

Swayed, Nudged, and Driven: Influence Is Constant

A New Zealand bank helpfully nudges customers to save money on impulse by just pressing a button on their iPhone. Apparently there is an app for that.

School cafeterias across the United States are experimenting with the presentation of healthier food choices—making fruit and vegetables more appealing than the more popular fried food by improving their lighting, positioning, and names (carrots called “X-ray veggies,” anyone?)

New York taxicabs have a touchscreen on the back of the front seat suggesting how much passengers should tip the driver upon arriving at a destination. Big, colorful buttons give the option of paying \$2, \$3, or \$4 if the fare is less than \$15. If your fare is more than \$15, the buttons display percentages from 20 to 25 to 30 percent. Clearly counting on people’s laziness or inability to calculate and self-select a fair tip, cabbies are happy to report that gratuities have shot way up, again due in part to these highly suggestive buttons that are tilted toward generosity.

We face tens of thousands of minor and major interactions every day that guide or steer us in one direction or another. While all this

influencing and nudging is perhaps becoming more obvious as we get older, it's been a factor from the moment we released our first gut-wrenching screams upon entering this life.

We Are Born to Influence

These days, it's impossible to walk down the street without experiencing the power of influence. Even if the street is completely empty, beckonings, warnings, sales pitches, and opinions fill every conceivable angle of our vision. This exposure to influence begins with our earliest sense of self, at the moment we acknowledge we are not alone and experience desire in some form. For most of us, this begins at birth.

With that first infantile desire emerges a natural instinct as to how to obtain what we want. We cry, we wail, and we adopt this technique long before we learn that we can also get what we want by smiling and laughing. Infants are not able to rationalize, prioritize, or otherwise communicate outside of their own desires, yet they get what they want by opening their cute little mouths and letting it rip.

Just as instinctual is the parental need to notice and respond from a context of providing care and/or learning. The need to nurture is as hardwired as the baby's wailing and brings the earliest hint of nature's intention for us to exert and perceive a full circle of lifelong influence. According to a 1968 study on this interaction, this parent-child exchange is precisely the stuff of attachment, even love. Children and parents begin their journey together through a dance of influence and response, played out on a stage of interaction. From the first frame, verbal and nonverbal clues fill the family room and quickly define a dynamic that will set the tone for an entire childhood.

This first taste of the power of influence begins a process of developing and understanding our inherent powers in that regard.

While social and domestic variables conspire to take this ability to different places and levels, the universal fact is that it is there within us, always available as a power to be reckoned with. Whether that power emerges as harnessing influence to get what we want or succumbing to it and becoming helpless against the desires of others remains an issue not so much of fate as of comprehension.

In other words, some get it and some don't.

A Never-Ending Battle for Rewards and Resources

As natural as it is for us to exert and respond to influence, it is a testament to the power of influence that it takes on so many forms and levels among adults. The constant battle for rewards and the pressures of competition for resources are woven into the fabric of any organization that's populated with goal-oriented professionals. They're a virtual petri dish of human psychology that elevates influence to nothing short of the currency of success.

In trying to cash in this currency, people sometimes overstep ethical and legal boundaries. A recent explosive article in *Rolling Stone* magazine detailed how the U.S. Army may have misused some of its "psychological operations" specialists (or PSYOPs, as they're commonly known) to influence U.S. senators who stopped by for visits. These specialists usually train their sights on hostile foreign organizations and individuals to manipulate various beliefs, value systems, and emotions for strategic gains in conflict situations and territories. In this case, however, the magazine's writer reported that PSYOPs targeted U.S. lawmakers making an appearance in the field, in a calculated effort to sway them toward sanctioning additional troops and other resources. Scandal ensued.

Competition for resources is intrinsic to the evolution of any surviving species, and the ability to adapt it to the prevailing environment has, for the majority of life on earth, defined who lives and who dies. In the human realm, competition is the fuel of pretty much all

that is political, economic, and relational. We compete for votes; we vie for jobs and money; we battle for market share; we score the best talent; we strive for prestige, badges of honor, and achievement; and on a global level, we wage war for power, advantage, and the promulgation of our belief systems. The urge to influence is as old as recorded history, and thus it comprises the very essence of human dynamics and evolution.

Winning the Battle with Influence

Whether by carrot or stick or any of the more nuanced forms of influence along the spectrum, everything we desire, negotiate, measure, and reward is the product of our ability to exert influence successfully. As our species has evolved, our brains have literally grown larger, actually tripling in size over the past two million years, according to a study by David Geary, professor of psychological studies at the University of Missouri College of Arts and Science. Natural selection drove this evolution as the complexity of needs became more, well, complex over the centuries. This phenomenon among humans is precisely due to the natural instinct to compete for rewards, because humans do it in a more socially complex and environmentally varied manner than other species, whose brains are largely the same size as they were when giant reptiles roamed the planet. The fastest lion eats; the slowest gazelle gets eaten. But with us, economic and social survival is a much more complex and delicate proposition.

With all our available intellectual square footage, two thousand millennia of evolution, and more rewards than ever up for grabs, our heightened interest in mastering the art of influence is more than understandable. Those who have mastered it are the ones in the corner offices, while the rest of us have to some degree clung to those first pangs of need expressed through crying out and smiling in the hope of getting something in return. That's because, while instinctual, exerting influence at the level at which it becomes

effective in a complex economy and culture is as much a learned psychological art as it is a gift of gab.

Our Values Are Targets for Influence

To truly understand the power of influence, one needs to grasp the context from which it springs. According to Shalom H. Schwartz, Ph.D., of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, *values* are the result of belief systems linked to emotions, and thus they are a strong motivating factor in our daily decision making. These values define the sweet spot for intended influence, because the ultimate goal is to point the decision making of others to the destination of our choice.

According to Dr. Schwartz, our motivations are colored by 10 distinct beliefs that do not distinguish between where we live or who we are in terms of worldview:

1. **Self-direction:** The ability to choose; act on preference; and create, discover, and explore options
2. **Stimulation:** The experience of energy, excitement, and challenge
3. **Hedonism:** Gratification achieved through maximizing pleasure
4. **Achievement:** The channeling of competence toward specific goals that are socially accepted or elicit approval
5. **Power:** Dominance or control, often imbued with prestige and status
6. **Security:** A sense of safety and stability relative to our relationships and ourselves
7. **Conformity:** The avoidance of responses and actions with negative consequences or the risk of disapproval, demonstrated through restraint and denial

- 8. **Tradition:** Conformity with customs and practices defined by religion, culture, or long-held belief systems that elicit respect and acceptance
- 9. **Benevolence:** The furtherance of others' well-being, especially those with whom we have personal relationships
- 10. **Universalism:** A respect and caring for all aspects of nature and other people through appreciation, tolerance, and understanding

The depth of this analysis subordinates the very things that make influence in today's world more challenging than ever: the astounding breadth of human experience and modes of socialization. Never before have we faced this many options with this level of competition for rewards. The scope of potential influence is unprecedented; so much so that we may find it hard to link our desires to our values, at least until we begin to question our motivations and self-knowledge. Self-reflection rather than basic instinct is the basis of an evolved self in an evolved culture, and the art of influence is the beneficiary of this process. Our efforts to change or even sway someone's mind are hindered if we don't comprehend the motivations of our audience or opposition.

Effective influence counts on our understanding of why people resist change even when an idea or opportunity serves their interests. Influence isn't as much about packaging truths for others as it is about presenting those truths in such a way that others think *they* have realized and discovered the ideas for themselves rather than hearing them from us. Among the many factors at the core of resistance is the myriad of belief systems and values that divide our culture into so many subsets and isolated silos of like-minded people. These systems are so powerful that they can conquer logic and evidence, which is why some extremists blow themselves up in the name of their beliefs. This is as true within organizations—and *for* organizations—as it is in any other subgroup. A culture

is a hard thing to change and an even harder thing to influence if your intention departs from accepted and well-understood norms.

As leaders, we need to anticipate what it takes to effect change and thus how to shape our efforts to exert influence. A number of esteemed scholars have aligned behind seven basic phases of the cycle of change that influencers need to consider when mounting an effort to move an audience off the status quo. This sequence is as follows:

1. **Business as usual:** The same-as-it-ever-was modality, a frozen state
2. **External threat:** The potential for loss; impending disaster; an ending of sorts; a shift via the introduction of a new element
3. **Denial:** A simple refusal to look at evidence, consider probabilities, and face the truth
4. **Mourning:** The dark and confusing state of letting go of what was
5. **Acceptance:** The final letting go of the past with an open mind to what comes next
6. **Renewal:** The discovery of new realizations, the thrill of new beginnings and forward movement, the sense of vision morphing into reality, the fruition of hope
7. **New structure:** The new becoming the status quo with a sense of stability and permanence

Attached to this values-anchored resistance to change is the presence of emotional inertia, or the simple lack of the energy required to do things differently. Influence is the energy that trumps inertia and whatever subtextual commitment defies the logic of a better path. What appears to be resistance may simply be two opposing emotional forces battling it out. Influential leaders find a way to discover and understand what these conflicting beliefs and forces are.

Employees who demonstrate repeated self-defeating behavior are examples of competing belief systems rather than overt opposition. Take the example of a young man who, in his free time, plays in a rock band and remains close and integral to the social group that embraces him in that area of his life. On the job, he demonstrates good work habits, is well liked and trouble-free, and consistently performs at a level that meets and often exceeds expectations. But he has been passed over for promotion in favor of seemingly lesser performers—it may have something to do with his bloodshot eyes from late-night rehearsals and a sometimes-visible neck tattoo; his performance reviews note that he doesn't quite fit in with the corporate culture and needs to work on integrating with the team. Given time and access, a psychologist might discover that this fellow is having trouble letting go of his underlying identity as a rebel and resists turning into just another one of the “suits” at the office, despite sharing their work ethic and their professional goals. There is potential for reconciliation at both ends of this dynamic, however, if the employee learns of and is given the opportunity to manage his apparent bias against prevailing corporate culture and understand the organization's bias for cultural conformity; the organization itself benefits from self-reflecting stakeholders and leaders who discover that by loosening up their archetypical prototype candidate profile, their influence leads to better forward-looking choices, unencumbered by hidden layers of skewed belief and prejudicial thinking.

A Closer Look at Our “Irrational” Behaviors

While it is perhaps paradoxical, many of us tend to think we know where inexplicable behaviors and belief systems come from. The closer they are to home, the more we think we understand, and as it turns out, it is less likely that we do. That's because an entire grad school year of human psychology could hardly account for what

motivates us to act on or resist incoming influence. Again, effective influencers understand this level of complexity and use it to break down barriers more quickly and completely.

The presence of a psychological factor sometimes imbues irrationality with legitimacy. Take, for example, someone who has trouble remembering things. Without acknowledging that anything may be wrong, we assign this behavior to being scatterbrained, overloaded, or unfocused. But the moment we know for certain that a chemical imbalance is in play, the memory issue switches context to something that explains the behavior and elicits a different, more tolerant response. It also provides an opportunity to improve it.

Supposedly rational behavior in modern economic culture stems from decisions and actions that serve the interests and rewards of the decider. But there are ample examples of people who do the exact opposite of what's expected; they resist that which might help them and adopt beliefs and demonstrate behaviors that inevitably come back to bite them in some way. Almost as if this were their intention from square one. Are they masochists in full command of their path, or does something else—an issue of psychological imbalance or neurochemistry—take over at the moment of decision?

The answer is that it could be either or neither. In the growing field of behavioral economics, leading researchers such as Daniel Kahneman, Amos Tversky, Richard Thaler, and *Predictably Irrational* author Dan Ariely have sufficiently debunked the notion that humans are rational at all. Instead of rationality, the effective influencer looks for cues to determine the most likely causal factor for a person's "irrationality" and goes from there.

Sometimes the human voice of unreason that stands in the way of positive decision making is social rather than biochemical. We have to look no further than the community of extremist martyrs to recognize this. Are they all mentally ill? Chemically imbalanced? Or have they been conditioned and programmed to such an extent that their neural pathways run in a direction that aligns

with their belief systems and trumps their sense of self and any resident fear? Almost certainly this is the case, and it completely frames the context of any attempt to rationalize with or influence such people.

Whether biological, chemical, or social, if our beliefs are “irrational,” so too will be our behaviors. Our brains dictate our choices before they are even on the table, according to a study conducted at the University of Minnesota. A widely cited example is what researchers call the *gambler’s fallacy*, which posits that when gamblers believe there is an emerging pattern in an otherwise random deck of cards, they play according to self-proclaimed probability. They believe they’re “hot” and will continue to win.

Maybe they will, maybe not. But it’s one of the reasons why “the house always wins.” Gamblers who see a pattern where randomness is the only thing controlling the cards will follow that pattern right into bankruptcy.

For the more “rational” heads among us, that may be an off-beat example. Everyone knows that gamblers have a problem—one which thankfully doesn’t affect you and me. Right?

If you believe that, a quick mental trip to the stock market should sober you up.

Irrationality in the Stock Market

After the economic crash of 2008, behavioral finance was once again a hot topic in the debate about what went wrong. The early research of Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman offered some answers. They called it *prospect theory*. Specifically, they learned that investors—all humans really—value gains and losses differently. When it comes to potential losses, our panic may be disproportionately greater than the pleasure we take in the prospect of potential gains. In a nutshell, the idea of losing \$100 hits us twice as hard as the idea of gaining \$100. In this context, the scholars

also discovered that investors—and the rest of us—are much more open to risk to avoid any losses than we are to capture potential gains.

Leavey School of Business's Meir Statman, an expert in behavioral finance, says that people actually grieve after having made bad decisions, including financial ones. For most people, facing the prospect of selling a particular stock is anything but a rational search for clues; rather, it is an emotional exercise tightly connected to the difference in how much we paid for the stock versus how much we can get for it now.

Statman, who studied the cognitive errors and emotions that can influence investor behavior, has a couple of theories:

- Investors hang on to falling stocks to avoid the painful realization of having made a mistake if they sell it.
- People are worried about others' judgment in disclosing losses incurred by bad investments, delaying any decision to cut their losses.

Others in the behavioral economics field posit that crowd thinking guides investors' behavior, as it is thought to be safer to follow the crowd—they must know better—than to rely on our own decision making. The result of this is crushingly obvious when a “herd” of investors panics, and everyone sells their shares at once, each spurred on by the behavior of the others.

Another sign of our follow-the-herd behavior crystallizes when hyped-up investors flock to buy an overpriced but highly popular stock, demonstrating the opposite of the rational investment mantra “buy low, sell high.” When the stock eventually goes down, investors can rationalize their poor decisions more easily by faulting the herd for the hyperbolic stampede rather than blaming themselves.

Let's look at some other scenarios where we're influenced day in and day out.

Eleven Ways You're Being Influenced Right Now

Don't look now, but you're sitting or standing under a frenzied barrage of high-frequency influence. It is like radio waves from television broadcasts, mobile phones, wireless devices, and spy satellites—they're everywhere, omnipresent, to the extent that we no longer notice. Yet they define our daily lives and provide the means by which we weigh and make choices. So it is with the forces of influence—many of which are born on those very radio waves—that bombard us at every waking moment.

The most obvious inbound influence is, of course, advertising. But not your father's advertising from "All in the Family." Today's advertisers use neuroscience-based techniques straight out of sci-fi movies to hit all the senses and begin the salivation process before you can change the channel. America's favorite fried chicken haunt, KFC, actually enlists aroma dispensers (fried chicken will get you every time) from lunch delivery carts while making deliveries in office parks. According to the company's CEO, this works better than advertising in attracting customers. I believe it, having once advised the owners of an artisan ice-cream shop in Denver to funnel the smell of fresh-baked waffle cones to the shop's surrounding pedestrian areas via a simple piping system. Customers started arriving for a cool treat on cue, like moths to a flame.

Companies spend billions of dollars a year trying to get us to buy their products. In 2009, *Advertising Age* estimated that Procter & Gamble spent \$8.68 billion, making it the number-one advertiser in the world. With the development of the relatively new science branch called *neuromarketing*, companies have ratcheted up their persuasive tactics by targeting all of our senses to affect our brain and get us to buy. Here are some examples.

1. Us Versus Them

Apple's brand capitalizes on our brain's natural tendency to want to belong to one group over another. This is what social psychologists call *social identity*: how we value being part of a group, and why and how we identify with people who share similar interests. Apple's ad campaigns over the years, such as the Mac Guy versus the PC Guy, group people into two categories, cool and hip versus dopey and unpopular, without otherwise mentioning any features or product benefits. Mercedes Benz versus Toyota's Prius is another example of marketing geared toward triggering the "need-to-belong" neurons. The former appeals to those who value status and prestige; the Prius campaigns on the other hand tap into their customers' desire to practice environmental responsibility and, perhaps, exhibit understated elegance.

2. Feedback Timing

Another form of influence is the phenomenon of asking for, giving, and receiving *feedback*. Studies prove that when feedback is imminent (such as test scores that show up immediately), fear of failure and disappointment is at its highest. Because of this fear, feedback that's just around the corner promotes greater performance and effort. A Canadian study showed that exam scores were 22 percent higher when those being tested knew they were to be graded and evaluated immediately upon completion as opposed to waiting until later for their scores. This becomes a sort of velvet hammer for the influencer, who can leverage the proximity of feedback in her presentation of messages and options.

3. "Enlightning" Influence

One German study proved that the type of background lighting in a room where people are tasting wine favorably influences their perception of the wine's taste and increases their willingness to pay more for it. Red and blue ambient lighting, as opposed to white

or green, encouraged tasters of white wine to perceive the wine as sweeter, fruitier, and more expensive. For restaurant owners and others responsible for colors and lighting in a commercial space, the influence of these aspects on the subjective value of a product is something to be considered.

4. No Girlie Men

Cornell researchers conducted a study involving two groups of men in which they pretended to analyze the masculinity of the participants. They fictitiously characterized the men in one of the groups as having weak masculine traits. That group subsequently overcompensated for their perceived lack of manliness and displayed more homophobic tendencies, voiced strong support for the Iraq war, and favored SUVs over other vehicles.

5. Survival of the Prettiest

Voters evaluate the competence of a candidate by his facial appearance. Princeton University research found that those voters most likely to be influenced by appearances are those who watch TV and are less knowledgeable. By manipulating computer models of faces to reflect degrees of competence, the researchers determined that “facial maturity and physical attractiveness” were the main features that made voters perceive a candidate as competent.

6. David 0, Goliath 1

Think the underdog has more motivation to win in an unequal pairing of strength and skill? It’s the story we love in the movies. Apparently, it’s more of a myth. A recent study found that team members work harder when they’re competing against another group that is of lower status or skill than when they’re competing against a team of equals. Social psychologists at Ohio State and Cornell universities say their studies contradict the popular notion

that underdogs are more highly motivated when they're competing against a higher status group. Robert Lount, coauthor of the study and assistant professor of management and human resources at Ohio State University's Fisher College of Business, said, "We found over and over again, across multiple studies, that people worked about 30 percent harder when their group was competing against a lower-status group. It seems surprising to many people that the high-status team has more motivation, but it really makes sense. The higher-ranked group has more to lose if they don't compare well against a lower-status group. But if you're the lower-status group and lose to your superior rival, nothing has changed—it just reaffirms the way things are."

7. Quick Judge of Character

If the eyes are the window to the soul, then the face is a potential glimpse at a most-wanted poster. New findings published in *Psychological Science* posit that a quick glance at someone's face might be all we need to predict that person's proclivity for anger. Psychologists from Brock University asked volunteers to take a glimpse at photographs of men and then rate how aggressive they were. These were photographs of men whose aggressive tendencies had already been assessed in the lab. Each volunteer stared at the photos for either 2,000 milliseconds or 39 milliseconds. The volunteers' estimation of aggressiveness was fairly accurate. Interestingly, their evaluations also correlated with the one facial feature that prior research had established was an indication of aggressive behavior: the width between the subject's left and right cheeks and the distance from the upper to the midbrow. This is called *facial width-to-height ratio*, and the larger it is, the more aggressive the man tends to be. This suggests that we're influenced by this facial feature, and it might affect our judgment of and interactions with people. The lesson for influencers? Keep your expressions warm,

or at least avoid the dreaded furrowed brow, which may not be perceived as threatening but could easily be mistaken for judgment. Both are deal killers.

8. Tactile Tactics

Asking for a raise? Buying a car? Sit in a hard chair. A recent study by several universities discovered that people who sat in hard chairs were tougher negotiators, less flexible and moved less during negotiations. They also perceived the person they were negotiating with as more stable and less emotional. “First impressions are liable to be influenced by the tactile environment, and control over this environment may be especially important for negotiators, pollsters, job seekers, and others interested in interpersonal communication,” the authors write in *Science* magazine. “The use of ‘tactile tactics’ may represent a new frontier in social influence and communication.”

9. Heavyweight Champion

The same study aimed to evaluate weight as it relates metaphorically to “seriousness and importance.” Participants in the study played recruiters and were given résumés to assess; the papers were attached to either a light or a heavier clipboard. Those participants who viewed résumés attached to a heavier clipboard judged the candidates to be more qualified and serious. In addition, the evaluators gave themselves higher marks for accuracy when holding a heavy clipboard versus a light one.

10. Closing in on Emotional Distance

The next time someone tells you, “I just need some space,” you’ll know the emotional implications this can have on your relationship. Two Yale University psychologists tested to see if an open, orderly space affects people’s emotions differently than a cluttered,

closed-in space. (These are the same principles as those of feng shui.) The researchers had subjects draw lines on a graph that primed them to feel either “spatial distance” or “spatial closeness.” Here are their results in a nutshell:

Compared to those who were conditioned (primed) for spatial closeness, those who were conditioned for spatial distance via the simple graph exercise were more distant in their emotional reactions to media depictions of embarrassment—meaning they felt more free to enjoy it—and also felt less distressed by fictional depictions of violence. The researchers were somewhat surprised to learn that this simple priming technique also prompted participants to report feeling less of an emotional attachment to family and their hometowns, showing the effect that conditioning for distance can have on our emotions.

11. Primed for Influence

Finally, bringing the way we’re influenced full circle, remember the earlier example about investors’ irrational decision making when it comes to the stock market? One study found that reading newspaper articles about irrelevant matters involving risk affects people’s financial decisions. Researchers at the University of Haifa gave Group A a story about taking risks and reaping large profits and Group B a story about someone who didn’t take a risk and avoided significant losses. Both groups were told they were reading the stories to test their memory recall. Both were then given identical information about an unidentified NASDAQ stock. The result? Group A, which had read the story involving successful risk taking, credited the stock with a higher value than did Group B.

Doron Kliger, Ph.D., who carried out the study along with one of his students, commented, “The findings of this research show that risk preferences may be manipulated—while the person making those decisions is unaware of it. An investment advisor

who reads reports in the morning news that ‘encourage’ risk taking might behave entirely differently, on a professional level, than if reading reports on failed risk taking—even if the reports were unrelated to the question at stake. Psychology describes varying human behavior depending on numerous factors. It should not be assumed that financial decision makers are immune to such influences.”

The bottom line in all of this is that 360-degree influencers have a bulging tool chest of techniques and psychological instruments at their disposal, without needing a Ph.D. after their name. It’s more than charisma or the gift of gab; it’s knowledge and strategy that separates professional leaders from those who are better suited to be contributors. Both are critical to the success of any organization and business, but you’re reading this book to become the former and to guide the latter to success via your ability to influence in all directions.

Who We Are Makes a Difference in How We Influence

Speaking of the gift of gab, and somewhat contrary to popular opinion, being a trained orator and practiced debater isn’t a key requirement to becoming an effective influencer. Research has shown, however, that certain demographics and traits do spawn better influencers.

Women have traditionally proved to be more democratic leaders, who encourage collaboration and involvement at all levels of a team. They also tend to show a more transformational style of leadership (that is, the grooming and growth of subordinates), making them more effective mentors.

On the other side of this politically sensitive coin, women are less likely to adopt aggressive styles when necessary and thus have a narrower field of options when in influencing mode. One study showed that a male presenter has a six times greater likelihood

of getting buy-in than a woman presenting the same information. Although unfair, this is great information for female leaders to exploit strategically; they can put a trusted male messenger in front of a group for quicker acceptance of a message. Strategy and psychology beat ego every time when important business goals are at stake.

Some leaders—and this applies equally to both genders—are self-serving in their leadership style to the point of narcissism (which in turn defines their influencing style), putting them in the *bully* category where subordinates and some peers are concerned. Jim Moran, a professor of management at the Florida State University College of Business, found that nearly a third of people polled said their boss was likely to exaggerate accomplishments so he would look good. A little more than a quarter said their boss was a braggart and praise junkie; had an inflated, unrealistic self-image, was self-centered; and, to a slightly lesser extent, did favors only when there was a promise of getting something in return. Unless you own the place, this career strategy won't take you very far.

The studies, while seemingly gender biased, are based on statistical research and are full of exceptions, especially when influencers are dealing from an informed base of techniques rather than relying on their own agendas and psychology.

Getting an Accurate Picture of Your Current Influencing Power

One powerful factor in the science of influencing is assessing where those you need to influence fit in terms of self-image and socialization. Research has shown that people who feel socially excluded are likely to go to extreme measures to change their status in this regard. This stems from a powerful and profound morsel of psychology, one with consequences and barriers that the effective influencer needs to understand.

One experiment showed that people who felt excluded from a group were more likely to buy a product that demonstrated their

belonging to a group with the intention to “fit in” and be accepted. On a social level, this study also showed that people were more likely to order food they didn’t like and even snort cocaine in a back room to ingratiate themselves with people they believed to be insiders in a group from which they felt excluded.

The following information reinforces the need to understand the beliefs of a group you need to influence and align your ideas with those beliefs. Researchers at the universities of Florida and Illinois conducted extensive experiments on how receptive people are to ideas that are contrary to their own and what motivates them (defensively or accurately) to be open or closed to these new ideas. The study combined data from 91 experiments with nearly 8,000 subjects, and the conclusion bears out what we would guess instinctually: people are twice as likely to choose ideas that align with their core beliefs than to consider ideas opposed to their beliefs (67 percent versus 33 percent of respondents). “Certain individuals, those with close-minded personalities, are even more reluctant to expose themselves to differing perspectives,” [University of Illinois psychology professor Dolores] Albarracín said. “They will opt for the information that corresponds to their views nearly 75 percent of the time.” This is especially true when these choices center on religion, politics, or ethics.

Another study exposed a less obvious but potentially empowering subtlety of influence. Likeability can be a powerful influencing tool; if you want people to like you more so you can have a base from which to exert your influence, then buy a concert ticket instead of an expensive watch. Researchers at the University of Colorado at Boulder discovered that people who spent time, money, and energy on experiences instead of material and esteem-enhancing things were more widely accepted and liked than their more flamboyant counterparts. Professor Leaf Van Boven, lead researcher of the study, noted, “The mistake we can sometimes make is believing that pursuing material possessions will gain us

status and admiration while also improving our social relationships. . . . In fact, it seems to have exactly the opposite effect. This is really problematic, because we know that having quality social relationships is one of the best predictors of happiness, health, and well-being.”

The past two decades have seen a renaissance in the field of intelligence quotient (IQ) research, breaking down the potential of the brain into the wider spectrum of cognitive, social, and emotional intelligence—and showing a surprisingly low correlation between them. In terms of influence, studies have shown that people with high emotional intelligence are more likely to become student leaders and, later in life, organizational influencers than are their perhaps more academically gifted peers. It certainly isn’t news anymore, but there are still large and small organizations that promote subject-matter experts and specialists with high IQs into leadership positions, only to see them fail at inspiring and leading teams. Leaders in a position to promote and employees with a basic understanding of emotional and social intelligence need to recognize that true influence with others isn’t related to a three-digit IQ score or expert mastery at spreadsheet manipulation; rather, you need the ability to recognize and regulate your own emotions to manage successful relationships with others.

It is a common perception that people who are trusting by nature are ripe targets for deceitful influencers; that trust too often equates to naïveté. But studies show that people with a high propensity to trust are also more likely to sniff out liars and fraud. Nancy Carter and Mark Weber of the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto say that high trusters also form more accurate first impressions that translate to better hiring decisions in the workplace. Forward-looking leaders make certain that people with a high propensity for trust are now being placed in positions that require an adept sense of perception and the ability to make accurate character reads with very little input.

For astute influencers at any level, this means listening to those who have a reputation as trusting individuals in order to stay ahead of the less trustworthy ones.

Your Personal Influencing Arsenal

More information is constantly emerging about our proclivities, decision-making skills, current likes and dislikes, irrationalities, and feelings about something—anything—as we furiously update our profiles on the various social networks. Influencers then become scientists. They're researchers who put the pieces of the puzzle together with the help of books like this and then get to work on incorporating the information into their influencing strategy.

The astute influencer leverages every morsel of information and cultural understanding of how people think and behave in order to optimize messaging and promote buy-in. She also makes use of the most effective channels of influence whenever possible.

Edward M. Hallowell, M.D., an instructor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, says that relying on face-to-face meetings is the most effective influencing strategy of all. With the proliferation of digital messaging, the in-person meeting is becoming a lost art; thus, its intended effect as a vehicle of connection and establishing trust is enhanced.

Speaking of trust, using the word itself can send your influencing efforts to a higher level. Regardless of the logic and facts you are using to pitch your position, the moment the word *trust* comes out, the conversation is personalized. It's as if you're staking your reputation on what you're saying, you're invested in both the risk and the outcome, and you're asking the listener to join you rather than to change or forfeit something.

Perhaps more than any other aspects of leadership and career empowerment, the art of influencing others in a 360-degree manner depends on both realms of skill—the ability to craft your

thoughts and presentations clearly, strategically, and persuasively, and the ability to apply the proper tools and the power of scientifically proven human psychology to the effort. It all begins and ends with an outward-facing understanding of your audience and shaping your intentions to create a win-win situation that plays into their sense of worthiness, fulfillment, and the better good of all.

In the next chapter, you'll discover that 360-degree influence starts with the self. We'll discuss cognitive intelligence, emotional intelligence, and social intelligence, as well as the need to define your strengths and weaknesses in those areas. You'll also get a better understanding of your personal and social power.