The Power to Change Anything

INFLUENCER

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

If you’re like most people, you face several influence challenges that have you stumped. For instance, at work your best efforts to make quality part of the everyday culture have yielded no improvements. Or maybe at the personal level you’re fighting a problem that has gone on for years.

Whether you’re a CEO, a parent or merely a person who wants to make a difference, you probably wish you had more influence with the people in your life. Most of us stop trying to make change happen because we believe it is too difficult, if not impossible. Instead we develop complicated coping strategies when we should be learning the tools and techniques of the world’s most influential people. Almost all the profound, pervasive and persistent problems we face in our lives, our companies and our world can be solved.

Over the past half century, a handful of behavioral science theorists and practitioners have discovered the power to change just about anything. From high-powered influencers from all walks of life, we can learn every step of the influence process — including robust strategies for making change inevitable. Through years of careful research and studied practice, the authors have developed powerful influence principles and strategies that can be replicated and that others can learn.

Not everyone will become influencers with a capital “I,” but everyone can learn and apply the methods and strategies the world’s best influencers use every day.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to identify a handful of high-leverage behaviors that lead to rapid and profound change.
- How to apply strategies for changing both thoughts and actions.
- How to marshall six sources of influence — such as finding strength in numbers, changing the environment and harnessing peer pressure — to make change inevitable.
- What steps you need to take in order to become an opinion leader.
- How to reward vital behaviors and not just good results.
- Why studying positive deviance can help you identify vital behaviors and how to do it.
You’re an Influencer

There are a handful of brilliant social scientists routinely studied by influence masters, but the one cited as the scholar of scholars is the legendary father of social learning theory, Dr. Albert Bandura. Dr. Bandura generated a remarkable body of knowledge that led to rapid changes in behaviors that other theorists had dawdled over for years.

He demonstrated, for example, how powerfully our behavior is shaped by observing others. This came at a time when most psychologists believed that behavior was solely influenced by the direct rewards and punishments people experienced. He also taught us where not to waste our time. For instance, if you want others to change, you don’t have to put a person on a couch for 10 years to learn about his or her critical childhood moments.

Study With the Best Scholars

There is a growing body of knowledge as well as an impressive supply of real-life success stories that teach exactly how to change almost any human behavior. The influencers noted below demonstrate that, if you know what you’re doing, you can indeed change remarkably resistant behaviors.

Dr. Mimi Silbert in San Francisco, Calif. is the founder of the Delancey Street Foundation. It consists of several dozen businesses, all headed by Silbert, and is part corporate conglomerate, part residential therapy. What’s unique about the institution is the employee population, which consists of thieves, prostitutes, robbers and murderers. Dr. Silbert’s typical new hires have had four felony convictions, they’ve been homeless for years, and most are lifetime drug addicts. Within hours of joining Delancey, they are working in either a restaurant, moving company, car repair shop or one of the many Delancey companies. Other than Silbert herself, these felons and addicts make up the entire population at Delancey. No therapists. No professional staff. Her remarkable influence strategy has profoundly changed the lives of 14,000 employees over the past 30 years. Of those who join Delancey, over 90 percent never go back to drugs or crime.

Since 1986, Dr. Hopkins and his team at The Carter Center in Atlanta, Ga. have focused on the eradication of the Guinea worm disease. The Guinea worm is one of the largest human parasites, and it has caused incalculable pain and suffering in millions of people. Hopkins knew that if 120 million people in 23,000 villages would change just a few vital behaviors for just one year, there would never be another case of the infection. But imagine the audacity of intending to influence such a scattered population in so many countries. And yet, this is exactly what Hopkins’ team has done. They are overcoming enormous disadvantages and will have beaten the disease with nothing more than the ability to influence human thought and action.

What This Means to You

There’s good news in all of this. Since our ineffectiveness at influencing others stems from a simple inability rather than a character flaw or lack of motivation, the solution lies in continued learning. We can become powerful influencers. It also means that the changes we need to make won’t be too intrusive. Instead, we need to expand our self-image by seeing ourselves as influencers; it’s the one job that cuts across every domain of our life.

All this is important to know because if you want to
change how people behave, you have to first change how they think. There is no one strategy for resolving profound, persistent and resistant problems. It takes an entire set of influence methods.

Find Vital Behaviors

Before you can influence change, you have to decide what you’re trying to change. Influence geniuses focus on behaviors. They’re universally firm on this point. Enormous influence comes from focusing on just a few vital behaviors. Take care to ensure that you do not confuse outcomes with behaviors. In most failed influence strategies, you’re likely to find at least one example of means/ends confusion, in which the focus is on achieving a specific end result instead of a focus on what actually needs to be done. Without a behavioral focus, often people will not choose to enact the right behaviors.

Study the Best

How do legitimate researchers actually discover the handful of behaviors that typically lead to success? The science of identifying which actions lead to key outcomes — no matter the domain — has already been carefully developed by those who study “best practices.” Researchers compared the best to the rest and then discovered the unique and powerful behaviors that led to success. They watched top performers at work, compared them with others who were decent but not quite as good and identified the sets of behaviors that set apart the best from the rest.

The real test of best-practice research comes when scholars take newly discovered vital behaviors and teach them to experimental groups. If they have indeed found the right behaviors, experimental subjects show far greater improvement in both the vital behaviors and the desired outcome than do control subjects. From this best-practice research we learn two important concepts:

• First, there is a process for discovering what successful people actually do. We know what to look for when examining others’ claims that they’ve found vital behaviors. If the individuals who are offering up best practices haven’t scientifically compared the best to the rest, found the differentiating behaviors, taught these behaviors to new subjects and then demonstrated changes in the outcomes they care about, they’re not the people we want to learn from.

• Second, in many of the areas where you’d like to exert influence, the vital-behaviors research has already been done. If you search carefully, you’ll find that good scholars have found the vital behaviors that solve most challenges affecting a large number of people.

Study Positive Deviance

“Positive deviance” can be extremely helpful in discovering the handful of vital behaviors that will help solve the problem you’re attacking. Look for people, times or places where you or others don’t experience the same problems and try to determine the unique behaviors that make the difference.

• First, dive into the center of the actual community, family or organization you want to change.

• Second, discover and study settings where the targeted problem should exist but doesn’t.

• Third, identify the unique behaviors of the group that succeeds.

In the case of the Guinea worm disease, researchers focused on the third methodology of identifying unique behaviors and flew into sub-Saharan Africa. Once there, researchers decided to study villages that should have the disease but didn’t. They were particularly interested in villages that were immediate neighbors to locations that were rife with the Guinea worm disease.

It didn’t take long to discover the vital behaviors. Researchers knew that behaviors related to the fetching and handling of water would be crucial, so they zeroed in on those successful behaviors, which could then later be taught to the worm-struck villages.

Test Your Results

Finally, if you’ve conducted your own research and found what you think are high-leverage vital behaviors, test your ideas. Implement the proposed actions and see if they yield the results you want. Don’t merely measure the presence or absence of the vital behaviors; also check to see whether the results you want are happening. To make it easy to both surface and test vital behaviors, conduct short-cycle-time experiments. Don’t hypothesize forever or put massive studies into place. Instead, develop the habit of conducting rapid, low-risk mini experiments.

Change the Way You Change Minds

Once you’ve identified the behaviors you want to change, you’re ready to convince others to change their minds. But as you might suspect, convincing others to see the world differently isn’t easy.

People will attempt to change their behavior if they believe it will be worth it, and they believe they can do
what is required. Instill these two views, and individuals will at least try to enact a new behavior or perhaps stop an old one. To change one or both of these views, most people rely on verbal persuasion. Talk is easy, and it works a great deal of the time. However, with persistent and resistant problems, talk has very likely failed in the past, and it’s time to help individuals experience for themselves the benefits of the proposed behavior.

Dr. Bandura and his team found that if you want people to change their persistent and resistant view of the world, come up with innovative ways to create personal experiences. Second, when you can’t take everyone on a field trip, create vicarious experiences.

The good news is that vicarious modeling is one of the most accessible influence tools that can be employed. For most of us, that means we’ll make use of a well-told story.

Create Profound Vicarious Experiences
Stories provide every person, no matter how limited his or her resources, with an influence tool that is both immediately accessible and enormously powerful. Poignant narratives help listeners transport themselves away from the content of what is being said and into the experience itself. Because stories create vivid images and provide concrete detail, they are:

- More understandable than terse lectures.
- More focused on the simple reality of an actual event.
- More often credible than simple statements of fact.

Finally, as listeners dive into the narrative and suspend disbelief, stories create an empathic reaction that feels just as real as enacting the behavior themselves.

Tell the Whole Story
Don’t make the mistake of shortcutting the story — stripping it of its compelling narrative and leaving out much of the meaning and all of the emotion. And make sure that the narrative you’re employing contains a clear link between the current behaviors and existing (or possibly future) negative results. Also make sure that the story includes positive replacement behaviors that yield new and better results. Remember, stories need to deal with both “Will it be worth it?” and “Can I do it?” When it comes to changing behavior, nothing else matters.

Make Change Inevitable
We now know enough about the forces that affect human behavior to place them into a coherent and workable model that can be used to organize our thinking, select a full set of influence strategies, combine them into a powerful plan and eventually make change inevitable.

### Model of the Six Sources of Influence

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### Master the Six Sources of Influence
With this model, influence geniuses know exactly what forces to bring into play in order to overdetermine their chances of success.

- **Source 1: Personal Motivation** — work on connecting vital behaviors to intrinsic motives
- **Source 2: Personal Ability** — coach the specifics of each behavior through deliberate practice
- **Source 3: Social Motivation** — draw on the enormous power of social influence to both motivate and enable the target behaviors
- **Source 4: Social Ability** — people in a community will have to assist each other if they hope to succeed
- **Source 5: Structural Motivation** — attach appropriate reward structures to motivate people to pick up the vital behaviors
- **Source 6: Structural Ability** — ensure that systems, processes, reporting structures, visual cues and so forth support the vital behaviors.

### Make the Undesirable Desirable
If you can’t find a way to change a person’s intrinsic response to a behavior — if you can’t make the right behaviors pleasurable and the wrong behaviors painful — you’ll have to make up for the motivational shortfall by relying on external incentives or possibly even punishments.

Can you actually change how humans experience a behavior? Is it possible to change the meaning of a behavior itself from loathsome to gratifying, from pleasurable to disgusting, or from insulting to inspiring? If you ask gifted influencers, their unequivocal answer will be, *of course you can.* And you *must.* Specifically, there are two very powerful and ethical ways of helping
humans change their reaction to a previously neutral or noxious behavior: creating new experiences and creating new motives.

**Create New Experiences**

Sometimes people loathe the very thought of a new behavior because they lack adequate information to judge it correctly. Get people to try it. The “try it, you’ll like it” strategy can be further aided by the use of models. Many influence masters have found that vicarious experience can work in situations where they can’t get people to try a vital behavior based on faith alone.

When dealing with activities that are rarely satisfying or unhealthy activities that are very satisfying, take the focus off the activity itself, and reconnect vital behavior to the person’s sense of values. Don’t be afraid to talk openly about the long-term values individuals are currently either supporting or violating.

**Create New Motives**

Help individuals see their choices as moral quests or as personally defining moments, and that they must keep this perspective despite distractions and emotional stress. Help them to take their eyes off the demands of the moment and view the larger moral issues at hand by reframing reality in moral terms. Spotlight human consequences and rehumanize targets that people readily and easily abuse. Don’t let people minimize or justify their behavior by transforming humans into statistics. If people can make their behavior part of a broader and more important moral mission, they can do almost anything.

When facing highly resistant people, don’t try to gain control over them by wowing them with logic and argument. Instead, talk with them about what they want. Through a skillful use of open and nondirective questions, called motivational interviewing, examine what is most important to the person and what changes in their life might be required in order for them to live according to their values. When you listen and they talk, they discover on their own what they must do.

**Surpass Your Limits**

Many of the profound and persistent problems we face stem more from a lack of skill (which in turn stems from a lack of deliberate practice) than from a genetic curse, a lack of courage or a character flaw. But we often underestimate the need to learn and actually practice the desired skill. For example, self-discipline, long viewed as a character trait, and elite performance, similarly linked to genetic gifts, stem from the ability to engage in guided practice of clearly defined skills.

There is little evidence that people who achieve exceptional performance ever get there through any means other than carefully guided practice. Learn how to practice the right actions, and you can master everything from withstanding the temptations of unhealthy food to holding an awkward discussion with your boss.

**Perfect Complex Skills**

Not all practice is good practice. For example, most professionals progress until they reach an “acceptable” level, and then they plateau. Beyond this level of mediocrity, further improvements are not correlated to years of work in the field.

So what creates improvement? According to psychologist Dr. Anders Ericsson, improvement is related not just to practice, but to a particular kind of practice — called deliberate practice. The techniques of deliberate practice are:

- **Demand full attention for brief intervals.** The ability to concentrate at a heightened level is usually the limiting factor to deliberate practice. Most people can maintain a heightened level of concentration for only an hour straight.
- **Provide immediate feedback against a clear standard.** The number of hours one spends practicing a skill is far less important than receiving clear and frequent feedback against a known standard.
- **Break mastery into mini-goals.** Concentrate on specific goals where the process is controllable.
- **Prepare for setbacks; build in resilience.** The practice regime should gradually introduce tasks that require increased effort and persistence. As learners overcome more difficult tasks and recover from intermittent defeats, they see that setbacks aren’t permanent roadblocks, but signals that they need to keep learning.
- **Build emotional skills.** To regain emotional control over your genetically wired responses, take the focus off your instinctive objective by carefully attending to distraction activities. For example, as a strategy to help obsessive-compulsives cope with their tendencies, therapists teach them to wait 15 minutes before giving in to a maddening mental demand.

**Harness Peer Pressure**

When seeking influence tools that have an impact on profound and persistent problems, no resource is more powerful and accessible than the persuasion of the people who make up our social networks. The ridicule and praise, acceptance and rejection, approval and disapproval of our fellow beings can do more to assist or destroy our change efforts than almost any other source.
The Power of One

To harness the immense power of social support, sometimes you need to find only one respected individual who will fly in the face of history and model the new vital behaviors. When a respected individual attempts a vital behavior and succeeds, this one act alone can go further in motivating others to change than almost any other source of influence. But take note, the living examples of other humans exert power only to the extent that the person who is modeling the vital behaviors is truly respected.

Enlist Social Support

When it comes to creating change, you no longer have to worry about influencing everyone at once. Your job is to find the opinion leaders who are the key to everyone else. Spend disproportionate time with them. Listen to their concerns. Build trust with them. Be open to their ideas. Rely on them to share your ideas, and you’ll gain a source of influence unlike any other.

On a more personal note, if you’re trying to change something within your own life, co-opt the power of those who have an influence on you. If you make a commitment and then share it with friends, you’re far more likely to follow through than if you simply make your commitment to yourself. Better still, team up with someone who is attempting to make the same changes you are.

Make Undiscussables Discussable

Sometimes change efforts call for changes in widely shared norms. In that case, almost everyone in a community has to talk openly about a proposed change in behavior before it can be safely embraced by anyone. This calls for public discourse. Detractors will often suggest that it’s inappropriate to hold such an open discourse, and they may even go so far as to suggest that the topic is undiscussable. Ignore those who seek silence instead of healthy dialogue. Make it safe to talk about high-stakes and controversial topics.

Create a Village

Some challenges are so profound that they won’t vanish, even if everyone talks openly and new norms are formed. For instance, some personal changes are so significant that asking people to embrace many new behaviors requires that you shape them into entirely new people; this level of transformation calls for the work of an entire village.

When breaking away from habits that are continually reinforced by a person’s existing social network, people must be plucked from their support structure and placed in a new network, one where virtually everyone in their new social circle supports and rewards the right behaviors while punishing the wrong ones.

Find Strength in Numbers

As the Beatles suggested, we’re most likely to succeed when we have “a little help from our friends.” These friends provide us with access to their brains, give us the strength of their hands and even allow us to make use of their many other personal resources. In effect they provide us with social capital. In fact, with a little help from our friends, we can produce a force greater than the sum of our individual efforts. But we can do this only when we know how to make use of social capital — the profound enabling power of an essential network of relationships.

So, when exactly should you build social capital to bring about challenging changes?

- When others are part of the problem
- When you can’t succeed on your own
- When facing changing, turbulent, or novel times — calling for novel solutions.

Blind Spots

Perhaps the most obvious condition that demands social support as a means of influencing vital behaviors comes with the need for feedback that can be offered only by a pair of outside eyes. When it comes to business and other settings, leaders rarely think of using real-time coaches. Some of today’s companies provide their leaders with call-in advisers who discuss what happened yesterday when the leader faced a challenge and didn’t do all that well. But few provide real-time coaching. This should change.
Design Rewards and Demand Accountability

Stories of well-intended rewards that inadvertently backfire are legion. The primary cause of most of these debacles is that individuals attempt to influence behaviors by using rewards as their first motivational strategy. In a well-balanced change effort, rewards come third. Influence masters first ensure that vital behaviors connect to intrinsic satisfaction. Next, they line up social support. They double-check both of these areas before they finally choose extrinsic rewards to motivate behavior.

Making use of extrinsic rewards can be complicated. Not every reward has its desired effect. Sometimes extrinsic programs can completely backfire and serve as punishment. For example, reward ceremonies honor a select few top performers but leave others who are not recognized feeling discouraged.

Use Incentives Wisely

Influence masters eventually use rewards and punishments, so the question is how to use incentives wisely.

Take care to ensure that the rewards come soon, are gratifying and are clearly tied to vital behaviors. When you do so, even small rewards can be used to help people overcome some of the most profound and persistent problems.

If you’re doing it right, less is more. When it comes to offering extrinsic rewards, the rewards typically don’t need to be very large — at least if you’ve laid the groundwork with the previous sources of motivation. The thought behind an incentive often carries symbolic significance and taps into a variety of social forces that carry a lot of weight.

Reward Vital Behaviors, Not Just Results

Don’t wait until people achieve phenomenal results, but instead reward small improvements in behavior. As simple as this sounds we’re bad at it, especially at work. When polled, employees reveal that their No. 1 complaint is that they aren’t recognized for their notable performances.

Each year a new survey publishes the fact that employees would appreciate more praise, and each year we apparently do nothing different. There seems to be a permanent divide between researchers and scholars who heartily argue that performance is best improved by rewarding incremental improvements, and the rest of the world where people wait for a profound achievement before working up any enthusiasm.

Influence by rewarding right results and right behaviors. If an employees’ current performance level is unacceptable, and you can’t wait for them to come up to standard, then either terminate them or move them to a task that they can complete. On the other hand, if an individual is excelling in some areas while lagging in others — but overall is up to snuff — then set performance goals in the lagging areas and don’t be afraid to reward small improvements. This means that you shouldn’t wait for big results but should reward improvement in vital behaviors along the way.

Watch for Divisive Incentives

People are so often out of touch with the message they’re sending that they inadvertently reward exactly the wrong behavior. Just watch coaches as they speak about the importance of teamwork and then celebrate individual accomplishment. Kids quickly learn that it’s the score that counts, not the assist, and it turns many of them into selfish prima donnas. So when behaviors are out of whack, look closely at your rewards. Who knows? Your own incentive system may be causing the problem.

Punishment Sends a Message, and So Does Its Absence

Sometimes you don’t have the luxury of rewarding positive performance because the person never actually does the right thing. In fact, he or she does only the wrong thing — and often. In these cases, if you want to make use of extrinsic reinforcers, you’re left with the prospect of punishing this person.

Punishment can create all sorts of serious and harmful emotional effects, particularly if it is only loosely administered. When it comes to punishment, you must be very careful.

Before punishing, place a shot across the bow — provide a clear warning to let people know exactly what negative things will happen to them should they continue down their current path, but don’t actually administer discipline yet.

When all else fails, punish. The lack of punishment for routine infractions sends a loud message across an organization. If you aren’t willing to punish people when they violate a core value (such as giving their best effort), that value will lose its moral force in the organization. On the other hand, punishing sends a powerful message about your values when you do hold employees accountable.

Change the Environment

For the final source for increasing our ability (“Can I do it?”), we examine how nonhuman forces — the world of buildings, space, sound, sight and so forth — can be brought to bear in an influence strategy.

Consider the profound and yet mostly unnoticed effect of
things on entire communities. Realizing the physicality of a neighborhood can send out unspoken messages that encourage socially inappropriate behavior, George Kelling started a community movement that is largely credited for reducing felonies in New York City by as much as 75 percent.

Committed to lessening the effect things were having on the community, Kelling advised the New York Transit Authority to start paying attention to environmental cues that provided a fertile environment for criminal behavior. Kelling’s crew began a systematic attack against graffiti, litter and vandalism. Over time, a combination of cleanup and prosecution for minor offenses began to make a difference. Surroundings improved, community pride increased and petty crimes declined. So did violent crime.

Environmental factors affect much of what we do, and yet we often fail to make good use of things as much as we should. There are two reasons for this:

- We often fail to notice their profound impact. More often than not, powerful elements in our environment, such as work procedures, job layouts, reporting structures, etc., remain invisible to us.
- Even when we do think about the impact the environment is having on us, we rarely know what to do about it.

**Make the Invisible Visible**

Once you’ve identified environmental elements that are subtly driving your or others’ behavior, take steps to make them more obvious. That is, you make the invisible visible.

Provide actual cues in the environment to remind people of the behaviors you’re trying to influence.

For example, Dr. Leon Bender tried several methods to encourage doctors to wash their hands more thoroughly. He finally realized that he needed to make the invisible visible. At a routine meeting, he handed each doctor a Petri dish with a layer of agar, collected a culture of their hands, and sent the dishes to the lab for culturing and photographing. When the photos came back from the lab, the images were frightfully effective. When it came to changing physicians’ behavior, photos created poignant vicarious experiences and visual cues that reminded them of the need to properly wash their hands.

**Mind the Data Stream**

As in the hand-washing example, small cues in the environment can draw attention to critical data points and change how people think and eventually how they behave. Influence geniuses understand the importance of an accurate data stream and do their best to ensure that their strategies focus on vital behaviors by serving up visible, timely and accurate information that supports their goals.

One warning about data: There is such a thing as “too much of a good thing.” Corporate leaders often undermine the influence of the data they so carefully gather by overdoing it. The incessant flow of reports, printouts and e-mails transforms into numbing and incoherent background noise. Influence masters never make this mistake. They understand that the only reason for gathering or publishing any data is to reinforce vital behaviors.

**Make It Easy**

Rather than constantly finding ways to motivate people to continue with their boring, painful, dangerous or otherwise loathsome activities, find a way to change things in order to make the right behaviors easier to enact.

Making use of things to enable behavior works best when you can alter the physical world in a way that eliminates human choice entirely. You don’t merely make good behavior desirable, you make it inevitable. This is where structure, process and procedures come into play. An example of this is the fast-food industry where employees can simply push picture buttons when taking an order. The process has all been routinized, and it’s almost impossible to do the wrong thing.

**Become an Influencer**

There is a growing body of knowledge as well as an impressive supply of real-life success stories that teach exactly how to change almost any human behavior. Scholarly works by Dr. Albert Bandura and others demonstrate that, if you know what you’re doing, you can indeed change remarkably resistant behaviors.

To become an effective influencer, it is important to address all six sources of influence when designing an influence strategy. Stop thinking of influence tools as a buffet and recognize them as a comprehensive approach to creating systematic, widespread and lasting change. Diagnose both motivational and ability sources of influence and then lock in the results by applying individual, social and structural forces to the solution. You now have a powerful six-source diagnostic tool at your fingertips. Use it liberally.