often emerge. Differences are not ignored; they are subordinated. The issue or one's point is never as important as the relationship.

18. **Be influenced by them first.** We have influence with others to the degree they feel they have influence with us. As the saying goes, "I don't care how much you know until I know how much you care." When another feels you genuinely care about him and that you understand his unique problems and feelings, he also feels he has influenced you. He will then become amazingly open. We take the prescription because it is based on the diagnosis.

19. **Accept the person and the situation.** The first step in changing or improving another is to accept him as he is. Nothing reinforces defensive behavior more than judgment, comparison, or rejection. A feeling of acceptance and worth frees a person from the need to defend and helps release the natural growth tendency to improve. Acceptance is not condoning a weakness or agreeing with an opinion. Rather, it is affirming the intrinsic worth of another by acknowledging that he does feel or think a particular way.

Instruction: What You Tell Me

20. **Prepare your mind and heart before you prepare your speech.** What we say may be less important than how we say it. So, before your children return from school full of their own needs, stop and get control. Plumb your resources. Set your mind and heart. Choose pleasantness and cheerfulness. Choose to give full attention to their needs. Or sit a moment in the car before coming in from work and do the same. Ask yourself, “How can I bless my wife (or husband) and children tonight?” Plumb your resources. Choosing to be your best self will arrest fatigue and renew your best resolves.

21. **Avoid fight or flight—talk through differences.** Many people either fight or flee when they disagree. Fighting takes many forms, ranging from violence and open expressions of anger and hate to subtle sarcasm, sharp answers, clever comebacks, belittling humor, judgments, and reactions. Fleeing also takes various forms. One is simply to withdraw, feeling sorry for oneself. Such sulking often feeds the fires of revenge and future retaliation. People also flee by growing cold and indifferent, by escaping involvement and responsibility.

22. **Recognize and take time to teach.** With differences come supreme teaching moments. But there’s a time to teach and a time not to teach. It’s time to teach when 1) people are not threatened (efforts to teach when people feel threatened will only increase resentment, so wait for or create a new situation in which the person feels more secure and receptive); 2) you’re not angry or frustrated, when you have feelings of affection, respect, and inward security; and 3) when the other person needs help and support (to rush in with success formulas when someone is emotionally low or fatigued or under a lot of pressure is comparable to trying to teach a drowning man to swim). Remember: We are teaching one thing or another all of the time, because we are constantly radiating what we are.

23. **Agree on the limits, rules, expectations, and consequences.** These must be clearly established, agreed upon, understood, and enforced. Personal security is largely born of a sense of justice—knowing what is expected, what the limits, rules, and consequences are. Life can be thrown out of kilter with uncertain expectations, shifting limits, or arbitrary rules: one day this, the next day that. No wonder many grow up learning to depend only on their own ability to manipulate people and life. When life becomes a game to be manipulated, the only sin is getting caught.

24. **Don’t give up, and don’t give in.** It is unkind to shield people from the consequences of their own behavior. In doing so, we teach them they are inadequate and weak. When we give in to irresponsible

behavior by excusing it or sympathizing with it, we condone and foster spoiled, law-unto-self behavior. And if we give up — by ignoring people or tearing into them — we undermine their motivation to try. The discipline of *Don't give up, and don't give in*, tempered with love, comes from responsible, disciplined living. Otherwise we take the course of least resistance — giving in when we care or giving up when we don't.

25. **Be there at the crossroads.** None of us want the people we care most about to make decisions that have important long-range consequences on the basis of short-range emotional perspectives and moods, personal insecurity, and self-doubt. How can we influence them? First, think before you react. Don't be controlled by your own short-range emotional moods and do something that injures whatever relationship and influence you now have. Second, understand that people tend to act in terms of how they feel instead of what they know. Motivation is more a function of the heart than the head. When we sense that our reason and logic aren't communicating with their sentiment and emotion, we should try to understand their language as we would a foreign tongue, without condemning it or rejecting them. This effort communicates respect and acceptance, lowers defenses, diminishes the need to fight, and restores the desire to do what is right.

26. **Speak the languages of logic and emotion.** The language of logic and the language of emotion are as different as English and French. When we realize we don't have a common language, we may need to communicate in one of four other ways: 1) Give time, for when we cheerfully give time, we transfer its worth to another; 2) Be patient, as patience also communicates worth and says "I'll go at your speed; I'm happy to wait for you; you're worth it"; 3) Seek to understand, because an honest effort to understand eliminates the need to fight and to defend; and 4) Openly express our feelings and be congruent with our nonverbal expressions.

27. **Delegate effectively.** Effective delegation takes emotional courage as we allow, to one degree or another, others to make mistakes on our time, money, and good name. This courage consists of patience, self-control, faith in the potential of others, and respect for individual differences. Effective delegation must be two-way: responsibility given, responsibility received. There are three phases. First, the initial agreement. People have a clear understanding of what is expected and what the resources, authority, latitude, and guidelines are. Second, sustaining the delegates. The supervisor becomes a source of help, the advocate, not the feared adversary. He provides resources, removes obstacles, sustains actions and decisions,

gives vision, provides training, and shares feedback. Third, the accountability process. This is largely one of self-evaluation, since delegates are supervised by results, by actual performance.

28. **Involve people in meaningful projects.** Meaningful projects have a healing influence on people. However, what is meaningful to a manager may be meaningless to a subordinate. Projects take on meaning when people are involved in the planning and thinking processes. We all need to be engaged in a good cause. Without such projects, life loses its meaning; in fact, the life span is short for people who retire, looking for a tensionless state. Life is sustained by tension between where we are now and where we want to be—some goal worth struggling for.

29. **Train them in the law of the harvest.** We teach the “agricultural principles” of preparing the soil, seeding, cultivating, watering, weeding, and harvesting. We focus on natural processes. We align the systems, especially compensation, to reflect and reinforce the idea that we reap what we sow.

30. **Let natural consequences teach responsible behavior.** One of the kindest things we can do is to let the natural or logical consequences of people’s actions teach them responsible behavior. They may not like it or us, but popularity is a fickle standard by which to measure character development. Insisting on justice demands more true love, not less. We care enough for their growth and security to suffer their displeasure.

Overcoming Three Big Mistakes

In our attempts to influence others, we commonly make three mistakes, all related either to ignoring or short-cutting these three categories of influence.

Mistake #1: Advise before understand. Before we try to tell others what to do, we need to establish an understanding relationship. The key to your influence with me is your understanding of me. Unless you understand me and my unique situation and feelings, you won’t know how to advise or counsel me. Unless you’re influenced by my uniqueness, I’m not going to be influenced by your advice. Cure: Empathy—seek first to understand, then to be understood.

Mistake #2: Attempt to build/rebuild relationships without changing conduct or attitude. We try to build or rebuild a relationship without making any fundamental change in our conduct or attitude. If our example is pockmarked with inconsistency and insincerity, no amount of “win friends” technique will work. As Emerson so aptly put it, “What you are shouts so loudly in my ears I can’t hear what

you say.” Cure: Show consistency and sincerity.

Mistake #3: Assume that good example and relationship are sufficient. We assume that a good example and a good relationship are sufficient, that we don’t need to teach people explicitly. Just as vision without love contains no motivation, so also love without vision contains no goals, no guidelines, no standards, no lifting power. Cure: Teach and talk about vision, mission, roles, goals, guidelines, and standards.

In the last analysis, what we are communicating far more eloquently and persuasively than what we say or even what we do.

Indivisible Life

In a very real sense there is no such thing as organizational behavior. There is only individual behavior. Everything else flows out of that.

The main sticking point between Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung dealt with conscience. Freud believed the conscience or superego was basically a social product. Jung believed it primarily to be part of the collective unconscious, transcending the mortal overlay of culture, race, religion, gender, or nationality.

I believe Jung was right and Freud was wrong. In working with thousands of organizations and individuals around the world in preparing mission or value statements—assuming four conditions are present, namely 1) enough people; 2) interacting freely; 3) well informed about the realities of their situation; 4) feeling safe to express themselves without fear of censure, ridicule, or embarrassment—then the values or principles part of the mission statement all basically say the same thing, even though different words are used, regardless of nationality, culture, religion, or race.

Gandhi emphasized: “A person cannot do right in one department whilst attempting to do wrong in another department: Life is one indivisible whole.” John Wesley’s mother taught her son, “Whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, takes off your relish for spiritual things, whatever increases the authority of the body over the mind, that thing is sin to you, however innocent it may seem in itself.”

Further, I believe God is the true name and source of the collective unconscious and is therefore the ultimate moral authority in the universe. The daily prayerful study of His revealed word is the single most important and powerful discipline in life because it points our lives, like a compass, to “true north”—our divine destiny.

It also sets us on a life of service, and I fear, unless enough of us capture the spirit of the following conviction of George Bernard Shaw, that the social problems of today will overwhelm the economic machine and discombobulate all of society.

“This is the true joy in life, being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one.

“Being a force of nature instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy.

“I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community and as I live it is my privilege—my *privilege* to do for it whatever I can.

“I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work the more I love. I rejoice in life for its own sake. Life is no brief candle to me; it is a sort of splendid torch which I’ve got a hold of for the moment and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations.”

