THE POWER OF YOUR INFLUENCE

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The Power of Your Influence
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Introduction:

THE POWER TO CHANGE THE FUTURE

What is leadership? It’s an influence process—any time you are trying to influence the thinking, behavior, or development of another, you are engaging in leadership.

KEN BLANCHARD

You’re reading this book because you want to change the world. Perhaps you wouldn’t state it quite so dramatically, but the reason you picked up a book on the power of influence is that you have a vision for your life—or your family, community, church, or country—that remains unfulfilled. You want something to be different tomorrow than it is today.

Maybe that something is as mundane as having a clean house. You’d like your family or your roommates to pick up after themselves and do the dishes occasionally. You’re tired of nagging, and you don’t know what to do next.

Or perhaps you are after larger-scale change. You’d like to change the culture in your workplace or see different policies enacted at your school. You may even aspire to end human trafficking or solve the clean-water crisis in a developing country.

Whatever your dream may be, you’ve probably already discovered two important things: (1) You cannot achieve this alone, and (2) you cannot force others to join you. The only way to bring real, lasting change to your world is to harness the single most powerful attribute that you or any human being possesses: influence.
METHODS THAT DON’T WORK

When people long for change, they normally begin by trying two things that are equally ineffective. No doubt you’ve traveled these roads already. The first is to try to change the world by working harder. We might call this the *power-of-one* method.

**The Power-of-One Method**

When you see a problem, you say to yourself, “I can do something about this!” And you dive in with all your energy. You notice the trash along the roadside in your neighborhood, so you stop and pick it up. You want your organization to be more effective and efficient, so you stay later to get more done. You want the world to be a better place, so you become a better person.

The power-of-one approach is well illustrated by the often-repeated story of the starfish. According to one variation of the story, a young man is walking along the beach when he notices an older man picking up starfish that have been stranded by the tide and, one by one, throwing them back into the sea. The younger man surveys the beach and sees a countless multitude of helpless creatures on the sand.

“Look at all these starfish,” he says to the old man. “There must be thousands of them. What difference do you think you can make saving one starfish at a time?”

The old man nods, then picks up a starfish, throws it back into the water, and says, “It made a great difference for that one.”

The story illustrates the impact one individual can have on another, and it’s inspiring at that level. Yet many people who apply this philosophy eventually become frustrated and discouraged. They are moved by a great need but quickly become overwhelmed by its scope. Saving one starfish doesn’t solve the underlying problem, so they work harder and harder and harder. At the end of the day—or a few weeks, or perhaps a year or two—they become exhausted, crushed by the weight of an endless need. Some professions have developed terms to describe this, like *burnout* and *compassion fatigue*.

Working harder will not eliminate the problems you dream of solving. You will only exhaust yourself in the process. And that brings us to a second, equally futile approach.
The Power-Up Method

Realizing that the power of one will never be enough, many well-intentioned folks aim to enlist others in achieving the change they hope for. But, as you may have noticed, other people don’t always do what we’d like them to do. When they don’t, our first resort is often to apply some form of pressure to gain their compliance. We might call this the power-up approach.

We discipline our children, sometimes using corporal punishment, to make them behave. We implement policies in the workplace that will compel others to comply. We even pass laws that will force others to behave as we think they should. And those are just the formal uses of the power-up approach. Informally, we may resort to manipulation, social pressure, or even threats and intimidation to make others join us in the wonderful world we are trying to create.

The power-up approach is doomed to fail, however. Though it may be successful in the short term, social scientists have found that punishment is simply ineffective in changing behavior permanently. When the punishment or other external pressure is removed, people immediately revert to their former ways. And there are many occasions when powering up simply backfires, causing others to harden in their resolve.

Perhaps the best recent example of this comes from the Civil Rights Movement. During the early 1960s, civil-rights activists sought to desegregate bus terminals, universities, restrooms, and other public accommodations in accordance with federal law. Those in positions of authority powered up to prevent it. Activists were met with firm, often violent, resistance, including frequent arrests and the use of fire hoses and attack dogs. Those power tactics backfired, however, as activists persevered and continued to take their stand. In time, public sympathy swung in their favor.

Power tactics may bring a temporary change to a given situation, but they never work in the long run. To achieve the changes you envision, nagging, arguing, intimidating, or even legislating will not change the hearts and minds of others. To do that, you need a tool that is far more subtle, powerful, and effective. You need the power of influence.
A BETTER WAY

On August 28, 1963, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. stood on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., and addressed a crowd of some 250,000 people. As you may know, King was the leader of a nonviolent resistance movement aimed at securing equal rights for persons regardless of race. Rather than powering up, King’s followers powered down, allowing themselves to be arrested and sometimes beaten without fighting back. On that day in Washington, King delivered his now-famous speech “I Have a Dream,” in which he said he looked forward to the day when “all of God’s children”—no matter their background—could join hands and proclaim they are “free at last!”

These words rallied millions to the cause of civil rights. Without a bullhorn or bullwhip, nor a fire hose nor an attack dog nor a pair of handcuffs, Dr. King moved millions of people to change their minds about a pressing social issue, and thus changed the character of a nation. How did he do it? With the power of influence.

The purpose of this book is to enable you to achieve your dreams by teaching you to leverage that very power. If you are exhausted from trying to bring about change all by yourself, this book is for you. It will equip you to enlist others in pursuing your vision. If you are frustrated and perhaps even feeling foolish or guilty for the ways you’ve “powered up” on others, trying to force them to see things your way, this book is for you too. It will help you discover the freedom and confidence to simply be yourself, knowing that your life, your character, and the strength of your vision have far more potential to bring change than does any form of physical power or manipulation. And the stakes are high. Living out your faith by mastering the power of influence is one of the most important things you will ever do.

WHY THIS MATTERS

The power of influence matters so much because without it, you’ll be trapped in a cycle of frustration and ineffectiveness. The danger is that you may not achieve the dreams you have for yourself, or you may even find yourself worse off than before. That’s what happened on July 25, 1914. Two days earlier, Baron Giesl von Gieslingen, the
ambassador of the Austro-Hungarian Empire to Serbia, handed a note to the Serbian foreign ministry. A Serbian nationalist had assassinated Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife in Sarajevo, Bosnia. In response, the Austro-Hungarians powered up. They insisted the Serbian government comply to certain terms of agreement over the matter.

The Austrians assumed they could easily win with such a power move, but they were wrong. The deadline came and went, and Serbia mobilized its army. Three days later, Austria-Hungary declared war on the Serbs. Other European powers soon joined their allies on either side of the conflict, and World War I had begun, eventually costing more than 17 million lives.

When you resort to power over influence, you can have no idea what the unintended consequences will be. You probably won’t start an international war, but using power tactics in your home, your workplace, your church, or your community can have devastating effects. You risk losing relationships, bruising friendships, damaging your marriage, and destroying the very community context you hope to influence.

Gutting it out with the power-of-one approach can be disastrous also. The stress you may accumulate from overworking, over-caring, overcommitting, and overextending yourself can greatly affect your health—both physical and emotional—and your overall well-being.

Perhaps the worst consequence of not understanding the power of your influence is that you may never reach the goals you dream about. Your life, your family, and your community may never change in the ways you envision if you are not able to enlist others to join you through the positive, magnetic, irresistible power of your influence.

**POWER FOR GOOD**

Perhaps you’ve heard the old story about the salt shop. A man walked into a store one day and asked if they sold salt. “Sure,” the clerk said, “we’ve got lots of it. What kind do you need?”

“I’m not sure,” the man replied. “Why don’t you show me what you have.”

Taking the customer by the arm, the clerk led him through the store,
where he showed him row after row of table salt. “Is this what you’re looking for?” the clerk asked.

“I don’t think so,” the man replied.

“No worries,” said the clerk. “Follow me.” He led the customer deeper into the store to show shelves of kosher salt, rock salt, Himalayan salt, sea salt, flaked salt, pickling salt, softener salt, smoked salt, Alaea salt, and fleur de sel.

The customer’s eyes went wide with wonder. “Oh my!” he exclaimed. “You really do sell salt, don’t you?”

“No really,” the clerk replied. “We hardly sell any at all. But that salt salesman, wow! He really knows how to sell salt.”

When you master the power of influence, like the salt salesman, you’ll unlock your ability to enlist others in following your lead. Without powering up and without working yourself to death, you’ll begin to see the changes you envision. But make no mistake, influence is not mere salesmanship. Influence is the effect we have on others through our words, actions, and attitudes. It is the power of your life, character, and vision, shaping your world for the better. Yet most of us are unaware of the impact we have on others—either positive or negative.

What do you want to accomplish? Take a moment and envision the change you hope for in your family, in your community, or in your world. You’re about to learn the lessons that will enable you to make this vision a reality.

THE ROAD AHEAD

This book will show you how influence works on yourself, those around you, and the world at large. You will discover the tremendous power you have to affect the world for good, along with practical strategies to leverage that influence in order to make positive change.

Part 1 of this book lays a cognitive foundation for what follows. You will come to understand the nature of influence and how it operates in your life.

Chapter 1 introduces the idea that influence is the subtle effect you have on others through your words, actions, and attitudes. Your influence can be sweet and attractive, like the smell of freshly baked cookies,
enticing others to follow. Or it can have precisely the opposite effect. Like the first negative comment on social media, your influence may draw others into negative thinking and actions, leaving them worse off than before. You will become aware of the ways you currently influence others and be motivated to use your influence to make positive change.

Chapter 2 defines the three dimensions of influence: self, others, and the world. These are not discrete areas, as if influence in one arena were somehow separate from influence in the others. Rather, these three dimensions operate simultaneously. You have the power to influence your own thoughts and behaviors, the attitudes and actions of others, and those at one remove from you (the world). You will understand the dimensions of influence and realize the importance of influencing yourself and your great potential for influencing others.

Part 2 of the book is about crafting your influence. You will learn the nine key sources of your influence and how to produce a greater influence on others.

Chapter 3 describes the power of your vision. Vision is your preferred version of the future, a picture of the positive change you are trying to make in yourself and others. A strong, positive vision brings two benefits. First, it acts as a beacon in your life, guiding each choice you make. Second, it attracts others who may have a vague wish for positive change but have no idea how to articulate or pursue it. A person with a strong faith and a vision for the future will influence others. In this chapter, you will be prompted to articulate the positive change you are trying to make and to organize your life around it.

Chapter 4 describes the power of your thoughts. Your thoughts determine your influence because they affect everything about you. You cannot hope to influence others positively until you are thinking and living positively yourself. Centering on the age-old wisdom that “as [a man] thinks in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7 (NKJV), this chapter describes the incredible power of your thoughts in forming your actions and character. You will learn how to influence your own attitudes and actions by choosing positive patterns of thought.

Chapter 5 describes the power of your words. They are the single most powerful means of influence at your disposal. This chapter illustrates
the near inevitability that complaining, naysaying, belittling, and other forms of self-fulfilling prophecy will be realized. You will also be shown the tremendous power of positive speech to shape reality, while learning the speech patterns that influence others and gaining practical strategies for harnessing the power of positive speech.

Chapter 6 describes the power of your example. Your example is the silent influence you have over others, even when you are not aware of it. By embodying the change you hope to see in the world, you place a seal upon your words, giving them even greater power. In this chapter, you will learn how your example actually influences others, the factors that limit your positive example, and how to cultivate a consistently strong influence through your habits and actions.

Chapter 7 describes the power of your presence. Presence is the impact a person makes on others simply by being in the room. Presence is the sum of a number of subtle factors, including demeanor, manner of speech, facial expression, energy level, and behavior. In this chapter, you will come to see the often-underestimated effect of your presence both in person and online, and you will discover strategies for changing “the temperature of the room” simply by being present.

Chapter 8 describes the power of your encouragement. Encouragement is a form of positive speech that takes influence to a new level. When you encourage others, you directly influence their thoughts and actions. The results can be astounding. In this chapter, you will discover the explosive power of encouragement and be motivated to practice it consistently in your relationships.

Chapter 9 describes the power of your generosity. Generosity is giving to others without expectation or obligation. You can be generous with time, abilities, or resources. Generosity influences others in two ways. First, it establishes leadership by example, showing others the needs or opportunities that are most important. Second, it has a nudge effect, prompting others to be generous also. In this chapter, you will be inspired to become more generous and will be prompted to identify specific ways to practice generosity.

Chapter 10 describes the power of your commitment. Commitment is your willingness to stick with a positive vision even when it’s difficult
to achieve. Strong commitment is highly influential because people respect those who are willing to sacrifice for a goal over the long term. This chapter will provide strong motivation to remain engaged in the process of change over time.

Chapter 11 describes the power of your sacrifice. Generosity is sharing from abundance; sacrifice is giving of oneself at a level that risks loss. Sacrifice produces the most powerful influence because it is a demonstration of love. The influence of Gandhi, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Billy Graham, Bill Bright, John C. Maxwell, and other great leaders endures precisely because they were willing to put the needs of others ahead of their own. In this chapter, you will be inspired to give the greatest possible gift to others: yourself.

Finally, each chapter concludes with The Key Three: three critical questions for personal reflection. Remember that none of the learning in this book will benefit you if it stays inside your head. To be of use, it must trickle down into your heart and flow out through your words and actions. By reflecting on the ideas communicated here, you will both solidify the learning in your mind and discover practical ways to translate that learning into action.

When we have finished, you will realize what influence is, understand how it operates in your life and the lives of others, and be empowered to extend your influence to make positive change in yourself and in the world around you. What would you like to accomplish today? We’re about to begin the journey to achieve that goal.

**THE KEY THREE**

1. State the main reason you’re reading this book. What do you hope to achieve by it?
2. Are you more likely to resort to the power-of-one method, the power-up method, or the power of influence? Why?
3. How would you define influence?