



# Influencer

## The Power to Change Anything

Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, David Maxfield, Ron McMillan and Al Switzler  
McGraw-Hill © 2007  
288 pages

### Rating

9 9 Applicability  
9 Innovation  
9 Style

### Focus

- Leadership & Management
- Strategy
- Sales & Marketing
- Finance
- Human Resources
- IT, Production & Logistics
- Career & Self-Development**
- Small Business
- Economics & Politics
- Industries
- Global Business
- Concepts & Trends

### Take-Aways

- You don't have to accept things the way they are. You can create change.
- Giving orders and nagging doesn't impel change. Instead, give people new experiences, tell them moving stories, help them connect to their deeper values and shared humanity.
- To create change, use these influence strategies:
  - Focus on changing a few crucial behaviors.
  - Give people the information they lack and train them in the skills they need to act on it.
  - Build a reinforcement system that rewards behavior appropriately.
  - "Make the undesirable desirable."
  - Enlist the power of positive peer pressure.
  - Change the environment to encourage employees to exercise new behaviors.
- Rather than asking people to change on their own, create a network for people who are trying to change to support one another.

# Relevance

## What You Will Learn

In this summary, you will learn: 1) How people change; 2) How you can influence them to change; and 3) What influence strategies you can use to help people change.

## Recommendation

This book is a joy, and, as the authors no doubt intended, an inspiration. Often, those who try to create change over the long term give up and become resigned to the way things are. Into this stable situation come five authors – Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, David Maxfield, Ron McMillan and Al Switzler – full of optimism, examples and, best of all, practical techniques you can use right away to create change. It would be easy to say the book is too optimistic, or that it claims too much is possible, but some of its examples show the success of sweeping, ambitious changes. Instead of clinging to a dour but “realistic” view of the world, they invite you to re-examine your influence strategies and analyze your environment for new clues, whether you are trying to change yourself or your employees. The social possibilities are exciting. *getAbstract* recommends this book to anyone who is trying to create social change, and especially people who are open-minded and at ease with new ideas.

# Summary

*“Enormous influence comes from focusing on just a few vital behaviors. Even the most pervasive problems will often yield to changes in a handful of high-leverage behaviors.”*

*“Massive problems require a community of influencers working in concert.”*

## Becoming an Influencer

You can become an influencer, create positive change, and play a major role in solving major dilemmas as well as small, irritating problems. Behavior is stubborn, but not set in stone. Now, you can learn some methods to help people change – including yourself.

That might sound optimistic, even idealistic, but look at Mimi Silbert: She creates real change through San Francisco’s Delancey Street Foundation, which helps repeat offenders and homeless felons. It doesn’t just give them a meal and hope that they somehow will get better. It guides them to new, productive behavior through work and acceptance. Silbert, like other successful influencers, gets this done by “focusing on just a few vital behaviors.” So, the first step in becoming an influencer is learning to identify “high-leverage behaviors” that will have the maximum overall impact. To find these pivotal behaviors, put aside what you think you know and “study the best.” See what actually works.

Next, search for “positive deviance.” Examine personal situations, organizations or communities that ought to be similar to yours, but that lack the problems you have and want to fix. Analyze what they are doing differently. Look for “recovery behaviors,” the actions people take to create change and to avoid backsliding into old habits. This requires examining at least two sample groups (ideally more). For example, say that six groups of employees took the same training program, but only one group consistently implemented the new skills. How is that group different? Focus on behaviors; leave theories till later. If members of the successful group joke around more, note that. If they work for a supervisor who is less open to being challenged than other supervisors, note that. List the behavioral differences that might have helped one group do better. Then test those behaviors. Try these techniques in low-risk test situations where you can get feedback quickly. Check for outside research that confirms or disproves your observations. Eventually you’ll derive a brief list of crucial behaviors. Focus on changing those.

*“We can become powerful influencers.”*

As you develop your list of “influencer” tools, you may find that people often approach change with “incomplete or inaccurate” mental models. You don’t have to disprove their ideas or correct all their false beliefs; instead, simply focus on behavior. The answers to just two questions determine if people will succeed in changing how they behave. First, “Is it worth it?” If the effort isn’t worth the likely gain, people won’t change, no matter how many reasons they have. Second, “Can you do it?” If a person doesn’t believe change is possible, it won’t matter how much someone nags; change won’t happen. Nagging – reminding people via straightforward, intrusive, words – is the most common method people use to try to produce change, but it doesn’t work.

Instead, use words and stories to “create profound vicarious experiences.” Paint pictures. Create characters to model new behaviors. Good, dramatic stories that illustrate principles and motivate people are essential to underscore important points. Tell the whole story. Don’t just scare people. The TV program *Scared Straight* made at-risk teens want to avoid jail, but it didn’t provide hope or options. Tell stories describing the experience of change.

Influencers don’t depend on just one technique. They combine six general strategies:

*“People choose their behaviors based on what they think will happen to them as a result.”*

1. **“Personal motivation”** – Addressing individual desires and values.
2. **“Personal ability”** – Teaching crucial information and the new skills needed to act on it.
3. **“Social motivation”** – Using peer pressure.
4. **“Social ability”** – Helping people unite for support, rather than struggling alone.
5. **“Structural motivation”** – Building reward systems; getting people to be accountable.
6. **“Structural ability”** – Changing the environment in which an action occurs.

### **Influence People through Personal Motivation**

Sometimes people act as they do because they don’t want to act differently, or they think the new behaviors they are being asked to carry out are distasteful or uncool. To change this, find a way to “make the undesirable desirable.” For example, think of existing habits like brushing your teeth. Brushing your teeth is kind of dull, but you associate it with good hygiene, not to mention good breath, so you brush.

*“Many of the...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.”*

To make new behaviors into similarly desirable habits, use two techniques: “creating new experiences and creating new motives.” This is the “try it, you’ll like it” approach. Find low-threat ways to have people experience the desired new behavior. Pave the way with stories about people like them who did the same thing and succeeded, despite the effort involved in changing.

Most people don’t do things to derive rationally explained value. They do things that align with their sense of who they are. After a time, those actions become habitual. Habits tend to be disconnected from rational evaluation, and from your “moral compass.” You want to reverse that. Seek ways to connect your actions to your moral values. Try to govern your behavior according to a positive code that accents the consequences of your actions. Start with language; spell out the harmful effects of destructive behavior compared to the benefits of kinder or healthier behavior. If you are helping others reverse their negative patterns, don’t lecture. Honor their choices; lead them to new behaviors with questions, not orders. Build links between the action you want and the deeper intrinsic – but not obvious – rewards.

*“When we inspect our actions from a moral perspective, we’re able to see consequences and connections that otherwise remain blocked from our view.”*

### **Influence People through Personal Ability**

When people don’t change despite your efforts as an influencer, avoid making a “fundamental attribution error.” You might think they haven’t changed because they don’t

*“Savvy influencers [use] social capital. They’re quick to consider what help, authority, consent, or cooperation individuals may need when facing risky or daunting new behaviors.”*

*“Phobics typically remain phobics because they rarely disconfirm their unfounded fears head-on.”*

*“If we can...change the feeling associated with a vital behavior, we can make compulsive bad habits feel as disgusting as going to bed with gritty teeth.”*

*“Unpleasant endeavors require a whole different sort of motivation that can come only from within. People stimulate this internal motivation by investing themselves...they make the activity an issue of personal significance.”*

want to, or because doing things the old way fits their nature, or even because they are bad. Often, people don’t change because they can’t. Even if they know what change they want to make, they “lack the ability.” They underestimate the work of learning new behaviors and they don’t get to practice new skills. Willpower often isn’t the issue (even with weight loss), but the skill to act differently is. One approach is to have people practice separate, specific facets of the desired behavior or skill. This demands complete focus, so a person can do it only for a short time.

People also need rapid feedback based on clear criteria and achievable goals. A person can’t, for example, play a sport “better.” That’s too vague. Instead, someone can try doing individual actions faster or differently. Deliberate practice works best when trainees are relaxed, so eliminate fear from the learning environment. Try to make dull subjects interesting. Expect people to stumble. And if you make mistakes, use your errors to build resilience. When you fail at a task, as happens often with a new skill, draw lessons from it. Break difficult skills into smaller steps, and frame any emotionally challenging situations so you stay cool and in contact with your rational self.

### **Influence People through Social Motivation**

Anyone who is familiar with mass movements’ devastating potential knows that peer pressure can be very powerful. Yet, people still try to make difficult changes without the helpful impact of a supportive community. Use the power of “social support” to your benefit.

A well-respected individual can be a model for an entire company or community, and can set a new tone for corporate culture. Just introducing a new idea isn’t enough. Many innovators and “early adopters” try that and have no influence on their communities. Instead, consider how your community works and identify its trendsetters. Since more than 85% of the people in any community won’t adopt new behaviors “until opinion leaders do,” you have to examine your target audience and find those people. Some will hold official positions, like organizational representatives or village chiefs. Others are simply respected individuals. Still others are media creations. Your job is to find and enlist these opinion leaders. This also works person-by-person. Individuals who try to quit smoking do better if they have buddies to check in with, even via e-mail. You may have to engage in smaller transformations as you work on making a larger change. Maybe you even need to become an opinion leader yourself. You may have to form a community of disparate individuals. And, if you’re trying to change a behavior no one talks about, your first change could be to make it “discussable.” To meet these challenges, use your community.

### **Influence People through Social Ability**

You can change by yourself, and you also can persuade others to change, one at a time. However, many times important changes are easier to carry out with the support of people who are close to you. A study of married couples in a cholesterol-reduction program found that one spouse was likely to achieve better results if the other spouse was also in the program. What’s more, some changes are interdependent, and affect you even if you aren’t the person who is changing. For example, reducing the local rate of HIV infection lowers public health risks and costs for a whole community. Other changes only work if several people (such as a team) change together.

You will shape change more effectively if you enlist social capital. Members of a community can help one another by brainstorming, pooling information, publicly pledging to act differently and mutually monitoring one another’s behavior. This cuts down on

individual “blind spots.” Help spread skills community-wide by having people teach each other. Such steps reinforce group solidarity, and reduce isolation and dehumanization.

*“Learn how to transform taboo subjects into a routine part of the public discourse, and you [will] possess an enormously powerful tool for dealing with some of the toughest cases imaginable.”*

*“When a respected individual attempts a vital behavior and succeeds, this...alone can go further in motivating others to change than almost any other source of influence.”*

*“The desire to be accepted, respected, and connected...really pulls at human heart strings. And as far as the rest of us are concerned – managers, parents, and coaches – learn how to co-opt this awesome power, and you can change just about anything.”*

### **Influence People through Structural Motivation**

Extrinsic rewards are among the most basic ways to try to shape behavior. They are also one of the most dangerous. If you aren’t careful, you may reward, and thus foster, the wrong behavior. For example, a Soviet attempt to use incentives to energize oil-drilling crews backfired. They offered bonuses based on the total feet drilled, and found that workers drilled a number of shallow holes (which are easier) rather than deeper wells that were likelier to produce oil. To protect your corporate culture, don’t offer rewards that pit your employees against one another.

Don’t dull the pleasure people find in doing things they like. For instance, rewarding kids for things they are already doing can backfire; they lose their intrinsic motivation and slack off the behavior. So, don’t replace “personal and social motivation” with bonuses.

You can still use extrinsic rewards to produce change, if you follow a few principles. Enlist opinion leaders, craft good stories and show people how the changes you advocate align with their best selves – then add monetary or external rewards. These don’t have to be large. In fact, symbolic rewards, such as certificates, may work fine. Start small: Give extensive, specific verbal praise to employees who do well. Don’t wait for the final results to give rewards. Reward people for practicing “vital behaviors,” even if they don’t achieve the desired results. Be careful with punishments. You can produce as much behavior change with a serious, focused warning as with punishment (sometimes more). When you do punish, be consistent. Make sure the punishment aligns with the infraction.

### **Influence People through Structural Ability**

When you are trying to get people to change, it is natural to focus on them individually, but that is not the only path. Environment has a strong influence on how people act. If company leaders say they want a free flow of communication with their employees, but they spend their time in intimidating, imposing offices far from the plant floor, they aren’t likely to get what they want.

The toughest thing to do with the environment is notice it. Try to “make the invisible visible.” This might be as simple as putting “fill to here” lines on boxes – a step that helped retrain workers to use shipping containers properly. It might be as shocking as the bacterial cultures a hospital took of doctors’ hands to reduce accidental infections. Even trained medical professionals did not wash as often as necessary until they saw pictures of what was growing on their hands. Accent similar relevant, but previous invisible, elements of the “data stream.” This could be easy or complex – from posting charts to redesigning a cafeteria to foster cross-departmental socializing. Shape the space to make it easier for people to behave as you want and, then, to use the desired behavior until it is habitual.

## About the Authors

**Kerry Patterson** is a training program author. **Joseph Grenny** is a speaker and founder of a nonprofit organization. **David Maxfield** is performance researcher and speaker. **Ron McMillan** is a leadership speaker and consultant. **Al Switzler** is a training expert and faculty member at the University of Michigan. They lead a corporate training and organizational performance firm, and also co-wrote *Crucial Conversations* and *Crucial Confrontations*.