INFLUENCE

# Influence vs. Manipulation:
## *Will You Build or Destroy Trust?*

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Leaders move teams to action through direct power, manipulation, or influence. Only one of them builds lasting trust.

In my previous post, I suggested that trust was a key factor in helping people work more effectively and efficiently on teams. As formal or informal leaders, it's our responsibility to help team members focus and move toward action in order to achieve a desired outcome. There are three basic ways that we can accomplish this: through the use of direct power, through manipulation, and by using interpersonal influence.

- We use legitimate power to direct others to do something that we want or need them to do. This is especially effective during an emergency, when fast, coordinated action is necessary and when you are seen to have the necessary expertise and/or authority. It may also be useful in situations where people are uncertain what to do or require instruction in how to accomplish a task. In military or other settings where there is a clear and accepted line of authority, direct power may have strategic value. There are, of course, negative consequences of using direct power.
    - It doesn't allow others to gain confidence in themselves as decision-makers and leaders
    - It doesn't leave space for alternative, perhaps better ideas
    - It leads to compliance rather than commitment.

Of course, there are always going to be situations where we lack legitimate authority, no matter how powerful we may be in some aspects of our lives – or we may choose not to use our power because we're looking for commitment to, ownership of, and accountability for taking an action on the part of others.

- Alternatively, we may find subtle or overt ways to manipulate others into doing what we want them to do. Perhaps we do this out of a desire to have people feel that sense of ownership or commitment – to believe that the action is their own idea. Unfortunately, few are fooled by this approach. We have taught our flagship program, Exercising Influence™, for more than twenty years around the globe and have asked thousands of people to describe the difference between influence and manipulation (as they experience either applied to them). The remarkably consistent response is that influence is done in the open and manipulation is hidden or false.

- Manipulation, they feel, attempts to trick them into taking an action that may even be against their own interests. Examples include:
  - having a "hidden agenda" for a meeting
  - presenting oneself as being open to influence on a decision when it has already been made
  - promising something that one has no intention or even ability to deliver in exchange for a commitment on the part of the other, or
  - misrepresenting facts in order to get others to buy into a proposal.
- Leaders who prefer to manipulate team members are seen as weak and less worthy of respect. Team members may take the desired action, but usually in response to the leader's authority rather than the manipulative behavior. A typical comment is "Why doesn't he/she just tell me what to do?"

Resorting to manipulation may represent a (usually forlorn) hope that we can make others think that something we want them to do is their own idea. It may reflect a skill deficit or a fear of being seen to exert power or influence. However motivated, it almost invariably leads to a loss of trust.

So, if your goal is to deliver results while sustaining and developing a strong relationship with others for the long-term, what kind of approach might work better?

Research clearly shows that influence is the best strategy for getting results and maintaining and developing a relationship for the long-term. People recognize that an influencer treats others with respect and offers them a choice to accept, reject, or change the action. The most effective leaders choose to influence others in an open, obvious, and reciprocal way.

- They use Expressive influence to Tell people what they need. They Sell them on the rationale or benefits. They Negotiate a fair agreement, or Enlist them in a cause.
- They use Receptive influence to Inquire about others' concerns or to Listen to their ideas. They Attune with others to build trust and they Facilitate team members' ability to act.
- They balance Expressive and Receptive influence behaviors so that the influence conversation goes in both directions.

Through the conscious and ethical use of influence skills, we as leaders can be successful both at building relationships and achieving results. In this way, we can build lasting trust with and within our organizations, teams, and families.

As I suggested in my previous post, the best teams are built on trust and offer trust from the start. However, in order to maintain and develop the kind of trust that leads to extraordinary results, leaders and members can consciously choose and practice interpersonal influence skills in all directions, resisting the temptation to hide behind the screen of manipulation and limiting their use of direct power to where it is essential.

*Some material in this post has been adapted with permission from the program, Exercising Influence: Building Relationships and Getting Results (Barnes & Conti Associates, 1994, 2015)*

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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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