

Influence, Credibility and the Deliberate Leader

*Leadership is not about titles, positions, or flowcharts.
It is about one life influencing another.*

JOHN C. MAXWELL

Leadership is the single most important factor in accomplishing success in everything we do. As elegantly argued by Dr. Chacha of teamworkministries.com, *Leadership is, without a doubt, the pillar that bears the largest load. If this collapses, the structure will collapse*—and that applies both personally and professionally.

Deliberate Leadership is about being self-aware enough so that you can be—purposefully wise, diplomatic, and intentional with competence, embracing the values (and behaviors) of accountability, reliability, and responsibility while being amiable, diligent, proactive, imaginative, self-starting, humble, and focused. Admittedly, there are hundreds of other definitions of leadership; they all vary somewhat in orientation, but most imply that the leadership process contains the element of *influence*, which is situational, in constant flux, and could be directed towards individuals, teams, or organizations—all with the intent of achieving success.

Influencing is what leaders do to accomplish success. In their classic book on leadership, *Leaders: Strategies for Taking Charge*, Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus argue that

Leading is influencing, guiding in direction, course, action, or opinion. An essential factor in leadership is the capacity to influence.

Leaders lead by establishing the rules of engagement and mobilizing others around their compelling vision of the future, by empowering them to follow in their footsteps. They show those around them what is possible and inspire them to make those possibilities a reality. They energize and focus teams in ways that fulfill their dreams, provide them

a process to realize unity and purpose, and leave them with a profound sense of accomplishment when success is achieved.

Deliberate leaders lead by personally modeling the behaviors or ways of thinking they desire while encouraging others to courageously take the initiative to be independent in their reasoning and in doing so, transfer ownership and responsibility to others.

Deliberate leaders are teachers, mentors, and role models—and they accomplish the majority of their results through the power of influence, not authority.

One theory of how leaders can positively influence their followers is through social influence. Social influence occurs when our emotions, opinions, or behaviors are affected by others. Social influence takes many forms and can be seen in conformity, socialization, peer pressure, obedience, leadership, persuasion, sales, and marketing. In 1958, Harvard psychologist Herbert Kelman identified three broad varieties of social influence: Compliance, Identification, and Internalization.

Compliance is when people appear to agree with others, but keep their dissenting opinions private. Identification is when people are influenced by someone who is well-liked and respected, such as a (positive) famous celebrity. Internalization is when people accept a belief or behavior and agree both publicly and privately.

A deliberate leader can use all three types of social influence to consciously maintain respect and influence. For example, compliance is often used by the leaders to maintain order, such as when employees are required to follow the basic rules or policies set out by their leaders. Similarly, identification will occur if the leader is well-liked and respected. Identification is important since a major component of a leader's job is to be a figurehead that employees, peers, clients, and even investors can rally around and support. Having a leader who is well-liked and respected will positively affect the culture of the agency. Finally, internalization occurs when employees “buy-in” to the mission and vision of the organization, due to the influence of its leadership.

All of these aspects of influence are essential for leaders to ensure that followers will respect them and the decisions that they make. While *influence* is important, it is also crucial that leaders **deliberately** persuade their followers (through the leader's actions) to believe that they are “Credible.”

Credibility is at the heart of *influence*!

But what is credibility?

Credibility is one of the most-studied areas among communication scholars. Writings about the construct date back over 2000 years ago, occurring most notably when Aristotle discussed the concept of ethos and how an audience's perceptions of a speaker's character would influence the believability of what the speaker said. Other noteworthy scholars of the day, such as Plato and Cicero, raised similar issues. The concept is pretty straightforward—the greater a speaker's credibility, the more believable the message or speech; the lower the credibility, the less believable the message.

For Aristotle and his contemporaries, credibility consisted of a speaker's character, intelligence, and goodwill.

Contemporary scholars across several disciplines have thoroughly researched the area, producing definitions of credibility similar to those expressed by Aristotle. For example, psychologists Hovland, Janis, and Kelley (1951) determined that credibility possessed three dimensions—trustworthiness, expertness, and intention. James McCroskey, the most prolific credibility researcher in communication, and Thomas Young (1981) ultimately concluded that perceptions of an individual's character and competence are the primary determinants of credibility, with intention being a part of character.

Our definition is “**Credibility is your reputation**”—to demonstrate the various characteristics and qualities outlined above, plus honesty, competence, vision (foresight) and the ability to inspire others from their point of view. The last four qualities were verified by authors and researchers James Kouzes and Barry Posner in their in-depth study on what employees wanted, needed, and demanded from their leadership so that leaders would be viewed as credible. They documented their findings in their best-selling book *Credibility* (1993/2011).

Credible leaders are those perceived by followers as possessing these enduring qualities of trust and expertise.

What does this mean?

The follower must perceive the leader to be a person of integrity, well-intended, and desiring to do the most good for all involved. Anything less reduces the leader's communication effectiveness. Why? Because decreasing credibility induces decreasing levels of the leader's believability.

The domino effect of our behaviors continues with “Trust” being a foundational component of being credible, which in turn improves your ability to influence others. Trusted leaders are more likely to be believed.

Regardless of your level of expertise, if you are not trusted, you cannot be a credible and effective deliberate leader.

Ken was participating in a leadership conference with Malcom Goldsmith, author of 38 books including the bestseller *What Got You Here, Won't Get You There* (and who is acknowledged as the number-one executive coach in the world). During his presentation, Malcom shared his standards or policy when coaching senior executives—or anybody, for that matter.

I never coach individuals who lack integrity—no exceptions. If I am coaching someone who can't be trusted and lacks integrity I simply say thank you and end our relationship. There is no negotiation because integrity is not something that can be coached!

Trust is a non-negotiable trait of anyone who wants to be viewed as a credible leader. We have all witnessed the impact of what happens in society when you can't trust a leader. News stories, particularly about government and business organizations, reflect a lack of trust and countless violations of ethical expectations. The research and work by Diddams and Chang argues that effective leaders aim to achieve ends through development of trust with followers. This is a key ingredient in establishing and maintaining the leader-follower relationships.

The research in this chapter reveals precisely why so few individuals are viewed as effective and successful leaders. This obviously is not something that happens by accident while walking to work one day. Our ability to positively influence (lead) is supported by our credibility and trust that others have in us.

As you proceed through this book, we will outline numerous strategies and insights so you can **deliberately** build trust and credibility with others to positively influence them. We are not saying that this all happens without effort, but we do know that it is worth it. And quite frankly, the alternative is not an option!