

EDUCATION & TRAINING



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Make more impact - faster

Think only the boss has a big influence in your workplace? Think again, says *Michelle Gibbings* - by doing a few things differently, EAs can quickly be seen as very influential characters

Job tenure is long gone, while the casual and contract labour force is continuing to expand.

And, at the same time, technological advances (including digitisation and artificial intelligence) are changing how we work. In fact, a 2016 report by the CSIRO and Australian Computer Society, *Tomorrow's digitally enabled workforce*, predicts that nearly half of the jobs in Australia are at risk of computerisation and automation.

The end result is a complex and ambiguous working environment where leaders are expected to deliver outcomes in a shorter timeframe and often with fewer resources.

To thrive in this ever changing landscape and to progress their career, high level EAs taking on an important business manager role need to know how to have more impact - faster. Central to that success, of course, is being able to influence.

Influence is more than it seems

People often equate influence with being Machiavellian but it's not that black and white - it all depends on the intent of the person seeking to influence. It's certainly a force for good when it is used to ensure better decisions but perhaps not so good when used for self-serving ends.

Being able to influence helps leaders to be heard and to get their initiatives across the line. It's also a skill that can help to balance the scales, so it's not just the charismatic extrovert who's heard.

And influence isn't a solo pursuit. An effective leader knows they can't do it alone. They need each team member operating optimally, so they can collectively make progress and affect change in the organisation. To do that, the team members need to be able to influence.

“Most people, when they hear the term ‘competitive advantage,’ think about Michael Porter’s definition as it relates to organisations. That is, for an organisation to succeed it needs to know what it’s good at vis-à-vis other players in the market. It’s this point of difference and how it is leveraged that makes an organisation stand out and succeed. But every individual has a unique set of skills. You can hone your skills in a way to create your distinct competitive advantage. To secure this competitive advantage, your professional toolkit needs to go beyond the traditional – to include an ability to motivate and encourage behavioural change and secure outcomes. In short, you need to be able to influence.”

‘Step Up: How to build your influence at work’ by Michelle Gibbings

Influential people lead differently

Influential people do many things differently – they tend to take the long view with relationships, which means they don’t sacrifice a relationship for short-term, self-serving gain. Consequently, they take the time to listen to people and welcome different thoughts, ideas and opinions as they know they don’t have all the answers. They’re also not afraid to take a stand and speak up against the majority on things that are important – not just for them, but for other people as well. Likewise, they’re willing to admit when they make a mistake, and see such errors as an opportunity to learn.

They acknowledge the efforts of others and don’t take the glory for successes that were not theirs or theirs alone. This is because they’re not afraid to hire people who are smarter than them – they know they need an awesome team around them if they’re to make progress.

Learn how to influence

Influence and charisma are not two sides of the same coin. There are people who appear naturally influential and easily able to navigate their way through complex environments. However, establishing influence takes effort and practice, but these are skills that can be learned.

- **Understand yourself** – examine the mindset you’re applying to your work and relationships. Letting assumptions drive your thought processes, and ultimately behaviour, can negatively impact your decision-making and interactions with colleagues and stakeholders.
- **Understand others** – take time to understand what intrinsically motivates those around you. Having insight into others will better enable you to work with them, and encourage and inspire them to secure common goals.

■ **Understand the process** – know the system in which the organisation operates, and how the players inter-relate, make decisions and secure outcomes. By understanding how it all works you’re better able to navigate the complexities.

■ **Maintain your integrity** – integrity once lost is almost impossible to regain. Guard it carefully and push beyond self-interest – seek to play the better game in discussions and advocate positions that are not self-serving.

■ **Get busy, on purpose** – influential people get things done so be deliberate about how you use your time, be decisive in how you make decisions and, lastly, be determined in the face of set-backs.

■ **Play the long game** – seek to secure long term, constructive relationships that are mutually beneficial. Relationships where it’s all about one person don’t last.

■ **Design your network** – be conscious about how you build your network. Identify relationship gaps and weaknesses, and put a plan in place to address them (for more information on this, check out Janine Garner’s article over the page).

■ **Lead consciously** – be aware of your actions and how they’re seen by other people. Inconsistencies in what you say and do are easily seen by others. Your leadership is constantly on display – and remember that leadership isn’t defined by hierarchy.

■ **Craft communication** – it’s not how much you talk, but what you say that matters. Ground your messages in reality and only say what people need to know. Keep it simple, whilst being empathetic, authentic and transparent.

■ **Negotiate wisely** – strive to secure outcomes that leave all involved with their dignity intact. Build the necessary relationships early so you’re ready for the negotiation process and have the resolve to see it through. ✪

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THE EXPERT

Michelle Gibbings is a change leadership and career expert, plus founder of Change Meridian where she works with global leaders and teams to help them accelerate progress. She is the author of *Step Up: How to Build Your Influence at Work*.