

Three Ways to Grow Your Influence

Ever get one of those meeting invites, and something seemed a little fishy? I did.

The meeting invitation subject line read, "Summer Promotion Planning Session." The purpose of the meeting was for directors, like me, to present our Summer promotion plans to the Marketing Vice President, Edward. No other description or direction was provided.

While Edward was a brilliant and accomplished marketer, he had a reputation for being volatile and flying off the handle at any given moment. He'd been known to verbally abuse his team when someone didn't know the answer to one of his questions or work didn't meet his expectations.

I had a number of my peers ask me why we were summoned to the planning session. I told them I had no idea but encouraged them to have their facts together; the meeting could be rough.

Because of a scheduling conflict, I attended the meeting virtually. I logged onto the meeting website, and I could see my peers sitting in the quiet room, looking a little apprehensive. Edward stormed into the room, sat down, and asked who wanted to go first. One poor soul raised his hand to volunteer.

Before the first presenter could get a word out, Edward began peppering the individual with questions. Edward's tone was condescending and became more intense as the dialogue progressed. The first volunteer didn't have some of the answers to Edward's questions.

Edward stopped the individual in mid-sentence and said, "Either you are incompetent, or you don't care. Which is it?"

I felt like I was watching a shark that smelled blood and began circling its prey.

After a long, uncomfortable pause, Edward said, “You obviously don’t know your business. What are you worth? I ask again whether you are incompetent or don’t care. Which is it?”

The first volunteer’s face was bright red, and steam came out of his ears. However, out of fear, he didn’t respond.

Edward turned to the next person and demanded, “How about you? What are your Summer promotion plans?”

As the next person bravely began presenting, Edward pounced on the individual with pressing questions. The person became flustered and couldn’t spit her words out.

Edward sarcastically asked, “You too? Either you are incompetent, or you don’t care about our business. Which is it?”

Edward then proceeded to ask everyone around the table the same question. When he finished, Edward stood up and said, “I think I made my point. Everyone had better know their facts next time!” He stormed out of the room just as quickly as he entered.

I was spared the berating because I attended virtually, and Edward didn’t call on me. I couldn’t believe what I just saw. It wasn’t right. No one should be marginalized like Edward did to the team; it was utterly demoralizing.

The next day, I told my manager what had happened. He told me that he’d already heard the negative feedback and assured me that Edward’s behavior would be addressed.

Then, I got a wild idea that I could positively influence the situation. I thought to myself, “Meetings don’t have to be like the one Edward just held. They can be productive, effective, and constructive all at the same time while

treating people with respect and dignity. Why don't I volunteer to lead the next plan presentation meeting and show there's a better way?"

I mentioned the idea to my manager. He paused and asked, "What will you do differently?"

"I'll let people know upfront what's expected of them, create a positive environment where ideas can be exchanged, and feedback can be given," I replied.

My manager smiled and said, "I like it. Let's give it a try on our next go around."

To make a long story short, my approach was successful. I reached out to different VPs to align with my proposed format. I developed and provided a plan report template outlining information expectations. Lastly, I facilitated a planning meeting with all of our cross-functional partners in a very positive environment.

I received great feedback, including a note from someone that worked for Edward, "the plans shared today were excellent, and definitely instilled the confidence for success against this critical initiative. Thank you for all of the collaboration with your customers in building out the details."

Because I influenced the situation, which led to a positive outcome, I was asked to lead other innovation launch and program plan presentation meetings. I proved that there was a better way to do things by treating people with dignity and respect.

As Christians, we are called to be *salt and light* (i.e., to influence). The Bible says,

"Let me tell you why you are here. You're here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth... Here's another way to put it: You're here to be light,

bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I'm putting you on a light stand. Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:13-16 The Message)

It's our job to shine and influence the world around us. So, what does it mean to be *salt and light*, to influence? Vocabulary.com defines influence as "the power to have an important effect on someone or something. If someone influences someone else, they are changing a person or thing in an indirect but important way." To be influential means having the ability to shape and mold people, events, or the environment around you. Influence is leadership.

How do you grow your influence?

1. **Build Trust.** Walk with integrity and establish people's confidence in you – Do what you say you'll do. Trust others and be trustworthy.
2. **Care About Others.** People won't care how much you know until they know how much you care. Treat people with dignity and respect. Take time to listen to people genuinely. Also, determine what interests others and motivates them, and help them get it.
3. **Lead by Example.** Remember, actions speak louder than words.

In the above story, I influenced the situation and the people around me by building trust with the team, creating a positive work environment, treating folks with dignity and respect, and leading by example.

How about you? When you see something that isn't right, do you

have the influence necessary to make a change? If not, what will you do to become influential and make a positive difference in your world (e.g., business, community, school, or church)? If you build trust, care about others and lead by example, you'll become an influential leader.

Do you want to discover more about becoming an inspirational leader? Please visit my website, prestonpoore.com, today!

Cheers,

Preston