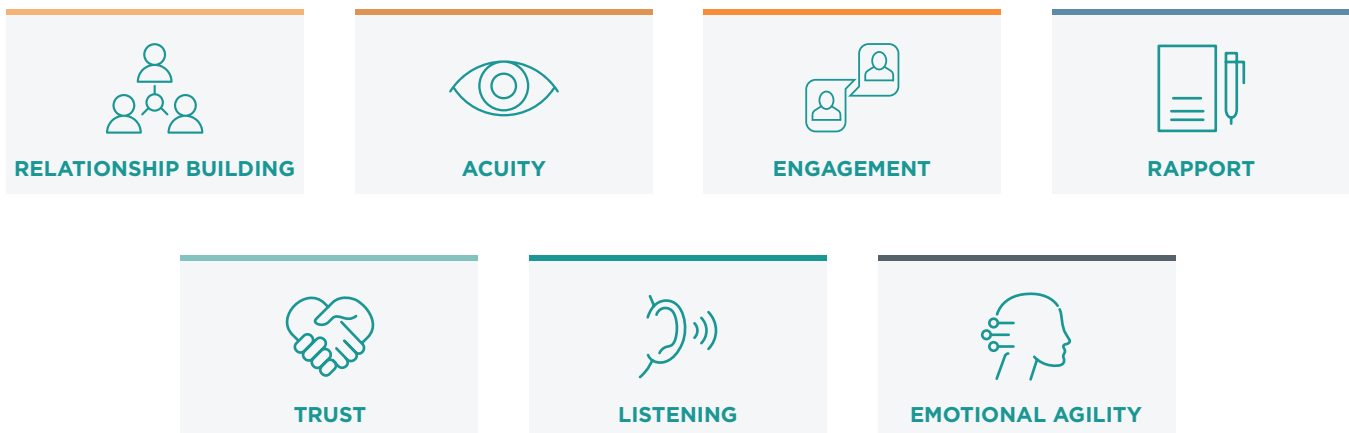# Influencing Without Authority

The ability to engage others and sway their perspective without relying on positional power is the best way to achieve buy-in and cultivate greater engagement in the workplace.

What is Influence?

Whether you are leading, following, and/or collaborating, chances are you need to influence others to be successful.

Influence is most often defined as the capacity to have an effect on the character, development, or behavior of someone or something. Influence is linked but not identical to persuasion, which is defined as the action of persuading someone to do or believe something.

The ability to influence without resorting to power (e.g., without relying on position, rank, assumed status, etc.) is contingent on leveraging a wide range of skills and insights. Most importantly, it requires paying attention to:

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING   **ACUITY**   **ENGAGEMENT**   **RAPPORT**

TRUST   **LISTENING**   **EMOTIONAL AGILITY**

How do you influence when you don't have authority?

STEP 1: Understand the system (how people typically get things accomplished and build buy-in and how power circulates).

STEP 2: Understand the stakeholders (i..e, what makes them tick and motivates them to do things or change their mind). You need to read the room, situation, and players before you can start to think about influencing what happens next.

STEP 3: Shift stakeholders' embedded logic. Engage them to explore alternatives.

STEP 4: Persuade and activate. Help them take the next step (don't take it on their behalf or force them to take the next step).

Primary Tools of Influence

Investing in relationships is the best way to build and sustain long-term influence.

Tool of Influence	Strategies
Build **relationships**	Ask great questions: • Who are you talking to? • What is already known about them? • What are you taking for granted or assuming? • Where are your potential points of connection?
Tune your sensory **acuity**	Pursue sensory acuity to leverage all possible sources of data: • What are you seeing and not seeing? • What are you experiencing in your body? • What are you feeling in your heart?
Engage the other person	Find out: • What is your interaction with this person telling you about who they are and where they are at? • How do you know?
Build **rapport**	Deepen your connection: • Do you share a mutual interest? • Can you give them something (tangible or intangible)? • Can you share a story to help draw them out? • What compliments might you share with them?
Build **trust**	Foster a solid foundation for a trusting relationship: • What is the best way to build credibility with this person? • How can you communicate more effectively? Are you matching their communication style (e.g., using their words)? • How can you be more transparent?
Listen deeply	Listen for the message beyond the word: • What do you hear them saying? • Are their words aligned with their body language? • What does their energy tell you?
Cultivate **emotional agility**	Manage your emotional states: • What, if anything, is triggering you in this situation? • Are you feeling frustrated? • If so, why?

Power in the Workplace

• In the past, most organizations sought to drive change from the top down (e.g., an influential leader telling people what to do and how to do it). Does this model still hold true in your organization?

• If not, what is your organization's default tool of influence?

• f your organization is now remote or hybrid, how has the shift impacted the ability to influence team members?

• What tools of influence work best under different circumstances, and what tools are most and least effective?

Types of Power in the Workplace

Type of Power	Definition	Effectiveness	Impact
Positional or Legitimate	Power is based on your ***position in an organization*** (e.g., your location on the organizational chart). In most cases, the closer you are to the top of the chart, the more power you possess.	Moderately effective	Influences people on a short-term but not long-term basis.
Reward	Power is based on ***ability to offer rewards or benefits*** (e.g., a paycheck or bonus). Anyone with hiring privileges possesses some degree of reward power.	Moderately effective	Influences people on a short-term but not long-term basis.
Expert	Power is based on ***experience and knowledge***. While this can be acquired due to knowledge alone (i.e., being the only person in an organization with a certain knowledge base), it can also be based on seniority.	Effective	Can influence people under some circumstances but isn't effective under all circumstances.
Relational or Referent	Power is based on ***interpersonal skills and ability to listen, cultivate trust, and gain buy-in***. This isn't the type of power that can be handed to someone (e.g., through a promotion); it is internal rather than external to the individual.	Highly effective	Cultivates a workplace where people are internally motivated.
Coercive	Power is based on using ***threats to motivate others.*** This is one of the most common types of power used in the workplace and one of the most damaging.	Ineffective	Results in a toxic workplace.
Innate/ Inherited	Power based on ***natural or endowed factors*** (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity, family of origin, etc.). This is another common type of power in the workplace and one of the most difficult to challenge as it is often taken for granted.	Ineffective	May work in some contexts but only with the risk of longer-term costs (e.g., erosion of culture, reproduction of inequities, etc.).

Understanding Your Default Position

- What is my default?
- How does this dynamic change based on visibility (e.g., with senior leadership), job title, etc.?
- Are there times when I'm more likely to over-index on positional, expert, or coercive power? If so, what triggers me to default to this position?
- What are my blindspots?

Influence Styles

We now know there are different styles and ways to influence people in the workplace.

Some of the best leaders have the ability to influence a wide range of stakeholders in a positive and unifying manner without relying solely on their positional power or rank. Notably, leaders aren't the only people who can benefit from influencing without authority.

Influence Preferences

There are many different ways to influence others. According to the CCL Influence Style indicator, five distinctive styles are particularly dominant.

Style	How it presents	Reliance on authority
Asserting	Insisting that your ideas are heard and considered and challenging the ideas of others.	Very high
Rationalizing	Putting forward your ideas and offering logical, rational reasons to convince others of your point of view.	High
Negotiating	Looking for compromises and making concessions to reach outcomes that satisfy your greater interest.	Medium
Inspiring	Advocating for your position and encourging others to embrace a shared mission.	Low
Bridging	Building relationships and connecting with others by listening, understanding, and building coalitions.	Very low

What is your influence style?

• Notice your preferences and default styles and develop the agility to influence without always resorting to the same styles.

• If you currently over-index on a very high or high authority style, what might you do to adopt a low or very low-authority style?

• What could you influence or influence more effectively by adopting a low-authority style?

• Don't forget! Influence is often multivariate. Different stakeholders have different perspectives, different timelines, different interests, and different definitions of success.

Ideas into Action

ENGAGE

AWARENESS

AIM Process

ACTIVATION

INTEGRATION/
ACCELERATION

AGILITY BUILDING

ACCOUNTABILITY

AWARENESS: Notice what impacts your decisions

- Understand different approaches to influencing others.
- Build awareness about your style and when you resort to one style over another.
- Build awareness about other people's influencing styles.

AGILITY BUILDING: Practice influencing without authority

- Proactively build tools to influence.
- Adopt different ways to influence.
- Consistently adopt an influencing style that relies on trust, rapport, etc.

AGILITY BUILDING: Practice influencing without authority

- When you need to get buy-in, consciously decide what style you'll adopt in advance.

ACCOUNTABILITY: Track Your Progress

- When you resort to a high-authority style, ask yourself why.
- Understand what triggers a more authoritarian approach.

INTEGRATE/ACCELERATE: Keep Going!

- Keep exploring new ways to influence those around you without relying on positional authority.