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A few weeks ago, I was trying to get my son to eat his vegetables and was not win-
ing the battle to get the greens into his mouth.

I was just about to badger him into sub-
mission by yelling out that he would not be able to
play football with me, when I recalled an
important lesson on influencing.

We love to follow the crowd. No mat-
ter how much you believe that you are not
influenced by others, the truth is we are
influenced by what others are doing and
saying.

We tend to enjoy songs that others listen
to – the best example being the Gangnam Style. We tend to dress like others.

We are influenced all the time by all sorts
of people and fads. This happens so often, we
even tend to engage in unlawful acts when we see others do it.

A few years ago, the crime rate in a town started to rise. There were warnings and
terrors issued and strict laws enacted.

There were big “Do Not Steal” posters but these did not reduce the crime rate. In fact,
crime became worse in those areas where warnings were posted.

Finally, there was a smart campaign that highlighted that the majority of people did
not steal. Surprisingly, the campaign worked.

In London, a new campaign kicked off
called the “99 percent”. The campaign had
posters all over London stating that “99 per-
cent of young Londoners DO NOT COMMIT
serious violence”.

And guess what happened? People were
influenced by these posters and crime started to decline.

Influence is critical for our success in life and in business. So, how do you influence?

There are numerous parts to influencing effectively. According to research done in
Harvard by Nanlin Ambady, it takes only six seconds for people to judge us.

Ambady provided university students six
seconds worth of footage (with no audio) of professors teaching and asked these stu-
dents to rate the teachers.

She kept the ratings and at the end of the
semester, compared the six second ratings
to the ratings from students who actually
attended the full semester of classes of these professors.

She found that even with six seconds, the students evaluations of the professors
were amazingly similar (and accurate) to the ratings of students who undertook a full
semester of classes.

These six seconds are our window of influ-
ence. Body language, words, your appear-
ance, harnessing the power of story-telling and using various means of concessions are
all part of the influencing arsenal.

But before we delve into how to influence, we need to understand what influence is.

WHAT IS INFLUENCE?

According to Eric Lau, the foremost
authority on influencing in Malaysia in my
opinion, “influence is the ability to move
others into action.”

Whenever we can change someone’s
thought process and convince them to pur-
sue a course of action, we have exercised
influence, hence demonstrated leadership.

The heart of strategic influencing is to
gain willing cooperation instead of mere
compliance. It’s about getting others to
follow us because they want to and not
because they have to.

Influencing moves work from being
merely transactional to relational. The most
effective way to influence others is first to
build a relationship of trust.

On Sept 18, 1978, in Jonestown Guyana,
909 followers of the People’s Temple, led
by cult-leader Jim Jones, died by cyanide
poisoning in what is called the largest mass-
suicide in modern history.

How did Jones come to command such
enormous influence over his followers’
thoughts and actions?

How did over 700 adults willingly feed
themselves and 200 of their children with
poison at the request of their leader?

Social psychologists identified the ability
to build relational trust as a key factor for
cult-leaders’ massive influence.

Jones was often described by his followers
as someone who was loving and was deeply
concerned about his followers’ well-being
amidst his domineering and controlling
personality. They loved him and trusted him
completely.

Here lies the powerful truth about influ-
ence. The level of influence you have on
others is directly proportionate to the level of trust they have in you. And trust does not
happen automatically. It is something you
need to work on.

INFLUENCING SECRETS

There are a number of other “secrets” to
enable you to become better at influencing.

Alex Pentland, a professor at MIT, con-
ducted an experiment where he attached
digital recording devices to business leaders
to monitor their speech and body language
over the course of a social dinner.

A week later, he was able to predict with
87% accuracy how these leaders would fare
in a business presentation which was rated
by judges. He did this without listening to a
word of the presentation. How did he do it?

A key part to influencing others, especially
judges or interviewers, is not what you say
but how you portray yourself.

Are you confident, passionate, single-
mined and committed to the cause you are
presenting? The delivery of your message
may be much more important than what is
said.

Remember, Ambady’s earlier research
showed us that people only need six seconds
to make pretty an accurate judgment about
you. So, how do you learn to ensure your
body language and the signals it sends help
you to influence better?

SMILE MORE?

Surprisingly, many believe that smiling
more helps you to influence better as you
come across as warm and personal.

Research, though, shows that smiling
makes no difference to your ability to better
influence (although the strength of a per-
son’s smile has a positive effect on customer
satisfaction in the service industry).

Neither does body posture. Nor hand
movement. So, what are factors that make a
difference?

The most important body part for
influencing is your eye. Research from the
University of Toronto stipulates that “eye
contact is magnetic.”

Eye contact with each other signals attrac-
tion and creates a link that pulls people
together. So, while trust may take time to
build, having eye contact with people you
interact with at work and socially is some-
thing that can be easily done.

Yet, many of us shy away from having
conversation with each other and ensuring
eye contact. So, start this new year by using
your eyes to start influencing others.

FINAL THOUGHTS

All of us are influencing people or are
being influenced in some way or form every
day of our lives. Building trust gives you the
seed of influence. But more than that, your
body language plays a big part in how peo-
ple view and judge you.

Learn to use your eye contact and learn to
include stories into your presentations and
discussions.

Everyone needs to influence every
day. Learning to influence will only help
you to become a better leader. Warm
wishes for this new year from all of us at
Leaderonomics!

Roshan Thiran, CEO of Leaderonomics, a
social enterprise passionate about transform-
ing the nation through leadership and youth
development, wishes you a very blessed New
Year. He hopes 2014 will be a year where you
get to influence others to enable you to
take the world.

The Be A Leader video series is now available
for free. To watch these videos, go to www.
leaderonomics.tv and click the Be A Leader
icon.