



Hughes-Consulting

"News You Can Use"

May 2009

Partnering with You to Achieve Results

Hughes-Consulting specializes in Human Resources and Business Management Consulting.

Hughes-Consulting is an approved – Incumbent Worker Training Program (IWTP) training provider and an approved consultant to LANO and MEPoL

Contact Us

hughesconsulting
@bellsouth.net or call
Office: 985-893-2236

For past copies of
"News You Can Use"
please see our
website
www.hughes-consulting.org

The Influencers: The Top Five Reasons Leaders Lack Influence

Do you wear the shoes of change? And influence others to follow in your footsteps?
By Ron McMillan and Joseph Grenny

Influence challenges exist at every level of an organization. According to a study we recently conducted, one of the main culprits of these challenges is that leaders have little, if any, influence over the way employees behave. In fact, the data reveals that only 20 percent of leaders are true "influencers"—those capable of influencing positive change in a way that lasts.

For example, after six years and millions of dollars in resources, one CEO we worked with declared failure on a Lean/Six Sigma effort. When asked why he was giving up, he lamented, "I'm tired of trying to teach old dogs new tricks. I haven't figured out how to make Six Sigma part of our culture. And it's too expensive to keep trying."

Leaders' inability to influence the behavior of their people—to engage their hearts, minds and hands—is at the root of the vast majority of corporate disappointments. Here are the top five reasons most leaders lack influence:

1. Leaders think it's not their job. Most leaders put a great deal of time into crafting breakthrough strategies, selecting winning products and engaging with analysts, shareholders and major customers. But few realize that the success, or failure, of their grand schemes lies in influencing the behavior of the hundreds or thousands who will have to execute on the big ideas—their employees. The most influential leaders spend 50 to 75 percent of their time thinking about and actively influencing the behaviors they know will lead to top performance. But the majority delegates these duties to others like HR leaders. The average leader spends less than five percent of his or her time on active efforts to create behavior change. Consequently, results fall far short of their potential and employee behavior falls into predictable patterns of turfism, blame and politics.

2. Leaders lack competence. Many leaders who had previously stumbled into success at influencing behavior change couldn't articulate why their efforts succeeded. Even worse, the study showed that while most executives were frustrated with many behaviors in their organizations, only one in 20 had a carefully developed plan for influencing change. When leaders were asked to describe their approach to influencing rapid and sustainable behavior change, most had almost nothing to say.

For example, one CEO we interviewed took over a company that had stalled financially in recent months. The company was started by a group of highly skilled engineers who had built a wildly successful product. However, the founders now needed to change the culture of the company to focus on quality and execution. Things were going badly, and the CEO had no real plan for fundamentally changing this behavior. The same CEO described a tremendously effective influence challenge he'd tackled in a previous role that dramatically improved customer service. And yet, he had transferred almost none of what he'd used effectively to this new challenge.

3. Leaders confuse talking with influencing. Many leaders think influence consists of little more than talking someone into doing something. It's no wonder most influence efforts start with a PowerPoint presentation. But profound, persistent and overwhelming problems demand more than verbal persuasion. Anyone who's ever tried to talk a smoker into quitting knows there's a lot more to behavior change than words. Leaders make the same mistake when they

publish a bunch of platitudes in the form of a "Mission and Values" statement, give a few speeches on why these values are crucial and then assume their job is done.

4. Leaders believe in silver bullets. When leaders actually attempt to influence new behavior, they will often look for a quick fix—they fall into the trap of thinking that deeply ingrained bad habits can be changed with one simple technique. Every leader has his or her pet technique. Some host a star-studded retreat. Some are all about trinkets—so they hand out inspiring posters and color-changing mugs and think people will line up for change. Some believe it's about incentives and they tinker with the performance management system or tie new behavior to executive bonuses. The research shows that when leaders rely on just one simple source of influence to drive change, they almost always fail.

5. Leaders try to influence everyone. There are a few leaders who understand that influence is their job. They may even put a lot of time and energy into influencing behavior, but they squander limited time and energy by trying to influence everyone. The most influential leaders amass a wealth of social capital by investing time and energy with two influential groups—their chain of command and their opinion leaders. Influencers know they don't have to have personal relationships with everyone in the company—they just have to have relationships with those who do. If leaders spent time building trust with formal and informal opinion leaders, they will inherit social capital that extends their influence into every corner of the organization.

The good news is that one in twenty leaders can influence change. These successful leaders do so by using four or five sources of influence in combination, not just one. The study showed these people are able to affect behavior change quickly and permanently. And these are skills everyone can learn.

The root cause of disappointment and underperformance is not a failure of ideas; it's a failure of influence. If leaders can learn to diagnose the sources of influence that are responsible for the current behavior of their employees, they can create an influence plan for replacing the bad behaviors with good ones and ultimately, make change inevitable.

The most important capacity we possess is our ability to influence behavior—that of ourselves or others. With a modest increase in influence repertoire and skills, any leader can generate substantial progress to the results he or she cares about most.