



## Five Pathways to Influential Leadership

By Terri Klass

It is often said that leadership and influence are one and the same thing. Coaching leaders and presenting leadership development programs for many years has led me to the same conclusion. In fact, it is often not the person with the fanciest title who is the most influential in an organization or on a team.

One senior leadership team I worked with had many outspoken voices. When our meetings first started, I was having a challenging time trying to figure out why the most senior person wasn't speaking up or even given extra special treatment. It was fascinating to listen to the banter back and forth, trying to capture the most listened to voice. I kept processing these questions:

“Who is at the center of most of the conversations?”

“Which individual is being asked the most questions?”

“Who is yielding the highest level of authority?”

“Is it possible to delineate who really is the most influential?”

And then magically the answer emerged. To my surprise, the influential leader on this team was not the titled leader. It was someone much quieter, who carried greater presence and weight.

What made this person so impactful? How did this individual rise above the others to become the most respected? What contributes to influential leadership?

## Five Pathways To Influential Leadership

### 1. Competence

To be an influential leader it is without a doubt necessary to be skilled, knowledgeable and capable. If we try to lead without possessing the required competences, we may not be viewed as credible. That is not to say we need to be “the smartest one in the room”, but rather have a deep understanding of how to execute on the strategy.

### 2. Communication

As many leaders find out early on in their careers, it is essential to be a strong communicator. The most brilliant plan will fall flat if a leader cannot share their ideas with the rest of the team. Daniel Pink shares in his important book, “To Sell Is Human”, that to move or influence others we need to sell. We sell through our storytelling. When leaders are selling their message they need to be:

Openminded

Crystal clear

Respectful

Enthusiastic

In listening mode

### 3. Clear Vision

At the meeting with the senior leaders, it was apparent that only one individual knew where the organization needed to pivot. And that person did not have the golden title, but rather a clear direction forward. Leading with vision can sometimes mean responding to different opinions with ease and kindness.

### 4. Creativity

To be an innovative leader is to be an influential leader. What usually sets apart whether a team's buy-in happens or not, is whether or not a project is charting a new path forward. If a team senses that the status quo is being maintained, they are less likely to be swayed. Jump into more creative problem-solving by:

Looking at the problem as an opportunity

Brainstorming and playing around with new options

Embracing failure (it ultimately leads to new lessons and success)

### 5. Compassion

This final pathway to influential leadership is overlooked by some leaders. What is compassion? It is the ability to be sympathetic towards the pain points of others. When we lead with compassion, we not only demonstrate how much we care about our

team members, but we also key into what they are feeling. Leading with our hearts actually builds meaningful relationships which results in greater influence.

What helps you to be an influential leader?

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