



Avenues Of Influence

**8 Proven Pathways For Getting Things Done
When You Are Not In Charge**

By Joseph Reed PhD



You spend a good portion of your work life trying to influence other people.

- You need resources from them
- You want them to take some action
- You want them to change their behavior
- You want them to give you a promotion or a raise
- Maybe you just want them to pay attention to an idea or suggestion

There are endless reasons that you need to influence other people at work. The problem is, that they don't always see things the same way as you. And they probably don't have to do what you want them to do. So maybe they won't.

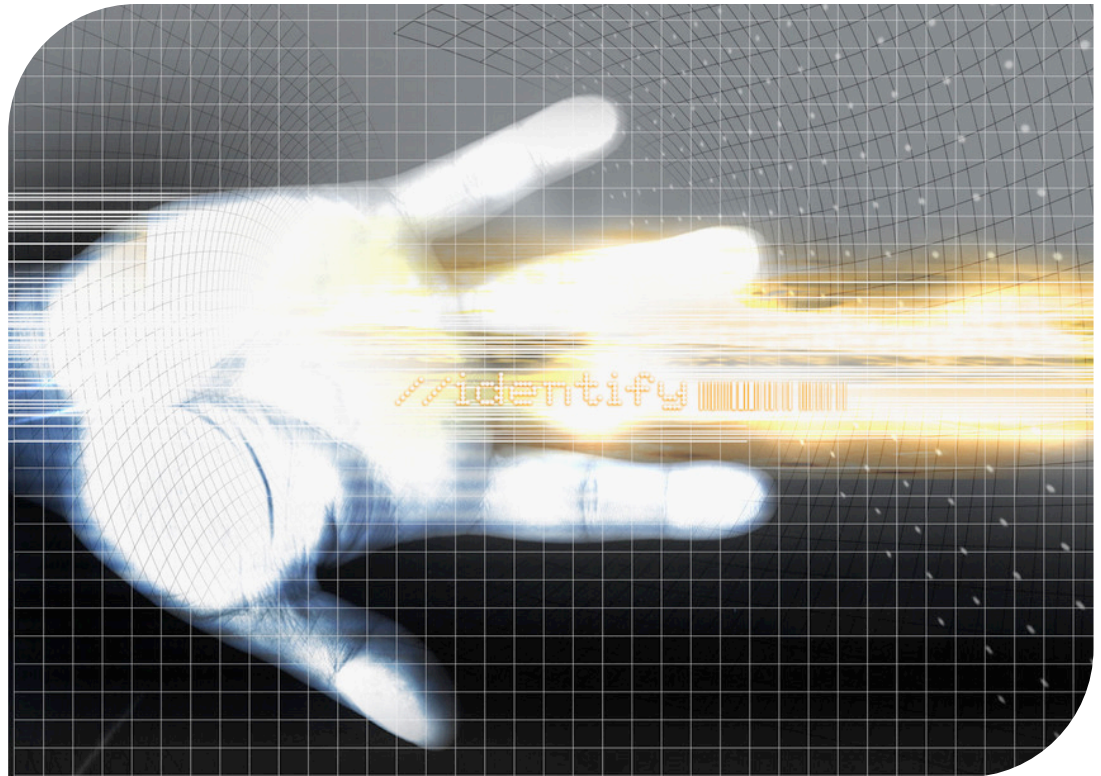
Even if you are the Manager, or the Team Leader or the President of the Enterprise the people you need to influence may still not do what you want them to do. When he was in office Bill Clinton said *"Being President is a little like being the groundskeeper of a cemetery. You have a lot of people under you and nobody's really listening."* Oh if you have formal power people will probably go through the motions, but they may not give you 100 % of their discretionary effort. What you will probably get is more along the lines of compliance. For a lot of the activities that you engage in compliance is just not going to be enough. You want their full commitment. Getting that full commitment requires influence: the ability to positively affect another's behavior, attitudes or

beliefs.

When I started working in organizations I thought that would be a relatively easy process. Do good work, develop good ideas and people will naturally listen. Those good ideas will naturally garner support and rise to the top. Unfortunately it didn't seem to work out that way. Sometimes my good ideas just fell on deaf ears. Other times there was support but not from the *right* people. And on occasion, when I thought that I had everything in place to make it work, somebody wouldn't follow through and the whole project would fall apart. I came to realize that good ideas didn't just automatically happen, that not everybody saw things the same way I did, that the way I worked with the people involved could make or break the initiative. I came to realize that influence was a key skill in getting things done.

I've spent over twenty years looking at the process of influence, trying to decipher how it works and what you or I could do to be more successful at it. It's a skill that's applicable to almost anyone working within an organization today. I've found that there are three basic principles for successful influence, along with eight methods, which I call Avenues of Influence.

Let me lay out those three basic principles first:



Principle #1: Influence Is A Process Not A Singular Event

We often think about influence as involving a charismatic persona and slick talk used to convince someone to do something that they probably didn't want to do in the first place. Most of the time that couldn't be farther from the truth. As a matter of fact, if you go in with guns blazing trying to dazzle the other person with your astounding vocabulary and sheer intellect, you are as likely to shoot yourself in the foot as reach an agreement.

Most influence attempts aren't isolated conversations. Initially you may need to spend a significant amount of time learning what matters to the person you are trying to influence and building trust. For example, one of the producers of the ESPN mini-series on O.J. Simpson visited a juror from the case numerous times in LA, and even took to gardening with her to establish trust before getting that jurors commitment to talk about her experiences. Influence isn't a one shot deal. I occasionally have participants attend my public seminar, *Influencing: Getting Things Done When You Don't Have Authority*, looking for an easy, time efficient way of influencing. Long-term influence doesn't work that way. It takes work.

It's also, not a one-way street. Since long-term influence is built on a relationship with another person, dialogue and compromise are part of the process. You may enter the process with a clear goal and well-defined outcomes in mind. But you also have to have an open mind. You have to be *influenceable*. The great Swiss Psychiatrist Carl Jung wrote in *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*:

"The meeting of the two personalities is like the contact of two chemical substances: If there is any reaction, both of them are transformed.... You

can exert no influence, if you are not susceptible to influence.”

Soliciting the reactions and views of the person you are trying to influence isn't a weakness. It creates a positive dynamic. It builds trust and allows the other person the psychological space to begin to modify their way of looking at the situation. If you don't go into an influence encounter willing to listen and grow you won't be able to create long-term positive influence.

Principle #2: Credibility is A Prerequisite For Long Term Influence

- Are you believable?
- Do the people you need to influence most, trust you?

If not, good luck trying to influence them. Credibility is an essential ingredient in getting things done when you don't have authority. It's not everything, but without it you don't stand much of a chance.

As you work to develop a greater sphere of influence you need to build it on a solid foundation of credibility. The research is pretty clear on the two key factors in building and maintaining credibility: *Warmth* and *Competence*.

And since credibility is in the eye of the beholder this isn't about how warm and competent you think you are. This is about how other people see you.

Warmth is about how others perceive your intent. Do they see you as sincere? Helpful? Friendly? Fair? Honest? *Warmth* is about the interpersonal impact that you have on others. So do you make them feel liked? Cared for? Unconditionally accepted?

Competence is about how other people perceive your ability. While *Warmth* is a generalized perception, aspects of *competence* are more task specific. Do they see you as knowledgeable about the issue? Do they recognize your technical skills related to the issue you are attempting to persuade them

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Carl Jung

about? More generally, do you have a history of sound judgment and prior success that they are aware of?

The relationship between warmth and competence in some ways is the difference between liking and respecting.

The importance and the relationship between these two factors seem to be hardwired into us as a species. According to the research, warmth outweighs the importance of competence. Why? Maybe in part because from an evolutionary perspective a person's good or bad intent was more important to our survival than their knowledge and skill. Sorry all you misanthropes out there, friendliness matters!

Several years ago I had the opportunity to co-lead a weeklong workshop for CEO's. I facilitated the workshop probably 8-10 times with a woman I'm going to call Joanne. Joanne was brilliant. She knew her stuff like nobody's business. She was great with our clients. She could present information and facilitate a group wonderfully. I just couldn't like her. I saw her as unfriendly and unhelpful. Despite the fact that I saw her as moral and ethical I just didn't trust her. I didn't believe that she had my best interests in mind. I didn't believe that she liked me. Despite our success co-facilitating, I stopped working with her. That's the power of warmth over competence.

Principle # 3: There Is No One Best Way To Influence

Influence is situational. The best way to go about influencing probably differs from one person to another. The best way to influence Susan may be different than the approach that will work best with Mark. And the best way to influence Mark may differ from one situation to another. Unfortunately, it's very easy to get locked into using one or two influence practices regardless of the situation.

Many of us, for example, approach influencing from a position of logic. We attempt to persuade the other person with a reasoned, rational argument about why they should do what we want them to do. When they don't immediately agree to our suggestions it feels as if they didn't really understand us. So we very naturally replay our logical well thought out suggestion to them - maybe a little more forcefully this time. Every one of us has experienced that scenario from one side or the other. It's not a formula for influence success.

You have to recognize that sometimes the influence practice that you like to use may not be the best approach for the person with whom you are working. The best approach could differ based on:

- Their personality
- Their culture
- The riskiness of the issue
- The time constraints
- Everything else that they have going on in their lives.

Since there is no one best approach to influence others, you need to understand the possible avenues and to recognize your preferences, your favorite routes. Understanding the eight Avenues of Influence will give you options.

Having self awareness about your preferred practices will give you the opportunity to move from your most naturally preferred influence approach to the approach that's most needed for that situation



EIGHT AVENUES OF INFLUENCE

- **Rational - Logical**
- **Visionary Language**
- **Political Agility**
- **Currency Exchange**
- **Consulting**
- **Relationship Management**
- **Alignment**
- **Pressure**

Avenue 1: Rational - Logical

Rational - Logical Influence Practices use data and if / then causal arguments to demonstrate the worthiness of an idea or proposal. If you want to use this practice you have to uncover the facts, "do your homework to build the logical case" and then assert your beliefs to persuade others.

It involves behaviors like:

- Using past experiences to convince others about how to do things
- Using if / then logic
- Pointing out the pros and cons
- Using data, facts and statistics to support ideas

It is one of the most commonly used influence strategies because it can and does work. If you are seen as an expert in the field it can be quite effective. It is also a useful strategy when you want to connect with and get through to individuals whose natural style involves thinking and logic.

But it doesn't always work. How many times have you had a good idea that just didn't seem to be able to get any traction? Even with groups of apparently "logically oriented" people, Rational - Logical Influence Practices can often fall short. Values and personality can affect perception, and selective perception can affect how the person hears your logical argument.

Frequently individuals from other functions or teams may have their own priorities and their own way of viewing the issue. They may very well believe that they have the knowledge and competence to make the right decision. When that happens Rational - Logical Influence Practices can bog down into a mutual "pushing" contest with each influencer becoming increasingly frustrated because the other side "just doesn't get it".



Avenue 2: Visionary Language Influence

Visionary Language Influence Practices use charismatic language and personal attributes to inspire and foster commitment from others. Language can touch emotion. It can inspire or motivate. It has the ability to anger or elate. If you use Visionary Language you are relying on the power of your words and your delivery of those words to touch the other person's values or emotions.

Visionary Language involves behaviors like:

- Using stories and anecdotes to illustrate key points
- Using analogies and metaphors to help explain key points
- Expressing ideas with confidence
- Demonstrating enthusiasm for an idea to capture people's attention and support

Not many people do it well, but those who do stand out. They use powerful words or phrases that evoke images in our minds eye. They seem to have the ability to describe common occurrences in words that raise them above the mundane. They can inspire through the use of analogies and metaphors. John Kennedy and Martin Luther King are two well-known examples of individuals who could paint pictures with their words.

The words are only part of the power of Visionary Language. The way you deliver the message can magnify its impact.



If you learn to use Visionary Language well you will stand out and be noticed. But you have to be selective about when you employ it. If you use it too often it can come across as disingenuous. It also has to be backed up with valid ideas and strategies or it will wear thin.

Avenue 3: Political Agility

At times it is difficult for one person, perhaps because of power differentials or because of past history, to effectively influence another. You may have to build coalitions and alliances with other people, who are better positioned to persuade key stakeholders and decision makers.

Political Agility probably begins with an understanding of the organizations formal, as well as informal structure.

- Who is responsible for what?
- How do things get done?

Roles and responsibilities are only the start. Political Agility is really about relationships. It requires an understanding of your relationships, as well as the relationships that exist between others within the organization. It requires that you identify the stakeholders who may have a vested interest in the issue or idea the you are proposing.

- Who are they?
- Where do they fit into the organization?
- What matters to them?
- What do you think their stake is in your idea?
- Who are the key decision makers for your idea?
- Who will have the final say?

Political Agility is a strategy for working through others to influence those decision makers. Alliances and coalitions are the lifeblood of Political Agility. Who within the organization is in a position to add value to your influence attempt? Identifying those people and enlisting their support is the payoff of the strategy. It is about tangential, indirect influence. The less formal power you have, the more important this avenue is for your ability to get things done.

Avenue 4: Currency Exchange

You are using a form of Currency Exchange when you offer to provide favors or resources in return for some desired action or resource from another person. *“I’ll do this for you if you’ll do that for me”*.

It involves behaviors like:

- Actively considering what may be of value to the person you are trying to influence and then using those items as bargaining chips

- Trading favors
- Giving in on issues that have less importance in order to gain concessions about issues that are more important
- Doing things for others and then calling in favors from them at a later date or time

Some people think about Currency Exchange in a negative way. But it doesn't have to be. In fact it may be one of the most useful strategies for influencing within a political environment. It's a practice that is often useful when trust is low.

Avenue 5: Consulting

Consulting is the process of involving others in making a decision or planning the execution of a proposal or project. It is one of the most frequently used influence strategies.

Some of the behaviors include:

- Soliciting the thoughts and ideas of the individual you are trying to influence
- Pointing out areas of agreement and common ground
- Actively listening to the person you are attempting to influence
- Giving credit and recognition

Soliciting another's input or opinion can influence in several ways. If you ask for my opinion - and I see it as genuine interest - it feels like a compliment. The fact that you seem to value my ideas makes me feel good about myself. I may very well project those positive feelings back onto you. In other words because you make me feel better about myself I begin to associate feeling good with being around you. The process may actually build rapport.

Secondly, having input into a decision or planning process allows me to ensure that my needs and interests are represented.

Finally, participating in the process allows me to express my opinion and to feel as if I can exert some control. Often those feelings result in a sense of ownership for the final decision. Even if that decision is not what I originally had in mind.

Consulting can be an excellent strategy when time is not an issue. It can provide the dual benefits of getting agreement along with developing a stronger relationship.

Avenue 6: Relationship Management

People want to be with, and do things for, people they like. Relationship Management involves building a relationship with a wide network of people so that if needed they may be called on at some time in the future. It's a long-term investment. It sounds Machiavellian and manipulative but when done correctly it becomes a reciprocal relationship where both sides benefit. In the long run you are not going to be able to do it well without genuinely caring for the interests and needs of the other party. It's not a way of manipulating. It's a recognition that relationships matter and a conscious effort to build and maintain the relationship.

Some of the behaviors involved include:

- Working to build relationships with people before needing anything from them
- Being likable
- Acting trustworthy
- Socialize with the people whom you need to influence

Some people are naturally extraverted and gregarious and build their networks naturally without thought or effort. Others of us have to work at it. People who are successful at Relationship Management work hard to grow the relationship. They become experts at networking, developing an ability to build rapport with different types of people. To do it well you need to work at finding connections between yourself and others.

You have to become adept at understanding the interests and needs of the people in your network so that you can offer help and assistance when possible. And since this is a long-term strategy, you have to make an effort to keep in touch with the people in your network on a regular basis. Whether you use phone calls, greeting cards, golf outings, E-mail or other tactics you have to work to keep the relationship alive.

Avenue 7: Alignment

Linking your ideas and proposals to broader organizational goals or values can be an effective strategy. It legitimizes your ideas by dovetailing them with principles that are known to be important already. By framing your ideas within that context or by appealing to some higher-level principle - like fairness for example - you may strike a cord within your audience and build a bridge between your position and theirs.

Alignment behaviors include:

- Linking your ideas to the values and culture of the organization
- Showing the people you are trying to influence how your ideas relate to the mission and goals of the organization
- Pointing out how your ideas support the strategies of the organization
- Working to create a sense of team identity and esprit des corps with the people you need to influence

At its core, Alignment requires an understanding of the:

- Organizations culture
- What is important within that culture
- Goals and strategies

Understanding and pointing out how those values, goals and strategies are supported by your idea or proposal is the key to the Alignment Practices.



Avenue 8: Pressure

Pressure tactics include using the power of position to force someone to comply, or the threat of involving some higher authority. In their more tactful applications, pressure practices may involve verbally linking some undesired outcome to noncompliance as in. *"I'm concerned that if we don't get this project completed on time it may affect where we obtain our expertise on future projects..."*

Pressure behaviors include:

- Pointing out the downsides and weaknesses of the proposals of others
- Escalating issues to higher levels of management when I don't get what I need from an individual
- Pressuring people to get what I need from them
- If an individual does something that you don't like finding a way to pay them back
- Throwing your weight around to get things done

Even when you use them tactfully Pressure tactics endanger the long-term relationship. Pressure practices are based on the threat of negative reinforcement and *"If / Then"* contingencies. As in, *"if you do A, then B will happen."* When people feel pressured it can force compliance, but seldom leads to commitment. Pressure practices may be called for when emergencies arise or when the immediate need outweighs the risk of damage to the relationship. Use them with caution!



So there you have it. Eight Avenues of Influence, eight pathways of persuasion that you can tap into to get things done when you don't have positional power or formal authority. Which one is best? It depends on the situation and the people involved. Over time people will show you which Avenues of Influence work best with them.

Most of the time you will find yourself using several within a single influence encounter. You might start the interaction using the Consulting Practice to gather information about the other person's perspective on the issue and to build rapport. At some point you may move into Logical-Rational Avenue by offering your ideas and the benefits that you believe are inherent in your proposal. At some point in the discussion you may move into the Visionary Language approach using metaphors or telling a story to make a key point.

To expand your sphere of influence overall, work to build your credibility throughout your organization, and in particular with your key stakeholders. Approach your influence interactions with an open mind. Look at them as two-way streets where not only are you trying to persuade but you are also open to being influenced. Remember that influence is not a one-time event. It's a process that takes time and effort. And finally, keep in mind that influence is a contingency based process. Master the Eight Avenues of Influence, and tailor your approach. Use the influence practices that are best for each situation.

About The Author

Dr Joseph Reed is a Master Trainer, an MBTI ® Master Practitioner as well as a former Marine Corps Officer and University Faculty Member. He's the CEO of J.R.Training - A Learning and Development Company. Joe has spent over twenty years working with both leaders and individual contributors to help them improve their abilities to get the right things done, enhance their working relationships, and perform up to their potential.

He spends an average of 140 days a year leading seminars or delivering speaking engagements. He offers tangible, practical tools to help people think - interact - manage -and perform at a higher level.

If you are interested in personal or professional development for yourself - or for others in your organization - check out DrJosephReed.com for additional resources.

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