

Influencing is the ability to change the minds and decisions of others without necessarily having formal authority to do so. And this capacity lies at the heart of leadership. The art of influencing and leading can be learned, much like swimming, but not everyone can win the gold in the Olympics! The same applies to leadership and influence.

There are many influential figures in history and in our present times from whom we can gain useful insights. Take Oprah Winfrey as a prominent example. She rose from poverty and a troubled youth to become one of the most powerful and influential woman in America. She came to prominence on television and, according to Forbes Magazine, she is the world's most highly paid media personality. She does what we also do. She reads and writes; listens and speaks; observes and behaves, as we also do. So what's the difference?! On a qualitative basis there is a lot that can be said, but in tangible terms the variation is an outstanding US\$ 500 million per annum! And how did she manage to achieve such a feat? In one word: EMPATHY. She is world-class when it comes to using the gift of empathy – an ability we all have, but most of us rarely use.

Oprah made her mark because she was unafraid to bare her soul and her own past experiences in front of audiences whereas most talk show hosts remained reserved in regard to their personal lives. Though it was difficult, she made public her past abuse, her drug problem during her twenties, and her struggle with obesity. In this latter area, Oprah, took a lot of heat from unkind critics who were unable to cope with the notion that a round woman could possibly be considered attractive, intelligent, and vital. She endured cruel jokes and jibes until she finally decided to lose weight.

Having looked at a famous contemporary figure like Oprah, we can swiftly move to the more historical figures that have shaped our world as we know it. Michael Hart, in his book, THE 100 – A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History – quotes Voltaire as having said, “It is to him who masters our minds by the force of truth, and not to those who enslave them by violence, that we owe our reverence.” Hart then raises an interesting question, “Of the billions of human beings who have populated the earth, which persons have most influenced the course of history?” In deciding exactly where to place an individual, he gave much weight to the importance of the historical movement to which the person contributed. Harts’ book is concerned with personal influence and ranks Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) at the top of the 100. Other rankings of interest include Isaac Newton (2); Confucius (5); Aristotle (14); Sigmund Freud (32); William Shakespeare (36); Asoka (52); John F Kennedy (80); Niccolo Machiavelli (88); and so on.

What is common in all great men and women of influence who have ever lived, and those who

are alive today? It is their extraordinary capacity for leadership, whether in the political, corporate, social, military or a scientific context.

Not surprisingly, leadership is one of the most talked about and least understood phenomenon on earth. This is mainly because there are many perspectives on the subject, with each view having some merit. Let's examine a few paradigms on leadership. David Ogilvy, founder of an advertising agency, Ogilvy and Mather, and himself a leader of some quality thought: "Great leaders almost always exude self-confidence. They are never petty. They are never buck passers. They pick themselves up after defeat ... They do not suffer from the crippling need to be universally loved ... The great leaders I have known have been curiously complicated people."

This is not entirely how a leading management guru, Warren Bennis, sees leadership. Bennis, a professor at the University of Southern California, says, "Successful leaders follow an almost universal principle of management, as true for orchestra conductors, army generals, football coaches, and school superintendents, as for corporate executives."

Regardless of how leadership is viewed by scholars and practitioners, one thing is clear - that leadership is all about people. It's about having the ability to get the best out of people in any given situation. To this end, influence is the very essence and soul of leadership. How to influence, and be open to influences, is the key for effectiveness as a leader. Influence is the universal management principle Bennis seems to be referring to.

Influencing capability has little to do with formal authority or position. For example, Gandhi held no formal office yet had immense influence in the sub-continent that finally led to the break-up of India in 1947. Muhammad Ali Jinnah led a nation by using a language different from his constituents. He succeeded in his endeavors through the force of his intellect and character.

Since leadership is action, and not position, influence can be acquired and developed by anyone, in any position in a given hierarchy – whether in a corporate, family or a community context.

Those who care deeply about accomplishing important goals depend on skills of communicating, negotiating and networking. How do we achieve sway over people and events? How do we win over others to our way of thinking? Why do we listen to some and not to others? These are some of the questions that can guide your reflections on leadership and influence.

In a Navitus program on Influencing for corporate managers and leaders that I conducted in Karachi recently, I shared a recent discovery with participants, which sheds an important light on how our thoughts affect reality.

New research into the nature of water reveals an infinite variety of form and structure. These varieties are reflected in the forms of the crystals of frozen water. Dr. Masaru Emoto, a Japanese researcher, in his ground-breaking book, *Messages from Water* and in his most recent book, *Messages from Water Part 2*, explains how he freezes different samples of water and then photographs their crystals. He is testing a variety of water samples from different

sources and is investigating the effect of prayer, sound and words on the quality of water.

What has put Dr. Emoto at the forefront of the Hado phenomenon (visit [www.hado.net](http://www.hado.net)) is his discovery that **thoughts and feelings influence physical reality**. Hado is the intrinsic vibrational pattern at the atomic level in all matter. It is the smallest unit of energy. Its basis is the energy of human consciousness. By producing different Hado through written and spoken words, as well as music and literally presenting it to the SAME water samples, the water appears to "change its expression".

What we can clearly infer from the Hado phenomenon is the positive or negative impact our thoughts can have on our environment. Just by entertaining positive and constructive thoughts in our minds, we can make a positive difference around us in all sorts of ways. For example, by being hopeful and solution-oriented, we can inspire our colleagues to keep up their morale in the face of hardships.

Positive thinking is no longer just a great idea for us. It has very practical implications in leadership as we saw in the Hado phenomenon. Take the example of Nasir Shafi. He is CEO of Crescent Bahuman (CBL), a vertically integrated textile unit based in Pindi Bhattian. Nasir nurtures the thought that his job as a CEO is to provide "hope and help". Such thinking is simple and powerful. It permeates the entire organization and serves to inspire the three thousand people who work with him in CBL.

Inspiring leaders have an aura around them, which if not seen by all, can be felt. Their mere presence in a given situation serves to instill faith in people and who become receptive to their ideas, no matter how challenging or difficult they may appear at first. So, think big. Think Positive. Desired actions and outcomes will surely follow.

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