

# Skillbook

# Building Influence

Leadership  
Skills



Mindtools

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## Skillbook

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# 1. Introduction

**H**ave you ever seen someone who, despite not having any “real” or legitimate authority, has still affected the decisions or actions of others? If so, you likely witnessed the power of **influence**.

The “flip side of the coin” – when someone who does have a position of authority, but struggles to get their voice heard or their ideas acted upon – shows how difficult it is to be effective when you lack influence.

For example, if your team members don’t believe that you’re credible, relevant or agreeable, you likely won’t get much support from them!

If you’re in this situation, it’s important to step back and decide what changes you can make to increase your personal influence.

In this one-hour **Skillbook**, we’ll explore how to increase your level of influence. As you work through it, you’ll learn:

- What personal influence is and how to develop it.
- How you can use different sources of personal power to increase your influence.
- Specific strategies to improve your influencing skills, so you can control the type of work you do and gain more satisfaction from your career.

You can also test your knowledge by working through three different scenario exercises at the end of the Skillbook, and suggest what the people in them could do to be more influential.

Then, you can apply what you’ve learned in your own role!

## 2. Understanding Influence

**T**hink of an influencer in your life. How did they make the impact that they want to? Was it because of their particular expertise, or because they possessed the charisma and personality that others responded to?

You don't need direct authority or force to exert influence or to create an impact. But, to be more influential, you need to understand the relationship between power and influence.

When we talk about power, it can conjure up visions of vengeful and domineering bosses and colleagues. Influence, too, is often misunderstood. It's sometimes associated with people who are manipulative, and who convince others to do things against their will.

But power and influence can be positive, and they are necessary if you want to progress in business.

When you get the balance right, a high degree of influence is a sign of personal efficacy. Influential people can often help to create a positive environment, and to motivate others to do great work. Those with influence are held in high esteem within organizations, and colleagues typically want to work with them.

Problems often start when people feel unable to influence decisions. They either get angry at the system that keeps ignoring them, or they become apathetic and quit trying. Both are self-destructive, and cause others to lose confidence.

Managers with little influence are often ineffective. And if they abuse the influence they have, it can lead to low morale and poor performance within their teams. But it is possible to find the right balance, and it's this empowered position that you want to be in.

There are several strategies that you can use to become influential. We'll find out more about them in the next chapter.

### Action:



Think about a time when you felt frustrated or disempowered because your voice wasn't heard. Why do you think you lacked influence? What did you do about it? How successful were you? Write your answers in the spaces provided on the following page.

<p><b>When was the last time you felt frustrated or disempowered because your voice wasn't heard?</b></p>	
<p><b>What did you do about it?</b></p>	
<p><b>How successful were you at getting your points across?</b></p>	
<p><b>Were you happy with the final outcome? If not, why not?</b></p>	
<p><b>What would you do differently, if you had the chance?</b></p>	

### 3. Increasing Your Personal Influence

**P**eople gain influence in many ways, from their personality, knowledge or position within an organization to their level of authority. Once you identify where to focus your efforts, you can make a plan to increase your influence, whatever your position.

#### French and Raven's Five Forms of Power

In 1959, social psychologists John French and Bertram Raven identified five common forms of power:

- **Expert power** – gained from having the knowledge, experience and ability to solve problems and to make good decisions.
- **Referent power** – stems from team members doing what the leader wants, because they value their approval and want to be more like them.
- **Legitimate power** – comes from the leader's position, which gives them the right to ask others to do something.
- **Reward power** – comes from controlling salary increases, promotions and other rewards that team members value.
- **Coercive power** – comes from having the authority to punish others.

#### Tip:



In 1965, Raven added a sixth type of power: **Informational**. This form of power results from controlling the information that others need to accomplish something. We'll look at this in more detail on the next page, when we explore how "centrality" enhances influence.

The base that's influential regardless of the person's position is **expert power**. When you have this, you can use your task-relevant knowledge or experience to influence others. Although it takes time and effort to build expert power, the payoff can be significant.

However, be careful not to rely too much on expertise, as you can end up isolated. This is particularly the case if your expertise is not relevant to your organization or valuable to the role that you aspire to have.

In either instance, people might only see you as relevant to a specific part of the organization, rather than as an integral part of the business.

## Charismatic Power

Another source of influence is charismatic power, which stems from desirable personal characteristics that others are drawn to. You could call it “personal magnetism.”

Charismatic people are confident and assertive, and have presence – others notice them because of their strength of character. They’re usually very engaging and likable, and present an air of trustworthiness.

The more your team members pay positive attention to you, and enjoy your company, the greater your personal power and influence becomes.

When you have confidence and passion, and live a purposeful life, you are likely to have some charisma. Even if you’re not naturally charismatic, you can develop charisma.

But be aware that using charisma as a strategy to gain influence is not right for everyone, particularly if it’s your only source of influence – for example, if you don’t have expertise relevant to the business, too.

## Building Personal Influence

You can build more personal influence by:

- **Proving your worth** – do this by demonstrating your commitment to your organization’s success. The more valuable you are to those in positions of authority, the higher your degree of personal influence will be. Going the extra mile for your team members and for your manager can increase your personal responsibility, which will enhance your level of influence.
- **Embodying organizational values:** this is when you behave in a way that is consistent with your organization’s key values, beliefs and culture.
- **Demonstrating personal integrity:** do your actions match your words? If people can see that you live up to your values and mean what you say, they’ll see you as credible, honest and legitimate.
- **Embrace centrality:** when people see you as someone “in the know,” they assume that what you say and do has relevance. You can position yourself more centrally by building a strong network, and by seeking out projects that allow you to interact with people at all levels of the organization.
- **Being flexible:** people who wait to be told what to do tend not to be very powerful or influential. Look for ways to take the initiative, and to improve the way you work. Show people that you can think critically about situations, and that you can make sound, non-routine decisions.



- **Staying visible:** this is the degree to which leaders and other powerful and influential people see your efforts. And, if you can increase your face-to-face communication with senior people in the organization, even better! Improve your visibility by attending meetings and other events that influential people attend, and getting involved in chat forums or conversation in person and online.
- **Gaining relevance:** this is how well your personal tasks align with organizational priorities. The more your work is central to the organization's success, the greater your personal influence. Your challenge is to prove how your role contributes to the efficient operation of your organization, regardless of your position.



### Action:

Think about the seven elements we have described in the section about Building Personal Influence, on pages 5-6.

For each element, consider your current strengths and weaknesses. Write down your findings in the spaces provided, below. What elements are you strongest in? What elements are you weakest in, or need to improve the most to build your personal influence?

	Strengths	Weaknesses
Proving Your Worth		
Embodying Organizational Values		
Showing Personal Integrity		
Embracing Centrality		
Being Flexible		
Staying Visible		
Gaining Relevance		

## 4. Using Your Power and Influence

**H**aving power and influence is one thing, but it is not the whole story – you also have to know **how** to use it. You can be an expert with a high-profile job and have lots of contacts but, if you don't know how to relate to people and get them on your side, your power will likely be ineffective.

What's important is to be able to get others to work with you willingly, so that you can accomplish your goals.

A great strategy for gaining influence with coworkers is to use a combination of reason, and establishing common ground or purpose. By this we mean getting people to respond positively to your request by explaining your needs, and by trusting their good intent.

The success of this approach depends on your ability to persuade others by using facts, and by positioning your team members' needs and personal values at the core of your argument. You can do this by framing your proposals in the following way:

- “I'd like you to \_\_\_\_ because I think we'd both find that it's good for/necessary to/consistent with...”
- “The experts support this idea, and I'd be happy to share their findings with you...”
- “Completing this task would also help you to meet your own objectives by...”

Also ensure your requests align with people's needs and values by framing them in the following ways:

- “Because we trust one another and have worked well in the past, I'm asking for your support...”
- “By agreeing to this, you're working for the common good because...”
- “The outcome will be so much better if you help us, because you're the expert in this area.”

### Note:



The idea of persuading someone to do something is sometimes confused with manipulation, even if it's based on a rational argument. Manipulation is deceitful, and you won't be influential for long if you behave like this.

The key to using persuasion effectively is to leave the other person feeling empowered by going along with you.

A rational argument can help you to gain influence, but so can an inspirational appeal to others. This can be particularly motivational and help to build people's passion, excitement, enthusiasm, and commitment for your cause. These are all necessary for you to achieve great things with your team.

For example, if you're an influencer, people already listen to your ideas. Even if they don't like what you suggest, they'll likely go along with it. But if you talk about what you want with passion, and have a clear vision of the organization's future, chances are you'll get a more positive response.

If you combine an inspirational approach with a rational argument, you're more likely to meet your objectives. And when you do this to benefit the organization, your power and influence will increase exponentially.



### Tip:

There may be times when your best attempts to influence someone keep meeting with resistance. They may be reluctant to help because of the burden they think it puts on them, or simply because you have no authority over them.

In such cases, the other person may be thinking, "What's in it for me?" You can explore strategies for using reciprocity to gain influence in our article, [The Influence Model](#).

## 5. Scenarios

In this chapter we'll look at three scenarios in which people feel powerless and unable to influence their situation. As you read through them, think about why they feel this lack of power. What area of personal influence do they feel they lack (refer back to pages 5 and 6 to remind yourself about the seven key elements of personal influence), and complete the action below.

### Action:



Read through the following three scenarios. Think about why each person feels powerless - do they have a lack of expertise or charisma? What could they do to boost their power and influence, and achieve the impact that they want.

Jot down your thoughts in the spaces provided on pages 10-12.

### Scenario One

**A frontline supervisor thinks it's his organization's rules and regulations that are managing his team... not him!**

Surinder has been a supervisor for less than a year. At first, he was delighted with his promotion. Unfortunately, the situation turned sour quite quickly. He thought this position would help him to progress within the business. Instead, it's looking like a dead end.

It seems to him that the only time he gets noticed is when something goes wrong. He feels caught between trying to support his team and being pulled in another direction by his superiors, leaving neither side satisfied.

The organization has very strict rules and policies, which make it hard for him to respond flexibly to requests from his team. Essentially, there is only one way to do things: the company way! To cope, Surinder has become increasingly strict with his people, so at least he knows that the work is done in the right way.

However, because he only seems to get attention when there's a problem, he has started to treat his team members in the same way, and he rarely congratulates them on their successes.

The increased rigidity and focus on rules and regulations has left the team feeling unappreciated and resentful. As a result, productivity is suffering.

**Question 1:**

**What could Surinder do to gain more influence within his team and among his superiors? Write your answer in the space below:**

## Scenario Two

**A communications specialist thought her role would be central to shaping the organization's strategy. Instead, she finds herself on the sidelines.**

Cait has been working as a press officer for two years. Her career plan was to gain visibility, learn about the industry and business, and then move into a general management role. The reality is, she feels isolated.

Her area of influence is extremely small, and she has limited knowledge of strategic developments within the business. The only authority she has is confined to decisions that affect her. She only hears about new projects through mass-circulated emails, and when her boss – the VP of Operations – tells her what she'll be working on next.

Because Cait is considered an expert, she hasn't been offered any professional development opportunities. She is given assignments, works on them by herself, and delivers them to her boss, who rarely speaks with her except when she's handed a new project.

Cait has her own office, works in isolation most of the time, and has little opportunity to develop relationships with her co-workers. What's more, her boss has brought in a communications consultant a few times to work on projects that Cait thinks she's more than capable of handling herself. This has made her cling onto the work she does, which means she's even more on the periphery.

The job that she thought would lead to bigger and better things has actually moved her away from her career goals.

**Question 2:****What should Cait do? Write your answer in the space below:**

### Scenario Three

**An executive is keen to lead his organization, but he is held back by day-to-day issues and tasks.**

Adrian has reached the pinnacle of his career. When he was promoted to CEO recently, he was ecstatic. Finally, the recognition for all his hard work managing various departments had happened. He learned the business from the bottom up, and became a great manager who was known for his innovative ideas and entrepreneurial spirit. He couldn't wait to bring those qualities to the top job, and to make a difference to the organization's performance.

After a few months, however, Adrian's elation has turned to frustration. Instead of spearheading change, and driving innovation, he is caught up in dealing with a mess of restrictions from every direction. He has to contend with government regulations, union officials, labor statutes, a corporate board that demands more and more accountability, shareholders who want immediate results, and increasingly demanding customers on social media.

He is having to deal more and more with the minutiae of everyday work, and he has no time left for strategic planning. He's fighting fires just to keep the organization on an even keel, when he thought he'd be inspiring people and making a difference.

This operational focus has also caused him to lose touch with what is happening in the organization each day. And he feels that people only tell him what they think he wants to hear.

Adrian has information about the state of the organization, which he can't share with his team until the time is right, and he knows that certain coworkers don't trust him. The saying, "It's lonely at the top," has taken on real meaning.

Now he hears a rumor that some people think he should be fired. His response is to withdraw even further, and to confide in even fewer colleagues. He's started down a negative path, and he feels he's losing control of the situation.

**Question 3:**

**What can Adrian do to regain his influence? Write your answer in the space below:**

## 6. Scenarios: Suggested Solutions

### Scenario One: Suggested Solution

#### **Surinder, the Frontline Supervisor**

Surinder needs to appeal to his team members and supervisors in a way that says, “I’m competent and I can handle the situation. You need to trust me.” Right now, though, he’s caught in the middle and everyone blames him.

He should focus on building his relationships and increasing his charismatic power to improve his personal influence. He needs to act in a way that builds trust and respect, by being transparent, personable and approachable. He should focus on being more authentic and accepting, and on communicating openly and honestly about these problems with his team members.

This will give him the opportunity to explain what’s happening, and to share with others some of the pressure he’s under. As he builds his personal power, he’ll likely be able to rely on people’s goodwill from the past, and persuade them to give him their support.

He also has to explain to his team members that they will share in his success if they support him. Not acknowledging their accomplishments and failing to give praise properly, will limit his influence and could cause discord and demotivation. It may even lead to conflict, if it continues.

Surinder should look for ways to add value to his role, and to accomplish more than his bosses expect. By making himself known for getting things done, he will gain visibility among more senior people. This will significantly improve his ability to influence upward.

His “rules-and-regulations” approach to management is not going to improve his power and influence. He needs to be flexible, and look for opportunities to innovate and make improvements. If he does this, he and his team will soon reap the rewards.

However, Surinder also needs to be mindful of his organization’s culture. He doesn’t want to be seen as a maverick, but he can turn his attention to influencing his superiors to investigate less restrictive ways of running the business. For example, he could research and present new best practice in his sector.

The ability to influence upward in this way is a great way of increasing your power and influence among your team members and your peers.



## Scenario Two: Suggested Solution

### Cait, the Communications Specialist

Cait has fallen into the “specialist trap.”

Expert power is a double-edged sword. She has made herself vital in one specific area, but this means that her ability to gain influence beyond her role is limited. She needs to concentrate on building her network and becoming more of a central figure within the organization.

She should look for ways to get information to filter **through**, rather than **to**, her. She might even want to consider taking on extra work that is more critical to operations. By doing this, she will learn about the organization, and others will see her as knowledgeable and valuable.

She must also increase the relevance of her role. She needs to bring its importance to senior managers’ attention. (Hopefully these are people she’s building relationships with.) She could also look at ways to use her skills in other departments, or train or mentor new people so they are more aware of her expertise, her role and her accomplishments.

Cait should explore ways to increase her visibility, as the only person who sees the results of her work is the VP of Operations. She could find opportunities to present what she does in person, rather than just writing reports, and join committees so she’s in contact with other executives.

She could also increase her sphere of influence by attending organizational events, talking with others about what it is she actually does, and by being more active online and on social media.

The more she can make herself and her work visible throughout the business and the sector as a whole, the greater influence she will enjoy.

## Scenario Three: Suggested Solution

### Adrian, the CEO

Adrian needs to slow down and look at the basics. He should evaluate the source of his expert power, and use it in his daily work. People knew him for his innovation and entrepreneurial skills, so he needs to rediscover those qualities. He’s lost influence because he’s not doing what he’s good at, or what he was recognized for in the first place.

He should also revisit the organization’s values, decide what they stand for, and behave in a way that aligns with them. He was promoted because of his creativity, yet he is predominantly doing administrative work. If he delegates his regulatory responsibilities, this will free up his time to lead.

One way he can regain his colleague’s trust is to improve the way he communicates with them. Their suspicions will only increase unless he addresses the issue “head on.” To start with, he should be honest, express how he feels, and tell people what he needs from them. If he can return to the way he was before he became CEO, he will earn back their trust and respect.

Adrian should call a meeting with his team to discuss the state of the organization in honest and stark terms. He should address the rumors that say he should be fired, and talk about the pressure he's been under. He should do this in an appropriate manner – that is, without complaining or acting like a victim. This will improve his charismatic power. The more he shares with others, the sooner he will regain his personal influence.

He should also appeal to people's desire to help him and the organization. He will be most influential by focusing on the collective need and the common good of his team. He can once again inspire people to shine in their own right and to explore their untapped strengths.

Overall, he needs to be bold and innovative in his response to the situation. These are the qualities that made him successful in the past, and they will serve him well now and in the future.



## 7. Key Points

**T**o achieve your goals, you need to be able to influence and gain the respect and support of others. Whether it's to get approval for expenditure beyond your budget or to get a new marketing campaign signed off, our ability to influence people at work is important.

Your level of influence depends on a number of factors, ranging from your character, your expertise, your role, and your visibility, to the way that you align your goals with your organization's objectives.

Not everyone is in a position of power or authority, but you can improve your own personal influence by:

- Proving your worth.
- Embodying organizational values.
- Demonstrating personal integrity.
- Embracing centrality.
- Being flexible.
- Staying visible.
- Gaining relevance.

You can also gain commitment from your team members by appealing to their shared needs and to the common good. Use rational arguments, along with inspirational appeals, to gain their buy in, and to create enthusiasm and passion for your ideas.