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WHAT IS INFLUENCE?

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So, what exactly is influence?

Some people influence with the words they use, the ideas they share, the stories they tell and the inspiring actions they take. Others have influence because of the positions they hold, the wealth they have or the company they keep.

There simply is no right or wrong way to influence. Everything is a factor. We are all influenced by people, places, events and situations . . . all of the time!

In a nutshell, influence is about affecting an outcome. It is about motivating a behavioural change or an action. It is about you, and understanding the impact you have on other people and their perceptions of you. It's about progressing things without forcing them or being pushy.

For me, when I imagine someone who is highly influential, a ton of words spring to mind to potentially describe them . . .

Reputation	Authoritative
Charismatic	Leader
Authentic	Humble
Integrity	Confident
Persuasive	Generous
Enthusiastic	Passionate
Knowledgeable	Connected
Communicator	Powerful
Respectful	

Throughout this book these words are going to feature strongly, and there is a summary/exercise chapter at the back designed to help you really reflect on what these words mean to you and, more importantly, how they apply to you.

If you just read this book then I am sure you will find some useful ideas which can help you push forwards. But if you really reflect, and relate the content to yourself, I believe you will get much more, *and* your strategy will become clear.

Imagine a business leader, celebrity or politician, for example. They probably get inundated with requests for media interviews, they are wealthy, maybe they have a best-selling book and speak/perform on stages across the world to huge audiences.

But is influence really restricted to celebrity? I don't believe you have to be a person of influence to be influential. We all influence behaviours every day, mainly without even knowing it. People change my perspective, my behaviours and my decisions all the time without the faintest idea of the impact they have had on me.

*'Parents are our children's first heroes! Your influence matters!
Wield it wisely with passion and purpose!'*

Anonymous

Think about the most influential people in your life. Mum and Dad will be right up there for most people, but it is unlikely that they are captains of industry. Yet their social conditioning from day one has helped you form your values and your moral compass – maybe even your political or religious leanings.

Teachers can have the same profound effect. Most of us, I am sure, can name at least one teacher who really got through to us. Mine was Mr Nesbitt, my English teacher, who understood my disruptive nature and challenged and dared me instead of being authoritarian. He turned learning into a game, which appealed to my competitive nature. As a result he got the best of me compared

to every other subject. I doubt Mr Nesbitt remembers who I am, but I shall never forget him. (In the unlikely event you are reading this Sir, thank you, I doff my cap . . . and who knew I would end up writing a book. ;-)

The influence of a good teacher, mentor or boss can never be erased. What mark do you leave on those who look up to you?

Sometimes we are influenced to revolt against the examples we are set. We adopt contrary behaviours based on consequences or our own disapproval of the authority figures in our lives.

Some of the people who have influenced us over the years did so intentionally, but I am sure many will have had no idea of the impact they had or the value they added.

'You don't have to be a person of influence to be influential. In fact, the most influential people in my life are probably not even aware of the things they have taught me.'

Scott Adams

Many of the things that influence us day to day go completely unnoticed on a conscious level, yet can change our attitudes and behaviour patterns. For example, witnessing and being moved by a simple act of kindness is far more likely to make us more generous in the hours that follow. Or getting caught up in an angry exchange might make us more irritable for the rest of the day.

Human beings are like sponges, emotionally we are affected by the world around us every day. We subconsciously pick up on other people's micro expressions, on advertising messages, and on

moods and atmospheres in the world around us. These in turn can have a knock-on effect on others. Which means we are potentially being influenced by people we haven't even met.

Your job requires you to influence people pretty much all of the time. It may be persuading people to advocate for you, creating new relationships, encouraging support or inspiring ideas. Whatever form it takes, the better you are at influencing, the better the results you will achieve.

Our physical state can influence others and even affect our attractiveness. Therefore, by simply managing our physical state we can become more influential.

For example, have you ever been in a crowded room and watched the domino effect as one person yawns and many others follow suit? Or seen someone laughing hysterically and, without knowing why, found yourself laughing along too?

Many studies have concluded that this is because we are empathetic creatures, some of you will have just yawned even imagining a room full of people yawning. I have influenced you right here, right now. ;-) We will cover this in more detail later in the book.

Here's something to think about . . . Every great person, throughout history, has in turn been influenced by others. Influencers are influenced, great leaders have been led and are willing to follow.

For example, Woody Allen was influenced by Hemmingway, Muhammad Ali by Martin Luther King, Tim Burton by Bram Stoker, Jane Austin and Charles Dickens by William Shakespeare, Stephen Fry by Oscar Wilde – the list goes on and on but I am sure you get the point.

So, what does this tell us? It tells us that we all need to be receptive students as well as generous teachers. We need to be open, with a thirst to learn more and be exposed to new ideas.

I have heard people say on many occasions (especially in speaker's circles) that there are no new ideas, just old messages repackaged. Whilst I don't subscribe to this entirely, I do believe all great leaders accept the influence of others, but have the ability and vision to apply their own experiences to what they have learned to evolve ideas, thereby pushing the boundaries and challenging the next generation.

From a business perspective, influence is an essential weapon in your armoury: leaders need to inspire their teams; marketers need to influence consumer spending decisions; and investors need convincing of viable opportunities.

As an individual, your personal influence in your job, business and social networks has a profound impact on your love, life and career prospects.

As a brand, if not carefully managed, a reputation that has taken years to build can be destroyed in an instant.

Great influencers, who use their skills well, increase their popularity. People like to be around them and get excited about the potential things that can happen while they are around.

They are known as doers. They don't play the victim card, moaning about things and wishing they were different. They don't blame or complain, they just get on with it.

Great influencers adapt to the situation. They modify their communication style depending on who they are talking to, but without compromising authenticity. They are able to change behaviour and attitude, not who they are!

A Moment of Reflection

So, take a moment now to ponder, maybe even sit with a blank sheet of paper and note down the answers to the following questions.

- Who has significantly influenced you over the years?
List them.
- What made them influential?
- What characteristics did they display?
- Who do you influence in your life right now and why?
- Who do you want to influence in the future?
- What is the outcome you desire?

Remember, for the accompanying strategy template and other resources go to www.InfluenceTheBook.com.

INFLUENCE IN A CHANGING WORLD

The times, they are a changin'

You are quite right (well, those of you old enough), I do have Bob Dylan playing whilst I write this chapter 😊 and the words from this 1964 song title are as true today as they were then.

I believe it has never been easier to develop personal influence than it is right now. Never in the history of mankind have we enjoyed so many rich ways to communicate our message. In this chapter I want to explore some of the societal changes and how a better understanding of these changes can help you to become more influential.

And just to cement my point before I get stuck into the detail: later in this book I will touch on face-to-face communication and how a better understanding of personality types will help you identify how people like to receive information, and how knowing this helps you better communicate with them . . . now throw into the mix their social conditioning and adaptive behaviours based on their experiences of technology, exposure to media etc. All of a sudden, there is a new layer of complexity to take into account when connecting with people.

I believe becoming a student of people can massively increase your ability to influence. Understanding people's experiences and the way they view the world is essential if you want to build that connection with them.

The pace of change up until the Industrial Revolution was, to say the least, relatively slow and steady. But since then, with every technical advance, the pace of change has accelerated and continues to do so today.

Since the publication of many of the established books relating to influence, the most significant thing to happen has been the birth of the internet – the decisive technology of the information age that has connected humankind and fundamentally changed the way we interact.

'We are all now connected by the Internet, like neurons in a giant brain.'

Stephen Hawking

We live in unprecedented times when ideas can spread in an instant and generations have never been so divided.

The socialisation of technology has made the world a smaller, more competitive, place and is second nature to the digital natives, commonly referred to as 'millennials', who know no different. They were born directly into the digital age, and as a result intuitively adapt to technology changes.

With over two billion smartphone users worldwide in 2016, we have knowledge at our fingertips and the ability to connect with others in an instant. More importantly perhaps, reputations can be

built or broken because anything and everything has the potential to be on the internet and on display.

As a professional speaker, my talks have to be Google proof, because every member of an audience has a computer in his or her pocket and is able to fact check everything I say, and what's more they can instantly call me out on inaccuracies by tweeting or posting online.

There is a clear divide in the attitudes, behaviours and experiences of those sharing this floating rock with us . . . And as such the things that influence us, from one person to the next, are potentially different.

For example, let's look at attitudes: if you were born after 1980 you are one of the digital natives I referred to above. Technology has probably always been a part of your life in some way, shape or form provided you live in Western society.

As a result of growing up in the last 30 years you are likely to have different attitudes to consumerism: you are less brand loyal, you rely heavily on social proof, you are getting married later, having kids later, probably have more debt etc., the list does in fact go on . . . So it stands to reason with all of these different experiences you will have different behaviours and opinions . . . What might have influenced your grandparents might not influence you.

Whilst us digital migrants (people over 35 . . . yes, me included) have adopted technology easily, it is not all we have known . . . my

first exposure to computers happened in my teenage years when the Sinclair ZX81 was introduced to the marketplace. We remember a simpler time when the world did actually shut up.

If we wanted to stay on top of the news, we had to wait for it to be broadcast at specific times of the day or read our daily newspaper, which was already out of date by the time we got it.

Even then the news we did receive was undemocratic. It was the point of view of corporate media outlets with all of their biases. Compare this to today where millennials get most of their news from their peers via social media. We have access to first-hand accounts via Facebook and Twitter making it much harder for our news to be manipulated.

Another thing that has changed is our ability to focus. Our concentration spans are getting shorter and shorter with the instant gratification of consuming online in the digital age. We favour short video clips on YouTube over the time investment a TV series or movie demands.

My own kids are rarely separated from their iPhones and are constantly sharing information which has amused, inspired or moved them. In fact, the only time my son watches a TV series is when he can consume multiple episodes at once via Netflix, because waiting a week for the next episode is soooooo last century.

We went from communication that required thought and formatting, letters and emails . . . to the texting and 140 character

bastardisation of language which has reduced our ability to express ourselves to an emoji. To quote Donald Trump: #Sad.

A recent survey of Canadian media consumption, conducted by technology giant Microsoft, concluded that the average attention span had fallen to just 8 seconds, down from 12 seconds in the year 2000. This is one second less than a goldfish.

Attention span, according to Wikipedia, can be defined as *'the amount of concentrated time one can spend on a task without becoming distracted'*. But we live in distracting times! It's no wonder we find it harder to concentrate.

'A good teacher, like a good entertainer first must hold his audience's attention, then he can teach his lesson.'

John Henrik Clarke

I believe human attention will be one of the scarcest commodities of the very near future, but essential for influence. If we are to hold attention long enough to share our message, we have to change the way we communicate.

So why do I share all of this? Mainly because I really want to hammer home the point that we need to continuously adapt the way we communicate if we want to influence – because it isn't one size fits all, and what works today may not work tomorrow.

If the audience you are trying to influence is spread across multi demographics, yet you are using one tone of voice, or one platform to communicate, the chances are you are not speaking to everyone.

A Moment of Reflection

So reflecting on this change, and your answers from the previous section where you identified who you influence right now and who you would like to influence in the future, consider the following.

- What demographic do they belong to (age, sex, ideology, class, location etc.)?
- What influences them right now (people, media, brands, publications etc.)?
- What is important to them?
- Where do they congregate both online and offline?
- Where do they consume?

Remember, for the accompanying strategy template and other resources go to www.InfluenceTheBook.com.

SETTING OBJECTIVES FOR INFLUENCE

Before I share with you what I consider the key principles of influence, I wanted to talk a little about objectives and strategy.

Now this isn't a book about goal setting, so I am not going to go into too much detail about how to effectively set goals – although for those interested, at the end of this chapter, I will give you my summary take on setting SMART goals which you can use if you like.

Clearly you bought this book for a reason, and you may already have a desired outcome, though maybe not a detailed plan.

Whatever your objectives, there will be things you can do to influence your success. There will also be people you can influence to help you achieve them.

Ask yourself

- What are my influence goals?
- Who needs to be influenced to achieve this goal (people or brands)?
- How do they need to be influenced, i.e. desired behaviour?
- What is my desired outcome?
- What channels of influence are open to me to reach them?
- What publications (online and offline) would provide useful profiles?
- What speaking opportunities help me target this audience?
- Which other influencers might be able to help me?
- What potential partnerships could be formed in the pursuit of this goal?

- What websites would it be useful to have a presence on to reach this audience?

By all means take some time now to think through these questions, and better still write down your answers. As you proceed through the book new ideas will present themselves, so you can refine your thinking and develop your strategy.

Here is a quick guide to setting SMART goals for those unfamiliar with what they are. There are several variations for the acronym which are listed here, I will be using the words in bold.

S **Specific**, stretching, significant

M **Measurable**, motivational, meaningful

A attainable, **Achievable**, acceptable, action-oriented, agreed upon, accountable

R realistic, **Relevant**, reasonable, results-oriented, rewarding

T time-based, **Time-bound**, timely, tangible, trackable

Specific

When setting goals, you need to be as specific as you can to improve your chances of success. Where possible use the six Ws;

Who Who is involved?

What What do you want to accomplish?

Where Where will this take place?

When When will this happen (establish your time frame)?

Which How will you do this (which requirements/constraints stand between you and your goal)?

Why Why are you doing this (what is your purpose for this goal)?

For example, a general goal would be to 'write more'. A specific goal would be to 'Write one 1000-word blog every week for the next year to increase my content, improve my writing skills and drive traffic to my website.'

Measurable

By setting measurable goals you will stay focused and know how to track your progress. Establish your criteria using questions like how much . . .? How many . . .? How will I know when the task is complete?

Agreed upon

Make sure all stakeholders agree on what the outcome should be and the timescales for completion. This makes you more accountable and increases your chances of success.

Realistic

If your goals are unachievable you will just give up. If they are too easy you will lack motivation. Setting goals that stretch you – but are within the realms of possibility with available resources, knowledge and time – are the best to keep you motivated.

Time-based

A goal should be grounded within a time frame which will provide you with a sense of urgency. What's your deadline? What are your milestones?

THE PRINCIPLES OF INFLUENCE

I set out to write this book because I think that previous writings in this genre tend to focus on persuasion techniques and don't cover other areas which are key to becoming influential. Keep in mind they were written before the digital age, which redefined influence and changed the way we source information.

So, in this next section of my book, I want to share some of the key principles I have used successfully throughout my career; sometimes knowingly, and sometimes accidentally (and only indentified upon reflection).

In the following section we will explore further how we apply these principles in everyday situations and, in order to help you make the most of this book, at the end of each section I will summarise the key learning and ask you a few questions to help contextualise the lessons for you.

I have broken these principles down into five categories using the acronym P.I.C.K.Y., which as a word means to be meticulous, to demand to have things just right, to care about the details. When it comes to your influence strategy, these seem appropriate traits.

This is what P.I.C.K.Y. stands for.

<i>People</i>	The people you need to influence.
<i>Image</i>	The image you portray both online and offline.
<i>Communication</i>	Effective communication to influence.
<i>Knowledge</i>	What you know and how best to share it.
<i>You</i>	The characteristics of great influencers.

