INFLUENCE

Influence Smarter:
Why "Keeping Score" Doesn't Work

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THE INFLUENCE GURU

Every time you influence someone, you make it easier or harder the next time. Principles for healthy, effective influence relationships.

Most of our important business, professional, and personal relationships are ongoing. Relationships in which we communicate and influence one another develop a history. Any specific influence opportunity or event is affected by the past and helps shape the future of the influence relationship. In other words, every time you influence someone you are making it either easier or harder to influence him or her the next time.

In thinking about an influence opportunity, consider the past, present, and future state of the relationship.

- **Past:** What has been our history of influencing one another? Has it been an effective, two-way influence relationship? Is there any unfinished business or unresolved conflict that might distract us from the influence issue at hand?
- **Present:** What is the current state of the relationship? Is there a comfortable rapport between us? Are we ready to get down to the business at hand or do we need to do some preliminary work?
- **Future:** What is the ideal state for this influence relationship? What do we need to do to establish that?

Much has been written and said about the importance of "win-win" relationships, but like many good ideas, it has become a cliché. If it is practiced in a demeaning, trivializing, or dishonest way (i.e., "Let Harry think it was his idea"), it will not work. People keep score in organizations and the current score can affect the outcome of any influence event. The scoring system in most organizations goes something like this:

> HOW ORGANIZATIONS KEEP SCORE
>
> - You owe me one.
> - I owe you one.
> - We're even.

These scores are usually only mentally recorded for "wins" of some substance (it cost one party something and the other party gained something from it). As long as both parties see the score the same way and keep the score in mind when influencing one another, the system works pretty well. Unfortunately, this system is very subjective and thus the current score is seldom understood the same way by each player. This can lead to conflict ranging from private grumbling and reluctance to cooperate to openly hostile relationships between or among individuals or groups.

A better basis for building influence relationships is through a set of principles. Some of these are implicit (unspoken but integral to the relationship) and some are explicit (discussed and agreed upon).

Implicit principles include:

- **Fairness:** The other will strive to be just and even-handed, to play by the rules.
- **Integrity:** The other will honor any agreements that he or she makes.
- **Trust:** You can assume that what the other says to be true is true.

Some people assume these principles to be true in absence of information to the contrary; others assume them to be false unless proven true by experience. Some people simply take a wait-and-see attitude about them in any new influence relationship. Once you have earned the other's assumption that these principles are true, any seeming abandonment of them will cost you dearly in trust and ability to influence successfully.

Explicit principles include but are not limited to the following:

- **Agreement to agree:** On a specific issue of importance to both or all parties, you begin by committing to a process that will only end when both or all parties are satisfied with the result.
- **Agreement to listen:** If any party is unsatisfied with the way things are working you will take the time to listen to one another's concerns. This also implies that if any party is unsatisfied, they agree to say something about it to one another rather than to third parties.
- **Agreement to resolve conflict:** If conflicts arise, you are committed to resolving them satisfactorily. If you cannot do it yourselves, you will jointly ask a third party to help you resolve it.
- **Agreement to think "outside the box":** You will put aside current limitations and assumptions and explore possibilities without premature judgment.

Explicit principles are usually tied to a specific process of influence, but can also be agreed to by teams or partners that work closely together over time. If these principles are operational in an influence relationship, the result will be trust. Trust is badly needed (and often in short supply) in fast-moving, changing organizations. When people trust one another, things get done. Time is not spent in "cover yourself" activities or "watching your back" or sabotaging agreements. Energy is not spent in unproductive conflict or duplication of effort. Influence happens in a natural way as part of the give and take of getting on with business when people don't feel they have to keep score anymore.

Once you have developed strong and healthy influence relationships, the process of gaining support and/or making things happen becomes a normal part of working with and living with others. You will succeed to the degree that you respect and honor these principles yourself as well as agreeing with others to abide by them.

Influence happens in a natural way when people don’t feel they have to keep score anymore.

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Founder of **The Influence Guru**, Kim Barnes is a coach, facilitator, and author with more than forty years of experience in leadership, influence, and organization development. She was a founder and, for many years, CEO of Barnes & Conti Associates, and developed or co-developed programs including *Exercising Influence*, *Inspirational Leadership*, *Intelligent Risk-Taking*, *Consulting on the Inside*, and *Managing Innovation*. She is the author of six books, including *Exercising Influence* (Wiley) and *Building Better Ideas* (Berrett-Koehler). She works with enterprise companies, government agencies, small businesses, and individuals from the San Francisco Bay Area.

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