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# Influencer



The  
New Science  
of Leading  
Change

Joseph Grenny • Kerry Patterson  
David Maxfield • Ron McMillan • Al Switzler

From the bestselling authors of  
**crucial conversations**

# Influencer



The  
New Science  
of Leading  
Change

SECOND EDITION

**Joseph Grenny • Kerry Patterson  
David Maxfield • Ron McMillan • Al Switzler**



New York Chicago San Francisco Lisbon London Madrid  
Mexico City Milan New Delhi San Juan Seoul  
Singapore Sydney Toronto

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This book is printed on acid-free paper.

We dedicate this book to influencers everywhere—  
to the tenacious leaders who have not only added to an  
ever-growing knowledge of how people change but have  
also restored hope, inspired action, and made it possible  
for each of us to amplify our influence to change  
the world for good.

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# Part



1

# The New Science of Leading Change

## 1

# Leadership Is Influence

*I haven't got the slightest idea how to change people, but still I keep a long list of prospective candidates just in case I should ever figure it out.*

—David Sedaris

**T**It wasn't the most harrowing research junket we had ever taken. Nothing like earlier adventures in our influencer research to some of the more dangerous parts of the world. No threat of deadly parasites, no confrontation with aggressive panhandlers, no fear of being kidnapped, no wrangling with corrupt politicians.

This time, our research had taken us to New York City to one of the Big Apple's finest restaurants where, as part of our demanding research regime, we'd be tossing back scrumptious appetizers while chatting with a brilliant restaurateur. (It was a tough job, but someone had to do it.) All of this was being done as part of an ongoing project aimed at discovering how some rather remarkable people routinely influence human behavior in a manner that is the envy of all who know them.

The person we were visiting on this particular day was Danny Meyer. Danny had earned the title of "influencer" by fostering a unique culture of customer service. Every one of

his restaurants had been in the top 40 of Zagat's ratings of customer preference—practically since the day they first opened. We soon discovered that the reason behind his unparalleled success was his capacity to influence 1,500 ordinary employees to consistently create extraordinary experiences for their 100,000 daily guests. Actually, *extraordinary* is too small a word.

For example, a woman frantically rushes through the entrance of Gramercy Tavern, one of Danny's exquisite establishments located in the Flatiron District of Manhattan. The potential diner is distraught because she has just left her purse in the taxi that dropped her off for lunch and then sped away into a sea of yellow. The blood drains from the woman's face as she realizes that not only will she never see her purse again but she also has no way to pay for her meal. Or get back to work.

At this moment, Danny's culture of hospitality kicks into action. An employee (let's call him Carlo) notices the stranger's look of panic, learns of her problem, and invites her to join her party—who are already seated and waiting for her.

"Don't worry about paying," Carlo comforts the worried guest. "We'll settle up some other time. For now, please enjoy yourself. In the meantime, what is your mobile number?"

Surmising that the frantic customer likely left her cell phone in her purse, Carlo asks a colleague to repeatedly call the number. Thirty minutes later when the taxi driver finally hears the ring and answers the call, he's many miles north in the Bronx. Carlo then flashes the Batman signal onto the side of a building to summon the Caped Crusader . . .

Okay, the Batman thing isn't true, . . . but what Carlo does do is quite heroic. He arranges to meet the taxi halfway between the two points, and he pays the driver for his trouble, retrieves the purse, and presents it to the woman just as she finishes

her lunch. We're guessing she responded by promising to name her firstborn child after the caring man who has been the very essence of hospitality.

What makes this incident remarkable is not just that it took place at all but that similar actions routinely occur in each of Danny's restaurants. Although Danny draws from the same labor pool, works in the same industry, buys the same ingredients, and builds in the same neighborhoods as 20,000 other New York restaurateurs, he has found a way to differentiate himself from all of his competitors—through *influence*. Members of Danny's staff behave markedly differently from your average restaurant employee, and this has not been the result of some lucky accident. It's been the result of Danny's systematic and intentional actions aimed at influencing very specific behavior.

That's why we traveled to New York. We went to see what made Danny an influencer.

## A COMMON THREAD

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Now, let's be clear. This isn't a book about customer service. Likewise, when we later visit a woman in San Francisco who has helped tens of thousands of felons turn their lives around, we won't be studying criminal psychology. And when we look at successful change efforts aimed at implementing Six Sigma, overcoming addiction, eradicating a pandemic, improving patient safety, reducing violence against women, improving employee engagement, and turning failing schools around, our interest won't be in exploring these topics either.

What we *will* be doing is looking for the common thread that connects all successful leaders—no matter the objective or the setting. We'll be exploring a common set of principles and

skills that help create quick, profound, and lasting change. We call this ability to create changes in human behavior *influence* and the people who do it *influencers*. At the end of the day, what qualifies people to be called “leaders” is their capacity to influence others to change their behavior in order to achieve important results.

Now, as you hear the word “influence,” you might think that we’re referring to the less impressive and more suspicious tool called “persuasion.” We’re not. This book is not about solving problems or hitting new targets by applying the right combination of verbal tricks. If you’re looking to reach rather modest goals by stealthily exerting your will over others, this book is not for you.

This book has much loftier and more enduring goals, requiring much stronger tools. It explores how to achieve profoundly better results in everything from the nuclear family to nuclear power plants by changing human habits that can be extraordinarily difficult to alter. We’ll examine in detail why people do what they do and what it takes to help them act differently. Our analysis will reveal that irrespective of whether you’re stopping AIDS or starting a safety program, the key to success has little to do with pep talks, bribes, or sermons. Instead, success relies on the capacity to systematically create rapid, profound, and sustainable changes in a handful of key behaviors.

For example, let’s say you work as a manager in a software development firm where dozens of software engineers write mountains of code every week. The products are so complex that the overall design is divided among several teams. After years of your employees’ bringing in projects late or riddled with bugs, you discover that the key to consistent high-quality performance is getting them to practice two *vital behaviors*:

(1) admit when they have problems, and (2) immediately speak up when they won't meet a deadline. When your software designers do these two things consistently, products get completed correctly and on time. When they don't, they don't. This flash of leadership insight gives you hope that if only you can influence your people to practice these two behaviors, you'll turn the corner on achieving results.

The problem is, your people (being the normal humans that they are) are more willing to donate a kidney than follow these two requests. Only fools admit to having problems. It is a naïve person, indeed, who willingly says, "Hey, everyone, I'm in trouble!" You've posted signs, provided training, and even offered a special parking space to those who admit they're behind. No takers.

But there is an influencer out there who has found a way to help software designers to routinely speak up when they run into problems or call for aid when a deadline is at risk. This time we'll travel to Ann Arbor, Michigan, to meet with Rich Sheridan, the co-owner of Menlo Innovations. His software designers meet every single deadline—and they thoroughly love their work. How has Rich created this culture of both joy and accountability? By following precisely the same principles of influence that Danny Meyer uses to generate lavish hospitality.

Throughout this book, we'll explore the details of Rich's, Danny's, and other influencers' strategies for influencing human behavior. It takes over 200 pages to share their knowledge and techniques. However, the short explanation for why they're successful is that they see themselves not simply as owners, managers, or leaders but as full-time influencers. In fact, it's how they characterize themselves. Talk with them and you'll soon learn that they think intentionally about their ability to

help others act in unprecedentedly effective ways. They think about influencing behavior, talk about it, and practice it, and all of them have created remarkable changes in domains where failure has been the norm—often for decades.

Now, unlike Rich or Danny, you probably don't work in a software development firm or a restaurant, but you probably *do* face challenges you'd like to overcome, not to mention the many stretch goals you'd love to achieve. Perhaps you'd like to help a troubled son who has just returned from his third drug rehab experience. Unfortunately, the program has failed twice before—and nothing has really changed since the last failure. This calls for influence. Or maybe you want to assist your work group in moving from being *decent* in on-time delivery to being *best in class*. Or perhaps you're working with a high school with a horrible dropout rate, and you want to see the students not only make it through high school but also to graduate from college. You want the best.

## A DEARTH OF INFLUENCE

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Fortunately, there's good news in this call to learn more about influence. Learning how to motivate and enable others to change their actions may be the most important skill you'll ever acquire. It's not merely curiously engaging (and it is); it also sits at the center of what ails most of us. The lion's share of the problems that really bother us don't call for additional technology, theory, philosophy, or data (we're up to our necks in *that*); instead, the problems call for the ability to *change what people do*. And when it comes to this particular skill, demand far exceeds supply.

Given the versatility and importance of knowing how to get other people to act differently, you'd think that at every back-

yard barbecue or office party, you could find someone who is an expert in influence. In fact, you'd think we'd be so consumed with the topic of influence that our children would collect influence trading cards, complete with pictures of world-class influencers. As a result of all this study and passion, we would speak a unique language, carry a full array of models, and master a specialized set of skills for both enabling and encouraging others to change their behavior.

Of course, none of this is true. At best, we chip away at the edges of influence—maybe we attend a seminar or two—but we don't routinely study the topic, and we are not good at helping others to change. Unlike Danny Meyer, Rich Sheridan, and the other influencers we'll soon meet, most of us can't verbalize our personal theory of influence, we don't see ourselves as influencers, and we most certainly don't have a successful record.

For example, when was the last time you saw a change attempt conducted at your place of work yield anything more than the occasional t-shirt or mug emblazoned with the name of the effort? If your answer is “never,” you’re in good company. Our review of the past 30 years of change literature reveals that fewer than one in eight workplace change efforts produces anything other than cynicism.

When it comes to creating changes in behavior, we're equally challenged at home. For instance, every year we spend millions on diets and lose little more than our money. Fewer than 10 percent of us succeed when setting out to change our excessive spending, inadequate exercise, and other bad habits.

Communities fare no better. Two-thirds of the felons who are released from our “correctional” system return within three years—completely uncorrected—while having earned an advanced degree in crime. Stopping the spread of AIDS and

other diseases requires people to cooperate in order to succeed; yet millions of individuals are infected every year because we humans are bad at cooperating, and we're not getting any better.

As a result of all of these failed influence efforts and unfulfilled dreams, most of us grow impatient. We ask: "Why aren't people doing what they should be doing, and why can't I get them to change?" Eventually we settle on the strategy recommended by essayist David Sedaris, who suggested: "I haven't got the slightest idea how to change people, but still I keep a long list of prospective candidates just in case I should ever figure it out."

But there *are* influencers out there.

## FINDING INFLUENCERS

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Our visits with Danny Meyer and Rich Sheridan should give you a hint as to what we did to expand our understanding of how to influence human behavior. We studied people who had succeeded where others had failed. Actually, we didn't start there. As most researchers do, we began by reading. Our research team pored over more than 17,000 articles and books to find scholars and practitioners who have mastered various aspects of influence. From these we identified those who had succeeded at influencing rapid, profound, and sustainable changes in ways that most of the world thinks are impossible. Next, we tracked down these rare individuals and closely examined their work.

For instance, we learned that Wiwat Rojanapithayakorn has saved over 5 million Thai citizens from contracting HIV/AIDS from a position of little to no power, by influencing the behavior of his 60 million fellow Thai citizens. That was certainly worth examining. Dain Hancock, president of Lockheed Mar-

tin Aeronautics, influenced remarkable behavior change across a cynical and resistant 13,000-person workforce, helping him land a \$1 trillion contract. Ethna Reid routinely enters schools that are last in their district in reading comprehension, and she propels them to the top—in less than a year. Martha Swai has helped reduce spousal abuse across the entire nation of Tanzania through the use of, of all things, a very influential radio program. Other notable influencers have eradicated a disease, saved thousands from dying from hospital errors, and turned convicted felons into productive citizens—to name but a few of their accomplishments.

So we tracked down these successful individuals and studied what they did—once again, looking for commonalities. It takes the rest of this book to explain what we learned from them, but we can offer some encouraging news. Influencers exist, and what they know and do is learnable. In fact, hundreds of thousands of people have read what we learned from them, and they have applied the principles and skills to their own challenges, put the ideas to work on their own aspirations, and they have made remarkable progress. And so can you.

So it's time to roll up your sleeves and get started. Go get that list of prospective change candidates you've been keeping for so long, and let's see what it takes to help them change.

# About the Authors

This award-winning team of authors has produced four *New York Times* bestsellers—*Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking when Stakes are High* (2002), *Crucial Accountability: Tools for Resolving Violated Expectations, Broken Commitments, and Bad Behavior* (2005), *Influencer: The New Science of Leading Change* (2008), and *Change Anything: The New Science of Personal Success* (2011). They are also cofounders of VitalSmarts, an innovator in corporate training and organizational performance.



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# About VitalSmarts

An innovator in corporate training and leadership development, VitalSmarts combines three decades of original research with 50 years of the best social science thinking to help leaders and organizations achieve new levels of performance. Specifically, we focus on human behavior—the underlying written and unwritten rules that shape what employees do every day and create the cultural operating system upon which an organization functions. VitalSmarts' work within the halls of some of the world's top organizations has led us to identify four skill sets present in successful companies. When used in combination, these high-leverage skills create healthy corporate cultures that spur flawless execution and consistent innovation. These skill sets are taught in our award-winning training programs and *New York Times* bestselling books of the same titles: Crucial Conversations, Crucial Accountability, Influencer, and Change Anything.

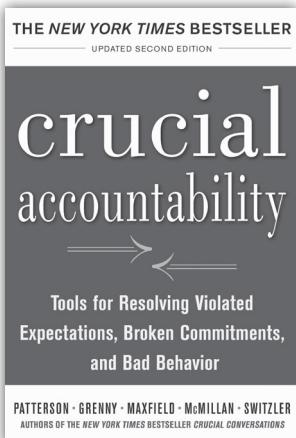
VitalSmarts has trained more than one million people worldwide and helped more than 300 of the Fortune 500 realize significant results using this proven method for driving rapid, sustainable and measurable change in behaviors. VitalSmarts has been ranked by *Inc.* magazine as one of the fastest-growing companies in America for nine consecutive years.

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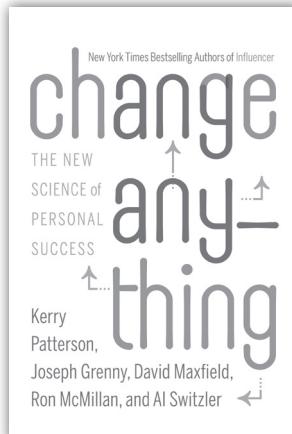
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—Muhammad Yunus, Nobel Peace Prize Winner

"Influencing human behavior is one of the most difficult challenges faced by leaders. This book provides powerful insight into how to make behavior change that will last."

—Sidney Taurel, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer,  
Eli Lilly and Company

"If you are truly motivated to make productive changes in your life, don't put down this book until you reach the last page. Whether dealing with a recalcitrant teen, doggedly resistant coworkers, or a personal frustration that 'no one ever wants to hear my view,' *Influencer* can help guide you in making the changes that put you in the driver's seat."

—Deborah Norville, anchor of *Inside Edition* and bestselling author

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JOSEPH GRENNY, KERRY PATTERSON, DAVID MAXFIELD, RON McMILLAN, and AL SWITZLER are the leaders of VitalSmarts, an innovator in best practices training products and services that has taught millions of people worldwide and that has worked with more than 300 of the Fortune 500 companies. [www.vitalsmarts.com](http://www.vitalsmarts.com)

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