

Introduction to Influential Leadership

*The hardest thing is not to get people to accept new ideas;
it is to get them to forget old ones.*

—John Maynard Keynes, economist

You have heard the saying “Some people make things happen. Other people watch what happens. Still others wonder what happened.” Leadership, in general, is about making things happen. Influential leadership goes a step farther: It makes a positive difference in organizations and in the lives of people who serve and are served by that organization.

Influential leaders perform at a higher level, are more productive, and achieve greater results than other leaders faced with similar circumstances and given the same resources. The success and effectiveness of influential leaders are driven by a set of behaviors that enables them to become role models for followers, guide operational improvements, and sustain excellence.

A study of management and leadership literature, along with my observations of health care leaders with whom I have worked, reveals a common set of behaviors shared by highly successful leaders, regardless of gender, ethnic group, vocation, generation, or location. These behaviors fall under three categories: self-awareness, collaboration, and connection. They can be learned, but they must be practiced daily for them to yield the desired results. In other words, leaders must be willing to apply the behaviors to become influential and, by extension, effective and transformational.

A universal truth in high-performing organizations is that individual breakthroughs drive organizational breakthroughs.

This book is a means to this end, providing critical concepts in achieving organizational excellence and inspiring better performance.

Three Fundamental Principles of Influential Leadership

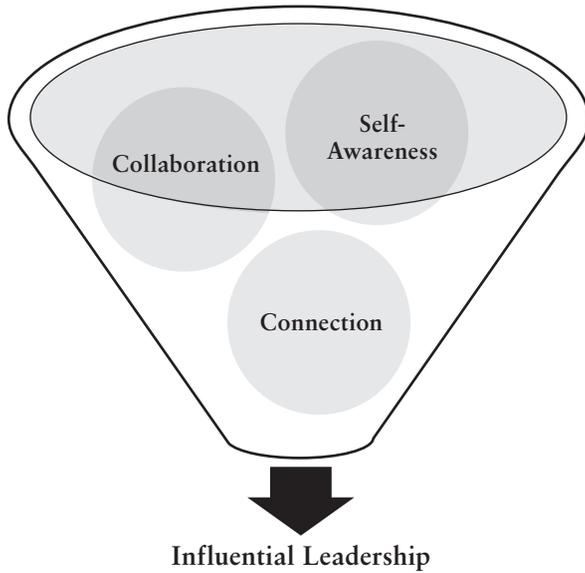
I have filled multiple leadership positions in my career—from brigade commander of my college's ROTC (Reserve Officers' Training Corps) military detachment to faculty member at the United States Military Academy at West Point to founder and chief executive officer of both for-profit and not-for-profit organizations. These experiences and my consulting work with various health care leaders have revealed one constant: Organizations that blossom and flourish are blessed with leaders who have not only the understanding of the fundamental principles of influential leadership (self-awareness, collaboration, and connection) but also the discipline to intentionally and purposefully apply the behaviors associated with these principles. (See figure 0-1.)

In contrast, organizations that lack this kind of leadership flounder in performance by accepting marginal success or living by the "good enough" cultural credo. These institutions are held back by leaders who are not self-aware, collaborative, or connective and thus are unable to inspire, develop, or implement performance breakthroughs that make a sustainable difference in the lives of people and the operations of the organization.

Self-Awareness: The Basic Competency of Influential Leaders

Think about all the people who have had leadership responsibility and authority over you. Who inspired, believed in, and encouraged you? When I reflect on this question, several teachers—from grade school to graduate school—come to mind. These teachers pushed me to try things I did not think I was capable of doing, supporting and mentoring me along the way.

Figure 0-1. Fundamental Principles of Influential Leadership



Now think about the people whose behaviors had a negative impact on you and your leadership development. Unfortunately, for many of us, this list includes so-called leaders, whose actions and words serve as an example of what we *do not* want to be like as a leader. One such leader from my past once made this comment: “Just remember I will always get all the credit, and you will always get all the blame.” I will never forget that statement and its destructive effect on my motivation and morale.

This simple exercise emphasizes the impact that people in leadership positions have and the importance of self-awareness. Influential leaders are kind, considerate, honest, respectful, and trustworthy, among many other inspiring traits. Sadly, far too many leaders are the exact opposite, and they are unaware of how they are perceived by their peers and subordinates. As a result, they do not realize that their negative behavior contributes to lack of trust, loss of credibility, and the high cost of

poor performance and low productivity. Worse, some leaders intentionally behave badly and are protective of those negative traits, believing at the least that they cause no harm.

By learning about the self, leaders become comfortable with their internal thought processes, values, beliefs, preferences, and emotions. They become self-managers, careful about how they present themselves and respond to the outside world. A self-aware leader, then, is in a better position to collaborate and connect with others, unlike a leader who is unaware of her true self.

Collaboration: The Duty of Influential Leaders

Leadership, at its core, is about getting a group of people to accomplish something that one person cannot do alone. Influential leaders rely on the principle of collaboration, knowing that people, not processes, strengthen or weaken the organization's pursuit of performance excellence. Specifically, these leaders rely on good behaviors—trust and accountability—to form a collaboration and move the organization toward its goals. A true collaboration is characterized by effective communication, cooperative attitudes, and integrated teams; these traits differentiate a collaboration from just any grouping of people assigned to complete a task.

Connection: The Strategy of Influential Leaders

When people are emotionally disconnected from their leaders, they are emotionally disconnected from their work and its accomplishment. As a result, performance suffers, productivity drops, and people withhold discretionary effort necessary to achieve at a high level. Influential leaders understand this dynamic and thus form bonds with those around them. They are charismatic, empathetic, compassionate, and approachable, traits that signal to others that they welcome and value a true connection with people.

The Performance Gap

Performance can be illustrated by this simple formula:

$$p = \text{technical skill} \times \text{motivation}$$

That is, performance (p) is the product of what we are *capable of doing* (technical skill) multiplied by what we are *willing to do* (motivation). In health care delivery, as in other high-risk industries, a gap between these two elements of performance can result in poor work quality that causes harm, suffering, and even a threat to human life.

Influential leaders are aware of these dire consequences. They hold themselves and others accountable for closing this performance gap. They model and teach the appropriate behaviors that strengthen both technical skills and motivation.

A critical problem in management generally (not just in health care) is the scarcity of leaders who possess the influential leadership behaviors that propel organizations to greatness and guide them through the significant challenges of today. We have plenty of managers and leaders who have superb technical, operational, and financial skills and an acute understanding of system processes. But we lack managers and leaders who have the motivation to go beyond those skills to enable the organization to exceed (not just meet) expectations; keep patients safe; and continue to improve processes, quality, and satisfaction. We lack leaders who have a deep understanding of the link between behavior and peak performance.

In the book *Good to Great*, author Jim Collins and his colleagues present evidence that behind a high-performing organization is an influential leader.¹ This finding emphasizes one simple truth: Influential leaders not only can close the performance gap but also can inspire others to make a difference. State-of-the-art equipment, technical and operational expertise, and use of proven quality improvement methodologies (e.g., benchmarking, Six Sigma, Lean Manufacturing) are merely tools that help

leaders and cannot, on their own, bring about excellent performance. The key to excellence, as Collins and other researchers have found, remains the influential leader. A study of 10,000 followers published in *Gallup Management Journal* reveals that people are looking for trust, compassion, stability, and hope from their leaders.² Researcher Barry Conchie states: “[t]rust also speaks to behavioral predictability.”³

Now is the time to invest in developing influential leaders.

Leadership Development

Recently I asked this question to a group of health care professionals attending my leadership seminar: Where do you learn how to *be* a leader? I clarified my question with “I am not asking for the typical traits of a good leader. I want to know your experiences in how to ‘do’ leadership.”

The answers were strikingly similar. None of the leaders in attendance had received any formal training, although many of them had taken continuing education courses in leadership theories and nearly everyone had read a best-selling (and trendy) management book. None had been exposed to the influential leadership concept and its associated behaviors.

This finding is not surprising. Many health care leaders (at all organizational levels) today came into their titled positions by being exemplary employees or followers. These former “line people” were exceptional at their day-to-day responsibilities and were rewarded with a promotion, but they have had little or no training (formal or informal) or experience in leadership and management. Few organizations invest the time and money to develop or prepare their most capable employees for future leadership positions. Even more unfortunate is that many existing leadership development programs ignore the value of studying human behaviors and the impact of these behaviors on performance outcomes. Without proper training and experience in how to do their jobs, new leaders are clueless about how to deal with the

dysfunctional situations and behaviors (or “people issues”) that occur daily and could consume 80 percent of their workday.

Leadership development should revolve around issues that are most relevant to leaders, such as how to hire or retain talented people. Effective leadership development is hands on, not lecture oriented or discussion based. Learned concepts must be practiced, applied to actual situations, and repeated until mastered. Feedback on performance should also be sought.

Why Leadership Development Efforts Fail

A number of factors contribute to the failure of leadership development programs. Among these is the limited participation by senior leadership in the training and in holding people accountable for changing behavior following the training. Limited participation signals a lack of commitment. As one common saying explains, “The difference between participation and commitment is like an eggs-and-ham breakfast: The chicken participated, but the pig was committed.”

Another reason that leadership development efforts fail is the cynicism of senior leaders. These leaders resist investing time and money into development programs, convinced that such efforts will yield minimal benefits but require maximum resources. This mind-set is disastrous, and it communicates to talented employees that the organization is not concerned about their growth. Remember that people do not quit their jobs; they quit their leaders.

When an organization fails to develop its leaders, or worse, when an organization develops leaders and loses them to another organization, the impact on organizational performance is staggering.

What This Book Offers

Thousands of books and articles on leadership have been published, and most of them contain specific definitions of and

strategies for leadership. With all of these resources, leaders still lack the basic ability to apply what they know to what they do. This book's focus on behavior (rather than technical skills) and on doing (in addition to knowing) sets it apart from other leadership publications. Here, I present the C⁴ model, a framework for assessing and understanding behavior.

A lot of material in this book is culled from the leadership seminars and workshops I lead. Attendees had expressed their wish for a compilation of the material distributed and discussed in those seminars, and my efforts to deliver on that wish presented an opportunity to write a book. The straightforward and conversational style of this book will resonate with people. Clear presentation of this information will clarify many leadership concepts and, I hope, will persuade you to try them for your benefit and the benefit of your organization and the community it serves.

Focus on Behavior, Not Technical Skills

Pick up the last five best-selling books on leadership, and you will find the same lists of attributes that are heavy on technical elements but light on behavior and relationship skills. It is the latter that bring out the technical competencies and enable the job to be done well. At higher levels of leadership (e.g., chief executives), technical skills are less important than good behavior and relationship-building ability. The reason is that the work of senior leaders is more strategic than operational.

Look at the number of highly capable leaders in politics, business, and nonprofit sectors who have failed. The root cause has not been their lack of talent, desire, ambition, enthusiasm, passion, agility, and other qualities. What sends these otherwise successful leaders hurtling toward the ground is their poor behavior. They become so insulated by their sense of self-worth and value that they lose sight of how they relate to others and get separated from those who can give them honest feedback.

Behavioral attributes (including interrelations ability), commonly and incorrectly referred to as “soft skills,” are really the “hard skills” that enable the leader to be influential—self-aware, collaborative, and connective. Employees’ low morale, refusal to engage in their work, mistrust of management, lack of motivation, and poor performance are linked to their leaders’ consistent display of negative behavior. It is easier to overlook someone’s technical shortcomings than his poor interpersonal skills. A leader’s behavior is the most important predictor of organizational performance.

Shift in Leadership Thinking

Highly successful people are protective of the behavior they believe is the source of their success. This protectiveness is supported by confirmation bias. *Confirmation bias* is a type of selective thinking or a tendency to gravitate toward facts and data that support what an individual already believes to be true.

In my experience, many leaders do not see their negative behaviors as the root cause of the safety, quality, and service problems they encounter in the workplace. Their confirmation bias is strong, and they are often ready to show evidence from the literature that something else is the source of their performance challenges. One conclusion is absolutely true: Behavior lapses are obvious to everyone but the person who commits them.

This book is a call for a radical shift in leadership thinking—from one that focuses on technical elements and processes to one that considers the impact of poor behavior on safety, quality, and service. This change must start with leaders at all levels. Real change will never come from outside consultants or the latest management fad. It will come from within an organization whose leaders understand the power of being self-aware, collaborative, and connective and are willing to unleash that power.

People tend to change their behavior when they understand how it affects (negatively or positively) the outcome of their

work, the lives of those around them, and the overall performance of their organization. For example, when a nurse supervisor explains to a verbally aggressive nurse that her behavior intimidates her co-workers and compromises her patient's health, she is more likely to change or tone down her approach. Another example is when the pharmacy director changes the "mental map" or "mental script" of weary pharmacists by asking them to think of their job as enhancing the patients' quality of life and not merely as filling hundreds of prescription orders every day. The former thought process trumps the latter because it supports the fact that pharmacists play an active role in patient care and as such should display behaviors that reflect the purpose of their position.

These simple techniques are used by influential leaders, who have a non-negotiable commitment to excellence and to their employees.

Organization of This Book

The book is organized into three parts, which correspond to the three fundamental principles of influential leadership.

Part I—Self-Awareness—explores the ancient Greek aphorism "know thyself." Virtually every kind of performance problem and personal or professional conflict is the result of relationship dysfunction. This dysfunction stems from a lack of self-awareness. Our own quirks and habits are invisible to us, so we do not see how they affect those around us. Part I (chapters 1 through 3) guides you to discover the mental patterns that drive thoughts and actions. Influential leaders are keenly aware of their own patterns, so they are able to effectively manage their emotions, conflicts, and relationships. They are empathic and compassionate, traits that come from knowing their own preferences and emotional needs. Part I helps you analyze how you deal with others and why, so that you can improve your thoughts and behaviors to become a leader who energizes, engages, and enhances the lives of those around you.

Part II—Collaboration—addresses the necessary elements of building a collaborative organizational culture. No one can achieve greatness alone. Success is the product of a highly functional team, and creating such a team requires strong interpersonal skills more than technical acumen. In part II (chapters 4 through 6), the roles of trust and accountability in building a collaborative culture are discussed.

Part III—Connection—elaborates on a simple but often overlooked concept: People perform activities better when they feel emotionally connected with what they are doing and with whom they are doing it. Before people buy into the organization's mission and vision, they must first buy into its leader. Part III (chapters 7 and 8) describes the factors that compel people to follow their leaders, the many ways that connections can be made and sustained, and the connection pitfalls that leaders must avoid.

Conclusion

This book is a collection of my life's work in health care leadership research, teaching, and coaching. A great many leaders are struggling to lead their organizations effectively. They have the desire but lack this basic understanding about behaviors:

1. They are the building blocks of organizational culture and performance.
2. They are vital to establishing and sustaining the organization's operational, financial, strategic, clinical, and human resources functions.

The concept of influential leadership is not a quick fix or a fad. It requires a commitment to achieving real breakthroughs. It requires learning; a change of mind-set; and a rediscovery of your work's passion, meaning, value, and purpose. Are you willing to try it?

Your ability to become an influential leader is directly proportional to your ability to manage your behavior and the way it

affects others. Just a few bad habits can nullify your influence on people or leave a false impression that behavior has no impact on organizational, departmental, or team performance. An excerpt from my poem “Born into This World” may say my point best:

Deming, Juran, now Toyota’s our savior,
When will we get it, the answer’s behavior.

Albert Einstein wrote: “The significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them.” The good news is that we can change, and this book offers the tools for doing so. Read on.

Key Takeaways

- This book calls for a radical shift in leadership thinking—from one that focuses on technical elements and processes to one that considers the impact of poor behavior on safety, quality, and service.
- Organizations that blossom and flourish are those whose leaders understand the fundamental principles of influential leadership (self-awareness, collaboration, and connection) and have the discipline to intentionally and purposefully apply the behaviors associated with these principles.
- A self-aware leader is in a better position to self-manage than one who lacks this awareness. Such a leader, then, is better able to collaborate and connect with others.
- Influential leaders rely on the principle of collaboration: People, not processes, strengthen or weaken the organization’s pursuit of performance excellence.
- When people are emotionally disconnected from their leaders, they are emotionally disconnected from their work and its accomplishment.
- State-of-the-art equipment, technical and operational expertise, and use of proven quality improvement meth-

odologies are merely tools. They cannot, on their own, bring about excellent performance.

- Employees' low morale, refusal to engage in their work, mistrust of management, lack of motivation, and poor performance are linked to their leaders' consistent display of negative behavior.
- People tend to change their behavior when they understand how it affects (negatively or positively) the outcome of their work, the lives of those around them, and the overall performance of their organization.

Applying the Concepts of Influential Leadership

The following questions are intended to initiate self-examination of your journey to become an influential leader.

1. Would you follow *yourself* as a leader?
 - What is your strongest leadership attribute?
 - How does this attribute influence those around you?
 - If you were to ask others to identify your top three leadership strengths, what would they say?
 - Do you allow other people an opportunity to expose your behavioral weaknesses (through seeking feedback)?
 - Do you see yourself as an influential leader? Why and how?
2. Who are the influential leaders in your life?
 - What behavioral traits does each display? What traits do they have in common?
 - What do you admire most about them?
 - How did they influence you to be the person you are today?
 - Why would you emulate their behaviors?

3. Are you constantly engaged in your self-development?
 - Do you have a personal mission statement?
 - Can you list your top three values without stopping to think about them?
 - Do you commit a regular part of your schedule to learning something new about leadership?
 - Are your behaviors aligned with your non-negotiable moral principles or values?
4. In your current position, who do you recognize as an influential leader?
 - When this leader offers advice, why do other people listen?
 - Do you want to be around this leader to learn from his or her behaviors, actions, abilities, and effectiveness?
 - Do you find this leader to be realistic in acknowledging the challenges of the organization yet highly optimistic and accepting of the responsibility to find solutions for these obstacles?

References

1. J. Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap . . . and Others Don't* (New York: HarperBusiness, 2001).
2. *Gallup Management Journal*, "What Followers Want from Leaders," 2009 [<http://gmj.gallup.com/content/113542/What-Followers-Want-From-Leaders.aspx>]. Accessed August 11, 2010.
3. T. Rath and B. Conchie, *Strengths-Based Leadership: Great Leaders, Teams, and Why People Follow* (Washington, DC: Gallup Press, 2009).