

CHAPTER 1

IS YOUR INFLUENCE OUTDATED?

The challenge begins with the mistaken belief that how we influenced others in the past still works in today's world of business.

Let's go back to Michael, my client who received the gift of feedback from a car-service driver. There is more to his story.

Like I did, you may have wondered if Michael and his company got the contract he was so confident they would win. It turns out the contract was awarded to a different company, a new player in the industry.

When I asked Michael why he thought they didn't get the business, he said, "I felt like I gave a powerful and persuasive presentation to the client. And I don't think I lost the deal because of that less-than-stellar phone call with my contact on the way to the airport, although it probably didn't help.

The business environment has changed dramatically in recent years, yet our understanding of influence hasn't kept pace with changing times.

"When I followed up with my contact, she said the company they chose didn't have a significantly better solution, cheaper price or more experienced team," Michael explained. "She said they just felt more confident in the other organization's ability to meet their needs."

Although he didn't realize it at first, what really happened here was that Michael and his team lacked the influence necessary to close the deal. I share Michael's story because it's a powerful example of what many leaders around the country are now discovering: **how we have defined influence in the past doesn't consistently produce results in the new world of business.** Michael and his team were playing by the old rules in a new game and still expecting to win.

While we are all aware (perhaps somewhat painfully) that the business environment has changed dramatically in recent years, few recognize that our understanding of influence hasn't kept pace with changing times:

- Too many leaders still buy into common misconceptions about how we gain influence and what it means to be influential.
- Technology has made it easier for us to communicate, yet much more difficult for us to influence others.
- *Good* is no longer good enough in a competitive global marketplace.
- In today's business world, effective leadership requires influence not only in high-stakes situations but Monday to Monday®.

The prevailing influence paradigm is out of date. The world has changed yet our concept of influence hasn't. Let's find out why.

THE THREE MYTHS OF INFLUENCE

I wish I had a dollar for every time I've heard a client say, "I'm influential when I need to be" or "I have influence because I am a [insert any number of executive titles here—CEO, VP, etc.]." If only these sentiments were true. Influence would be so much easier.

Much of our thinking (and therefore our actions) around influence is based on misconceptions and mistaken beliefs. If we want to update our thinking about influence, we first need to address what I call the Three Myths of Influence.

Myth #1: “I feel influential, therefore I am.”

Many people believe that if they feel they are a certain way (such as a good driver or an effective communicator), then it must be true. All too often, leaders mistakenly believe that if they feel influential, then others perceive them the same way. This problem is compounded by the fact that few people are willing to give leaders honest feedback about their influence or lack thereof. As a result, they take their level of influence for granted.

The vice president of sales for a large organization recently told me, “I’ve been doing [sales presentations] a long time. I’m always comfortable. I never get nervous when I present.” I quickly pointed out that comfort doesn’t equal influence!

Just because you feel confident, credible and knowledgeable, and the person sitting across the table from you is nodding his or her head yes, does not mean you *are* influential. The proof is in the other person’s actions. Will they do what you want them to do—buy your product or service, accept your recommendation, follow your lead?

REALITY: Influence is evidenced by results.

Myth #2: Influence is situational.

Many leaders believe influence is a skill set that can be turned on and off, used only as necessary. We show up for the big event or critical conversation and “turn it on,” meaning we are very conscious of our demeanor, our presence, the words we speak, how we deliver those words, and how we interact with those around us. We turn our influence on for key presentations, sales and creative pitches, board meetings, product launch events, conferences, important meetings or when it’s time to rally the team around a goal.

Outside of these high-stakes events, we tend to turn our influence off. We seem to think it’s not necessary to be influential in our routine, daily interactions—answering the phone, typing out a text or chatting in

the hallway. This mindset leads to inconsistent behavior and unpredictable communication between leaders and listeners.

True influence is Monday to Monday®. There is so much more to influence than showing up and giving a powerful presentation or having a meaningful conversation. Real influence is developed not through a series of one-time events, but rather through the accumulation of our daily actions and interactions.

REALITY: Influence is all the time, in every situation.

Myth #3: Title = Influence.

There is a myth in corporate America that influence comes with a title. We operate under the assumption that the higher our position, the longer we have been in our field or industry, or the bigger our success, the greater our influence by default. Many leaders confuse authority and power with the ability to have impact and influence on those around them. You may have power, but do people follow you? Do they willingly act on what you have to say?

The truth is that position and influence are not directly correlated. An impressive title doesn't buy you a pass. Influence is not a badge of honor you receive as you move up the corporate ladder. It's not determined by years of service, pay grade, or even contribution or value to an organization.

We inherently know this myth isn't true when we observe other executives or high-level leaders who lack influence. Yet we don't consider that same possibility might be true for ourselves. The further irony of this myth is that as you are promoted, your need for influence increases, but a bigger salary and corner office don't guarantee you will have greater influence. Those with powerful titles are expected to be influential leaders, yet many aren't.

In *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, John Maxwell states, "True leadership cannot be awarded, appointed or assigned. It comes only

from influence, and that cannot be mandated. It must be earned. The only thing a title can buy is a little time—either to increase your level of influence with others or to undermine it.”²

“An individual’s title doesn’t predict influence, which is a problem, especially for someone in my position,” the CEO of an international advertising agency once said to me. “I often wonder, are people telling me what they think I want to hear because I’m the CEO? Or am I influential because people genuinely believe I have good ideas?” The good news for this executive is that he truly is influential.

**REALITY: Anyone has the capacity to be influential
if they are willing to do the work.**

Myths and misconceptions are just a few of the many factors that undermine influence. As long as we hang on to these outdated beliefs, we limit our potential to enhance our influence. Do you subscribe to any of the Three Myths of Influence?

The Top Ten Lies We Tell Ourselves about Our Influence

1. I’m an executive/leader—I’m already influential.
2. I can turn on influence when I need to.
3. I feel confident, credible and knowledgeable, so others must experience me the same way.
4. Influence only occurs in face-to-face situations.
5. Having influence in day-to-day interactions isn’t necessary or important.
6. People are on their phones while I talk because that is just today’s culture.
7. My work sells itself. I don’t have to be influential.
8. What I’ve done in the past has gotten me where I am, and it’s good enough to get me where I want to go in the future.
9. Influence is a “soft skill” that doesn’t really matter in the digital age.
10. I’m comfortable in high-stakes situations, and if I’m comfortable I must be influential.

TECHNOLOGY: THE DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

I recently attended a conference where I presented on the topic of influence. On the day of my arrival, I had trouble finding the exact conference location, and I texted the conference coordinator asking for specific directions. Her responses were abrupt and harsh, almost bordering on rude. When I met her in person, I found her to be the complete opposite: approachable, pleasant and welcoming. I presumed the tone of her earlier texts was simply due to stress.

When she and I emailed after the conference, her responses were again curt. I was surprised that someone in such a visible position wasn't more aware of her virtual persona. If I had never met this woman in person, my perception of her would be based solely on how she came across in her emails and texts. This experience made me wonder how many people have a less-than-positive perception of her and how that might be negatively impacting her business.

Technology has affected almost every aspect of our professional and personal lives, including our ability to influence others. With respect to influence, technology is a double-edged sword. **Technology has made it easier for us to communicate, yet much more difficult for us to influence others Monday to Monday®.**

In an always-on, always-connected world, we tend to overlook the importance of influence. Too often, we don't stop to think about how we show up or how our communication will be received. Case in point: the message at the bottom of emails sent via smart phones asking recipients for forgiveness of our spelling errors. It's easier and faster—yet far less influential—to ask forgiveness than to check ourselves before we hit send.

Recent statistics indicate that eighty-nine billion business emails are sent worldwide each day.³ According to The Radicati Group, the average corporate email user sends and receives between 105 and 125 email messages per day.⁴ That is an astounding number that doesn't even include text messages. A report by Heywire Business found that 67 percent of business professionals use text messaging for business-related

communication. Of those professionals, 72 percent text with internal coworkers and 51 percent text with external contacts such as customers, prospects and vendors. Furthermore, more than 33 percent of sales professionals say they have closed a business deal via text. The report concluded, “Business has stopped talking and started texting.”⁵

Have you ever thought about how many emails and texts you send each day? Have you thought about how each of those messages impacts your influence? Each one is an opportunity to stand out from the crowd and grow your influence. Each one is also an opportunity to be misinterpreted, to damage your reputation and to negate your influence. Welcome to the new world of business, where your influence is always on display.

*Your influence is
always on display.*

When it comes to influence, every interaction matters.

If you remember nothing else from this book, remember this one point: Every single interaction—even the virtual ones—matters. Every presentation, conversation, impromptu meeting, email, text, picture, video, post or phone call in the back of a taxi—is a representation of who you are and directly determines how others experience you. Every interaction is a representation of your voice and your personal brand and establishes your reputation. Every interaction either enhances or detracts from your influence.

YOU CAN'T INFLUENCE THEM IF THEY AREN'T PAYING ATTENTION

Imagine that you've been preparing for a critical meeting for several weeks. You've done your research and dissected your slides ten times. You've even practiced your presentation. As you walk confidently to the front of the room to deliver your presentation, you look out over the group and what do you see? A room full of people on their electronic devices, heads bowed in the “smartphone prayer.”

Now this might not be a problem if everyone disconnects and turns off their devices when the meeting starts. Wishful thinking! How often

does that happen? They will silence their devices when you ask them to, but they will still be connected . . . and distracted.

Heywire Business reports that 97 percent of text messages are read within three minutes of delivery.⁶ This suggests that the people in your audience will likely check their devices at least once, if not multiple times, during your presentation. Heywire Business also found that 59 percent of people use their personal mobile device frequently for business communications. Consequently, your listeners will not only be receiving emails and texts from customers, colleagues and team members, but also from their significant other, kids, friends and, perhaps, Amazon, confirming their order has shipped. How many of those incoming messages will result in multiple-message conversations? Probably most of them. The interruptions and distractions will be never-ending.

When you deliver that critical presentation you've worked so hard on, will you have your listeners' full attention? What is the likelihood they will all act on your recommendations? What are the chances they will even remember your message a week from now? Slim at best if you're not consistently influential.

Good news . . . you're not alone. Who hasn't found themselves in a situation where their listeners aren't fully paying attention? Most of us have also been on the other side of this example too. Have you ever sat in a meeting and found your mind wandering to weekend plans? Are you guilty of checking your email or surfing the web while on a phone call? Have you ever been in the midst of a face-to-face conversation when you hear the familiar sound of an incoming text message and wondered who it's from and what it's about?

We've all done it, and therein lies the challenge: **Every day we are trying to influence always-connected, digitally-distracted, often-over-scheduled, multitasking individuals.**

The digital age has generated a staggering amount of digital noise. It is pervasive, constant and deafening. Digital distractions make it

exponentially more difficult to capture and keep your listeners' and readers' attention. This is one of the key reasons why typical influence principles don't produce results in today's business environment.

I recently heard a story about an executive who explained that he texts during meetings because, of course, it would be inappropriate to make phone calls during meetings.

At first I thought, "Seriously?" Then I realized that this story beautifully illustrates how invasive and intrusive technology has become. The new world of business is all access, all the time. Communicating via text, email and social media anywhere and anytime has become not only acceptable but the norm. As acceptable as it may be, it constantly diminishes the impact of your message and your ability to influence people to action.

Perhaps you're thinking, "Stacey, it's really not a big deal. I can quickly answer a text or email and listen to someone at the same time." You might want to reconsider that notion. While most individuals believe they can multitask, science is proving that effective multitasking is a fallacy. (A participant in one of my sessions chuckled when I shared this information with his group. "My wife will be relieved to hear this," he said. "She thinks I'm abnormal because I can't multitask.")

In a report for National Public Radio, Earl Miller, professor of neuroscience at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, explains that our brains can't focus on more than one thing at a time. Rather than truly multitasking, our brains are actually switching between tasks.

"Switching from task to task, you think you're actually paying attention to everything around you at the same time, but you're actually not," Miller said. Referring to an example of writing an email while talking on the phone, he said, "Those things are nearly impossible to do at the same time. You cannot focus on one while doing the other. . . . They

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both involve communicating via speech or the written word, and so there's a lot of conflict between the two of them."⁷ The reality is that we cannot do two things at once, or at least not do them both well.

You can try to eliminate digital noise by banning all electronic devices. (Good luck with that one!) You will never be able to remove all distractions. One of the biggest obstacles to influence is something you can neither see or hear—the thoughts that are constantly playing in your listeners' and readers' heads. The report that has to be done by 5:00, the ongoing conflict with a coworker, how to get to the kid's game on time, where to go for lunch. Internal chatter is yet another distraction that drowns out you and your message.

The bottom line is this: If you don't have people's attention, you can't influence them.

In the battle for your listeners' and readers' attention, only one thing is going to win. Will it be you and your message, or their constantly chirping devices? If you are not more engaging and compelling than the digital distraction of the moment, you and your message will lose every time.

GOOD IS NO LONGER GOOD ENOUGH

"We are well-known in our industry for having top-notch products and solid relationships with our customers."

This is the message I repeatedly hear from prospective clients. These executives believe that their organizations are on the right track . . . that is, until they lose some major customers. That is usually when they contact me looking for help.

Like my client Michael and his organization in the earlier story, these organizations are typically quite competitive in terms of products, services, price and people. There is something else going on that is causing them to lose business: They lack influence with their customers. As a result, their customers don't hesitate to make a change when something

better comes along. Of course, having influence doesn't guarantee that your company won't ever lose customers, but often they will at least give you the opportunity to try to keep their business.

It wasn't all that long ago that good products, good service and good people set you apart from the competition. Today, good is the minimum standard. It's not enough anymore to have high quality products and services at a competitive price, or even strong customer relationships. These factors alone won't influence people to buy in a marketplace characterized by intense competition, limited time and higher expectations. Is it possible that being *good enough* might be sabotaging your future success?

When all else is equal between you and the competition, the business goes to the one with more influence.

When all other factors are essentially the same, the sale goes to the company that customers trust the most. I do a lot of work with companies in the advertising industry, coaching them on how to create a stand-out experience with their customers. The partners of these advertising agencies tell me, "Our competitors have accountant representatives who are just as experienced as our account reps and creative people who are just as brilliant as ours. The truth is we all do similar work. Our clients tell us the reason we win the business is because we make them feel good. They trust that we are going to make the deadline and meet the budget."

It is the experience your organization and your team create for customers that influences them to buy your products and services. Zig Ziglar once said, "If people like you, they'll listen to you. If they trust you, they'll do business with you." Customers want to do business with organizations and people who are consistent, credible, trustworthy, knowledgeable, professional and passionate. It's no coincidence that these are the foundational characteristics of true influence.

When all else is equal between you and the competition, the business goes to the one with more influence.

LEADERSHIP REQUIRES INFLUENCE

Just as *good* is no longer enough to keep a profitable bottom line, being a *good* leader will no longer get you where you want to go in your career. In today's work environment, getting people to buy into your vision, act on your recommendations and follow your lead is more challenging than ever. **The new world of business requires influential leaders.**

According to Gallup's most recent *State of the Global Workplace* report, 63 percent of employees worldwide are not engaged and 24 percent are actively disengaged.⁸ That means a staggering 87 percent of team members are likely unmotivated and unwilling to give more than the bare minimum required to get the job done. Now add to that the complexity of a highly diverse workforce, flatter organizational structures, virtual workplaces and the ever-present pressure to "do more with less."

Your team is only as strong as your ability to influence them. "As a leader, you can't do anything on your own," Kristin Derwinski, Director of Organizational Development at Briggs & Stratton, pointed out. "If you can't influence others to get where you want to go, you become an ineffective leader. Influence is about getting people to rally around a common cause."

A key element of effective leadership is the ability to delegate, and delegating is simply influencing others to do what you want them to do when you want them to do it. Your level of influence affects your team's morale, attitudes, culture, behavior and especially their productivity. Their results are a direct reflection of your influence as a leader.

"People have a deep desire to follow a leader who inspires them to be their best," says Mark LeBlanc, author of *Growing Your Business* and my business coach. "If a leader is influential, he or she has a greater likelihood of getting people to move mountains. The absence of influence determines whether an employee will go the extra mile or stop short of reaching his or her potential."

Lisa Zarick is Executive Vice President of Global Talent Management for Edelman (and a client of mine when she was with Leo

Burnett Worldwide). When I asked Lisa how important influence is to her job as a leader, she said, “Influence is the number one skill I use. I call upon it every day, whether I’m working with the executive team or others in the organization.”

Influence for influence’s sake is not the goal. In today’s business environment, influence is the highest form of competitive advantage for both individuals and organizations. It is the “X factor” that trumps all else. If you have influence, customers keep coming back even when you don’t have the best price. If you have influence, people keep following your lead even when you’re not there.

Some people might argue that influence is irrelevant in today’s business world. Nothing could be further from the truth. Influence is more crucial to success than ever. Is it possible your thinking about influence might be outdated? Maybe it’s time for an influence upgrade to “Influence 2.0.” In the next chapter, you’ll discover how redefining influence produces real and lasting results.

Influence Monday to Monday® is the highest form of competitive advantage for both organizations and individuals.

S U M M A R Y

- Our current thinking about influence doesn't produce results in today's business environment.
- True influence is Monday to Monday[®], evidenced by results and available to anyone willing to do the work.
- Technology has made it easier for us to communicate, yet much more difficult for us to influence others Monday to Monday[®].
- Every interaction is an opportunity to enhance (or minimize) your influence.
- If you don't have people's attention, you can't influence them. You and your message must be more compelling than the digital noise constantly distracting your listeners and readers.
- When all else is equal between you and the competition, the business goes to the one with more influence.
- Influence Monday to Monday[®] is the highest form of competitive advantage for both organizations and individuals.

YOU MAY NOT BE AS INFLUENTIAL AS YOU THINK YOU ARE IF . . .

Your listeners are active on their electronic devices while you are talking.

Do you find yourself competing with technical gadgets? When you and your message are not interesting or when you're not directly connecting with your audience, you in effect give your listeners permission to check their devices. If people are texting, checking email or otherwise involved with their electronic devices while you're talking, it's a sure sign that they are disengaged. If your listeners aren't engaged, they won't hear your message; and if they don't hear your message, the chances of you influencing them to take action are slim—

Your natural response to this situation might be to—

- Ignore the behavior, assuming it is part of the culture
- Talk faster and louder, hoping the change will draw listeners' attention back to you (yet in reality causing them to become even more disengaged)
- Call out the offenders, making everyone feel like they are back in grade school

For Influence Monday to Monday®:

1. **Pause.** The silence will grab the offenders' attention and bring it back to you and your message.
2. **Look individuals in the eye.** When speaking, look directly at an individual for a complete sentence or thought, something most presenters don't do. Your audience will immediately sense that you are connecting with them. They also will be less likely to get sucked into their technical gadgets when they know you will catch them not paying attention.
3. **Take control.** State at the beginning with confidence, "In order to honor everyone's time and receive the value you expect from our time together, please close and silence your phones, tablets and laptops. This will also allow us to end on time."
4. **Be interesting.** Boring communicators don't grab and keep the attention of their listeners. Listeners zone out when you read from your slides, especially when they are filled to capacity with charts, graphs and unreadable fonts. No one wants to be read to. Make a real connection with your listeners by communicating with passion and authenticity.