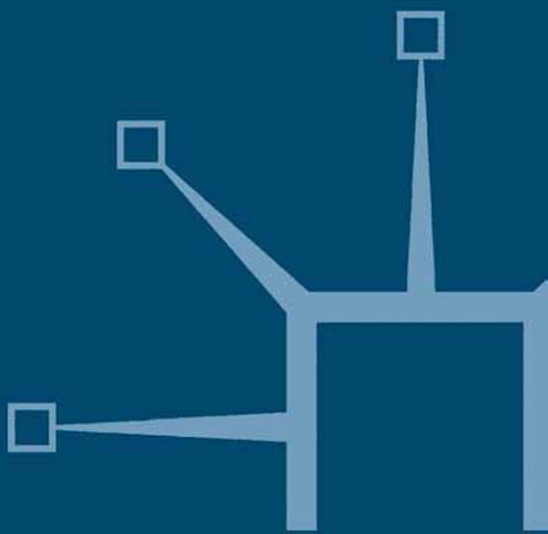


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BUILDING INFLUENCE IN THE WORKPLACE

HOW TO GAIN AND RETAIN
INFLUENCE AT WORK

Aryanne Oade



Building Influence in the Workplace

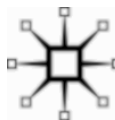
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HOW TO GAIN AND RETAIN
INFLUENCE AT WORK

Aryanne Oade
Director, Oade Associates Limited

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About the Author

Aryanne Oade has worked as a Chartered Psychologist since 1991. She has appeared on Channel 4 television speaking about customer complaints handling, has given an address on ‘Creativity in Business’ at the British Association for the Advancement of Science, and has appeared on Radio 4 speaking on the same topic. Aryanne has spoken at the Leeds and York Institute of Directors Breakfast Meetings on ‘Politics, Power and Profit,’ and at the British Psychological Society’s Annual Conference on ‘Stress Levels Among South Yorkshire Probation Officers.’ She is a member of the British Psychological Society’s Special Group in Coaching Psychology, and holds general membership at the Society’s Division of Occupational Psychology. Aryanne is also a member of the Association for Coaching.

Note from the Author

This book focuses on your influencing skills and how you apply them at work when handling a range of colleagues and co-workers. In writing the book, I am not seeking to advise you, the reader, on how to handle your workplace relationships, but rather to offer you my experience and know-how as someone who has coached and worked with hundreds of clients on these issues. In addition to reading this book, you might want to seek the services and professional advice of a coach, business psychologist or consultant, each of whom should be able to offer you tailored, detailed and impartial counsel on the more challenging inter-personal and influencing issues you might face at work.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge a number of people who have played a part in my work and the writing of this book.

Firstly, my thanks and gratitude go to all the clients who have spoken with me about their experiences of seeking to gain and retain influence at work. I am grateful to the many clients who have shared with me their successes, frustrations, reactions, and strategies for managing – and using – influential behavior in the workplace. These are perhaps the most frequently recurring concerns that clients bring to coaching meetings, and the ones that most often see them making rapid progress back at the workplace.

Next, I would like to thank the clients and contacts who allowed me to pick their brains at the start of the writing process for this book. These conversations were valuable to me, helping me to decide how to structure and focus its chapters. I send my thanks to each one of you gratefully and anonymously.

Then, I'd like to send my appreciation to Julie Perry and Gina Rowland for their helpful critique of the early chapters of the book; and to Arthur Soar for his feedback towards the end of the writing process.

Finally, I'd like to acknowledge the contribution of Stephen Rutt and the team at Palgrave Macmillan for their effective collaboration through the production process.

Overview

WHAT THIS BOOK IS ABOUT

This book is about personal influence at work: what it is, how to gain it, how to retain it, and how to use the influence you have already attained to get things done. It is about your ability to acquire and sustain influence with colleagues with whom you have some shared values and some things in common, as well as being about building and retaining influence with colleagues with whom you have no shared values and very little in common.

The book examines how to build influence with the colleagues you meet every day in your team or department, as well as how to build influence with your organization's opinion-formers and decision-makers, colleagues with whom you might meet infrequently and for short intervals only. The book will help you to understand your own values as an influencer, and enable you to recognize the links between 'having influence,' 'having power' and 'having responsibility.' It considers how to position your influencing arguments with colleagues who have different values from you and who won't be influenced by the factors which readily influence you. It examines how to build influence with irresponsible colleagues and with colleagues who want you to behave in ways that conflict with your wishes. It explores effective ways of raising your profile outside of your department, and effective ways of building influence with internal clients and senior managers. It will equip you with strategies, tactics, techniques and know-how so that you can learn how to consistently use behavior that proves persuasive with all your colleagues and workplace contacts.

The book is written for people at work at any level of an organization in any part of the world. The book outlines the principles for creating and maintaining influential relationships at work, and those principles are relevant across the board. So, whether you work for a small, medium or large organization and no matter which continents you work in, this book should help you to become a more influential member of your organization's workforce.

WHY I WROTE THIS BOOK

I wrote this book for the very many of you who go to work and need to get things done in tandem with others in order to be effective in your roles. The main sets of skills you need to be effective day in, day out are influencing skills. You can't use authority to get things done when you work with your peers or your managers, and it isn't considered wise to do so with your team members except when you really need to. On a day-to-day basis you will have to find another way to get done the things you need to get done. You need to go to work every day and establish and maintain effective, influential connections with your colleagues, some of whom you may not naturally like or want to work with, but with whom you need to gain and retain influence if you are to succeed.

In many organizations it's the unofficial connections between people that determine what decisions get made, which projects receive funding and support, which ideas receive sponsorship, who gets promoted and even who gets hired and fired. Learning how to build and retain influential relationships with your colleagues is a key component of organizational life, but most people have to work out for themselves how to do it effectively. It's not part of the induction program. I wrote this book for those of you who want to speed up the process of gaining influence with key colleagues, as well as for those of you who want to know how to retain the influence you already have and use it to help you achieve the goals and objectives that matter to you.

I wrote the book out of a firm conviction that being technically able at your role often isn't enough to build a reputation at work. It's OK as a starting point, but is no more than that. I believe that most frequently it's the quality of the relationships you build with your colleagues that will determine how effective you are perceived to be. And many people working in organizations today have had very little or no development in the influencing and people-handling skills they need to enable them to engage productively with and work effectively alongside a range of colleagues and co-workers. Without the ability to build influential relationships with your colleagues, retain influence with them and use the influence you do have to get things done, you may well not be seen as an influential member of the workforce even if your knowledge base and technical skills might suggest you could be.

BUILDING INFLUENCE AT WORK

If you want to have influence in the workplace it is vital that you develop and hone an effective set of influencing skills, tactics and strategies from which to select when handling different people, issues and personalities. Your suite of influencing tools needs to be sufficiently well developed that you have options when interacting with, interpreting and responding to the many different people around you. It needs to provide you with choices for handling managers more senior than you, colleagues who are your peers and those who work at a more junior level to you.

Your suite of influencing skills also needs to enable you to handle people with whom you share objectives and values as well as those people who want different things from you and whose methods of getting things done are very different from yours. It must also help you handle those colleagues skilled at appearing to be productive while not achieving very much at all, as well as managing those colleagues who want you to supply the energy, ideas, or strategies they subsequently pass off as their own.

This book will help you to become more accomplished at all these things. It will equip you with the insight, self-awareness, know-how, skills and knowledge that will enable you to:

- Recognize and manage the impact of your influencing style on other people.
- Read other people's influencing styles effectively.
- Select and apply the most useful and effective influencing strategies and tactics in a range of key situations.

MY BACKGROUND AND WORKPLACE EXPERIENCE

I am a Chartered Psychologist. I began working as a business psychologist in the late 1980s. During the following five years I worked for three consultancy firms before deciding to work as an independent business psychologist in early 1994. I made this move because I wanted to spend the greater part of my time working directly with clients, rather than managing colleague relationships. Some of my initial projects were carried out as an associate to smaller consultancy firms. Then, in January 2000, I set up Oade Associates to design and deliver bespoke executive coaching programmes,

tailored professional skills workshops and custom-made conference scenarios.

In this work I combine business psychology with the skills of professional actors. We create real-life scenarios that reflect the leadership and influencing, negotiating and conflict-resolution, political management and people-handling issues that my clients deal with in their day-to-day work. Since starting Oade Associates, I have run hundreds of executive coaching programs and professional skills workshops for managers and leaders working in the United Kingdom, Europe and North America. Many of these projects have involved working with clients on the reality of building, retaining and using influence at work.

In my coaching programs and workshops I ask clients to step back from their day-to-day work and workplace experiences. I ask them to reflect on the quality of the influencing behavior they use when things are going well for them, and to compare that with what they do when they are under pressure. Then, with the help of my professional actor colleagues, I recreate the very meetings clients find most challenging, meetings that they mishandle or in which they lose influence or credibility, and help clients to revisit these meetings using different and more productive influencing behavior, skills and tactics. I coach them to understand the links between their intra-personal world – their values, character and personality – and their inter-personal behavior: the influencing tactics, skills and strategies they use with other people. Clients practice their new influencing approaches until they are satisfied that they can go back to work and use them straight away. As a result of working in this way clients perform better in their roles, have greater influence in their key workplace relationships and demonstrate sustained behavior change.

In addition to working one-to-one and with small groups I also work with conference audiences. In this case I develop a series of custom-made sketches which my actor colleagues subsequently enact live on stage. Audience members discuss and debate the action at round tables, so that they can learn from one another's experiences of handling similar instances, and decide which inter-personal skills and tactics work well in particular situations and which don't. Scenarios have focused on managing the boundaries between colleagues' personal and private lives, handling under-performing colleagues and responding to perceived harassment and sexism at work.

This book comes out of my experience of helping hundreds of clients

to develop the influencing skills they need to perform effectively in their roles, and out of my belief that it is the quality of a person's people-handling skills that largely determines who will gain and retain true influence in the workplace.

How To Use This Book

WHO THIS BOOK IS FOR

I wrote the book for those of you who want to understand what practical actions you can take to become a more influential member of your team, department or organization.

Some of you simply may not know how to go about gaining influence. In this case you may be someone who:

- Has excellent technical knowledge but lacks the people-handling skills you need to develop your reputation beyond your immediate team.
- Knows your stuff but struggles to get senior, more influential people to listen to your ideas and proposals.
- Knows what needs to be done, but has difficulty convincing other people to sponsor your plans or take on board what you are saying.
- Has great ideas but doesn't know how to sell the merits of your proposals to your colleagues, and may sadly fail to get the level of profile your suggestions deserve.
- Works very hard but does not get the opportunities or rewards that your skill, effort and commitment merit.

I wrote this book for those of you who identify with any or all of these situations. I also wrote this book for those of you who don't know how to take advantage of the opportunities to influence that you already do have. You may:

- Struggle to select and use behavior which proves influential with key senior colleagues or key peers when you meet with them.
- Be unable to actively manage the perceptions you create in the minds of your key workplace contacts and fail to secure their good opinion even when you have something valuable to say.
- Not recognize the negative impact that your current influencing style has on some of your colleagues.
- Fail to select and use the most influential arguments in the ad hoc or more formal meetings you have with senior people, where what you say is just as important as how you say it.

WHAT THIS BOOK WILL DO FOR YOU

This book will take you through a process of stepping back from your day-to-day work and considering how you go about influencing key colleagues in the workplace. It will help you to reevaluate how you initiate and respond to opportunities to exert influence at work, and encourage you to reassess how you build influence with your key workplace contacts.

The book will introduce you to a series of case studies and smaller examples, each of which mirrors realistic workplace influencing dynamics. These case studies and smaller examples will illustrate the pitfalls, mistakes, oversights, and errors of judgment that can lose you influence and harm your credibility. They will also provide a blueprint for how to go about maximizing the influence you could have in a range of key workplace situations.

As you read the book you will be encouraged to step back from your day-to-day work and:

- Review how you currently seek to influence a range of your key workplace contacts.
- Identify your areas of strength and your areas for development as an influencer.
- Make decisions about what to do to improve the way in which you set about influencing your key workplace contacts.

Periodically, the book contains a series of questions for you to consider and answer in relation to your experiences of seeking to build influence at work. Each question is followed by a space in the text so that you can jot down your answers to it if you want to. These questions will provide you with an opportunity to apply the key points from the previous sections of the book to your working life, helping you get the most out of the process of reading the material.

THE CASE STUDIES AND SMALLER EXAMPLES

From Chapter 1 onwards, the book will introduce you to a series of case studies and smaller examples. Each of these scenarios mirrors realistic workplace influencing situations. A few of the scenarios are based on real-life dynamics. In each of these instances the details of the characters, the setting of the events, and the specific details of the scenarios have been fictionalized to protect the identities of the people involved.

Following an outline of the key facts of the case study or smaller example, you will find each of the following four sections.

The opportunity to influence. This section takes you behind the facts and specific detail of the action to identify the exact nature of the opportunity to influence presented in the scenario.

Handling the personalities. Here we take a deeper look at the personality of the characters with whom the main character wishes to build influence. We identify those factors that would or would not prove persuasive with that particular character's personality. This section gets behind a character's actions, words, and behaviors to understand their motivations and intentions and identify the best ways to handle them and build influence with them.

The outcome. This section describes the outcome of the main character's attempts to build influence in the scenario given their influencing style, the personality they are dealing with and the skills and tactics they employ.

Conclusions. In this last section we draw key lessons from the example.

THE NARRATIVE CASE STUDY

The final chapter of the book takes the form of a narrative case study. The narrative follows the progress of an employee who switches industry and needs to find his feet in his new job. The case study describes how the main character adjusts to the culture of his new employer over a ten-month period. It examines what influencing strategies he uses and when, how he evaluates the success of these strategies, how he builds influence with a range of colleagues, and what lessons he assimilates from making errors of judgment while trying to do so.

The narrative case study illustrates all the key learning points from the previous chapters of the book. It highlights realistic workplace influencing dynamics and explores a range of factors that the main character needs to take into account as he seeks to gain and retain influence in his new place of work.

WHAT YOU WILL NOT FIND IN THIS BOOK

This is a practical book which focuses on how to build and retain personal influence at work. It does not include discussions of organizational influencing strategies or the theoretical tactics of

influence. Nor does it explicitly discuss issues of demeanor, dress sense, or body language, although it does refer to them from time to time. Instead the book focuses on which behaviors prove influential and which do not prove influential in a range of key influencing situations in your workplace.

The book mainly concerns your relationships within your workplace with your colleagues and co-workers. In other words it focuses on how to build influence with your peers, senior managers, team members and internal clients. It does not feature chapters on how to build influence with clients or customers external to your organization, although some of the techniques and ideas in the book may well provide you with ideas on how to build more influence in these relationships too. Those of you who would like a book on building and sustaining influence with your clients might like to know that one of my forthcoming books will be *Handling Clients Effectively: How to Initiate, Sustain and Retain Long-Term Customer Relationships*. The book will be published by Palgrave Macmillan.

YOUR INFLUENCING BEHAVIOR

This book is written for you, the reader, and it comes with a note of caution. In my experience, when someone tries to have influence in a certain situation at work, and finds that they either don't build much influence at all or, at some point, manage to lose the influence they had previously secured, there are usually very specific reasons for this failure. It is often because they did not think deeply enough or clearly enough about the factors that matter most to the other key players in the situation. They may have only considered some of the issues, or all of them but only from a certain perspective. Or they may have only seen things from the point of view of some of the key players or themselves and not considered all of the alternative points of view. They therefore select ineffective influencing strategies, or worse, self-defeating ones, and suffer the consequence of receiving a dent to their reputation.

My wish is that, with the help of this book, you will avoid these pitfalls more often than not and that the input from this book will enable you to:

- Become more skilled, more effective and more productive at sizing up situations and reading them effectively before seeking to build influence in them.

- Act in ways that will gain you the degree of influence you would like to have in the situations that matter most to you.
- Retain and nurture the influence you do gain until you have a healthy, effective network of influential workplace relationships to draw on.

Contents

1 What is Workplace Influence?	1
What is influence at work?	1
Having influence in the workplace	2
Having influence at work: a definition	3
An example of using influential behavior	4
Applying the definition to the example	5
Your experience of ‘having influence’	6
Acquiring influence	8
Three critical questions	10
Question one: why do some people find it easy to acquire influence?	10
Question two: what causes some people to lose the influence they have already acquired?	12
Question three: why do some people struggle to build any influence at all?	13
True influence	14
The dangers of confusing ‘having power’ with ‘having influence’	15
Summary and next chapter	16
2 Influence, Power and Responsibility	17
Influence and responsibility	18
Case study one: interim manager	18
The opportunity to influence	20
Handling the personalities	21
The outcome	22
Conclusions	23
What do you want?	24
The reality of having greater influence	25
The benefits of having greater influence	26
The downside of having greater influence	27
Using your influence unwisely	27
Retaining power and control	28
Using your influence wisely	29
Your response	30
Summary and next chapter	31

3	Four Sets of Influencing Values	32
	Influencing your colleagues	33
	Four sets of influencing values	33
	Generating momentum, directing events	34
	Ensuring quality, managing risk	35
	Building rapport, contributing excellence	36
	Managing perceptions, marketing achievements	38
	Your influencing behavior	38
	Case study two: shifting influencing style	40
	The opportunity to influence	45
	Handling the personalities	46
	The outcome	48
	Conclusions	48
	Making the most of your opportunities to influence	48
	Case study three: valuing different things	50
	The opportunity to influence	53
	Handling the personalities	55
	The outcome	57
	Conclusions	57
	Your influencing behavior	58
	Summary and next chapter	61
4	Positioning Your Argument	62
	Why can't they see it?	63
	Gaining buy-in to key proposals	65
	Your influencing behavior	70
	Case study four: the go-between	72
	The opportunity to influence	75
	Handling the personalities	75
	The outcome	79
	Conclusions	79
	Your influencing behavior	80
	Summary and next chapter	81
5	Moral Conflicts: Your Resolve Under Pressure	83
	Doing the 'right thing'	84
	Clarifying the boundaries	86
	Standing firm	88
	Case study five: trading up	89
	The opportunity to influence	91
	Handling the personalities	92
	The outcome	97

Conclusions	98
Your influencing behavior	98
Case study six: undue pressure	100
The opportunity to influence	101
Handling the personalities	102
The outcome	104
Conclusions	104
Your influencing behavior	105
Summary and next chapter	106
6 Retaining Influence, Adding Value	108
The role of fact and your opinion in retaining influence	109
When opinion is not enough	112
Letting the facts speak for themselves	117
Your influencing behavior	117
Case study seven: changing priorities	119
The opportunity to influence	121
Handling the personalities	122
The outcome	123
Conclusions	124
Knowing when to compromise	125
Your influencing behavior	129
Summary and next chapter	130
7 Building a Reputation Outside Your Department	132
Improving your reputation	133
Making a positive impression	135
Case study eight: building a reputation	138
The opportunity to influence	140
Handling the personalities	140
The outcome	142
Conclusions	142
Your influencing behavior	143
Case study nine: altering perceptions	144
The opportunity to influence	146
Handling the personalities	147
The outcome	148
Conclusions	149
Your influencing behavior	149
Summary and next chapter	150

8 Influencing Irresponsible Colleagues	152
The profile of an irresponsible colleague	153
Examples of irresponsible behavior	155
Mishandling irresponsible colleagues	156
Case study ten: held to account	157
The opportunity to influence	158
Handling the personalities	159
The outcome	162
Conclusions	162
Confronting irresponsible behavior	163
Your influencing behavior	165
Case study eleven: managing reputations	166
The opportunity to influence	168
Handling the personalities	169
The outcome	171
Conclusions	172
Your influencing behavior	172
Summary and next chapter	173
9 Fragile Alliances, Building a Reputation: A Narrative Case Study	175
Introducing the technology manager	175
Handling the complexity	177
Time for a fresh challenge	177
The technology manager's offer	178
First impressions	179
Losing influence and power	181
Feeling confused	182
A clear choice	184
Going through the mill	185
Establishing contact with the business	185
Gaining ground	187
Flawed approach	188
Establishing credibility	189
Selling himself	191
Building influence	192
Gaining a reputation	193
Maintaining influence	193
Conclusions	194
<i>References and Recommended Reading</i>	197
<i>Index</i>	199

What is Workplace Influence?

Let's begin this book by considering what the terms 'influence at work' and 'having influence in the workplace' might mean. We will define them and then examine why some people are able to acquire influence and sustain it over a period of time, why others struggle to build any influence in the first place, and why others again manage to attain a degree of influence but then subsequently lose it. We will explore the influencing dynamics in your workplace and examine what might be involved in you acquiring greater influence at work. Then we will start to look at some of the possible confusions between 'having influence' and 'having power.'

WHAT IS INFLUENCE AT WORK?

So, what does the phrase 'influence at work' conjure up for you? You might like to take a few minutes to jot down in the space below any phrases and words that come to mind when you consider the term 'influence at work':

Whatever you have written, and however much you think that having influence at work is about a person's knowledge or interpersonal attributes or simply about whom they know, you may have had difficulty describing it with any degree of certainty. You might think that 'influence at work' has an intangible quality to it and is somewhat

difficult to pin down. Or you may have found that, as you considered the qualities that contribute to one or other colleague having influence in your workplace, they may not be present in the character of a third or fourth colleague whom you consider to be influential.

Influence at work is a highly individual issue. What influences one person – you, for instance – will not automatically influence another person. What influences one of your senior managers may not influence a different manager. In my work I have found that people who have acquired a degree of influence in the workplace have done so by having more than one strategy. They have a range of strategies and know which one to apply to the particular person they are dealing with in any given situation. So, is one of the main attributes possessed by a person who is perceived to have ‘influence at work’ the ability to select an effective strategy for influencing each specific person whose thinking they want to impact?

HAVING INFLUENCE IN THE WORKPLACE

Consider the list of words and phrases you developed to describe ‘influence at work’ and compare them with the points below. These points, while not intended to be an exhaustive list, outline some of the commonly cited responses. You might like to add some of your own:

- Being able to affect decisions within your areas of expertise.
- Being an opinion-former or touchstone for other people on your subject matter.
- Having the knowledge and skill to change or develop other people’s perceptions.
- Knowing how to sway a discussion or decision.
- Knowing how to get the buy-in you need to take your plans forward.
- Having the ability to extend your influence beyond the area in which you could reasonably expect to hold sway given your hierarchical position.
- Being referenced at a meeting as opposed to merely attending or participating in a meeting.
- Being adroit at handling other people’s agendas and working with them reasonably.
- Knowing how to say ‘no’ to colleagues without alienating them and thereby creating issues for yourself when you bring your next issue to the table.