



Influencers Among Us

A Practical Approach for Leading Change

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The ability to lead change is crucial for entrepreneurs and clinical nurse specialists (CNSs). Although introducing a new idea or initiative may be the first step toward achieving change, getting change not only to happen but also “to stick” is a significant challenge. This article introduces a 6-source model for influencing behaviors to effect the desired change that will take hold and achieve lasting impact. Attention is given to the application of the model to CNS practice.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The 6-source influencer model for change introduced in this article is based on the work by Vital Smarts and featured in the new book *Influencer: The Power to Change Anything*.¹ Vital Smarts, a global company headquartered in Provo, Utah, is dedicated to innovation in corporate training and organizational performance. Vital Smarts is also the creator of 2 other well-known books and training offerings² that improve key organizational outcomes by focusing on high-leverage skills and strategies: *Crucial Conversations*³ and *Crucial Confrontations*.⁴

The major assumption of the 6-source influencer model is that almost all the profound problems that individuals, organizations, and society face have a solution. Solutions lie with the ability to influence, a high-leverage skill that requires individuals to act differently. The authors argue that everyone has the potential to be an influencer. Reversing the mind-set of the well-known prayer that asks for serenity to accept the things that cannot be changed, the authors urge potential influencers to avoid seeking serenity. In fact, “instead of pleading for the wisdom to know when to give up, we should be demanding the names and addresses of the influencers who have found solutions to the problems we face every day. We should be seeking to

expand the list of things we can change so that we don't need to seek serenity so often.”^{1(p5)}

According to the Vital Smarts authors Patterson et al,¹ an influencer is someone who motivates others to change. Influencers “abandon serenity” to replace bad behaviors with powerful new skills that make things happen.¹ Influencers *choose* to influence and do so because they seek solutions, not solace, in the serenity trap,¹ a term that the authors equate to complacency and the status quo. Because complex problems do not have an easy fix, lasting impact requires the use of a combination of strategies aimed at affecting vital behaviors. The 6-source model takes into account the forces that affect human behavior and places 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.”^{1(p76)}

PRACTICAL APPROACH TO LEADING CHANGE

The 6-source influencer model offers a practical approach to leading change. Table 1 represents a synthesis of the work by Vital Smarts to identify key components of the model. An individual or organization dealing with a challenging issue requiring change would examine the issue then strategically apply the 6 sources of influence, which include personal, social, and structural influences within the context of 2 domains (motivation and ability). The model is research based and grounded in multiple theoretical frameworks deriving from the areas of psychology, social psychology, and organizational theory.

Personal Motivation

This source of influence asks the following questions: How can you get people to do things they currently find loathsome? Will it be worth it? The key to success with personal motivation involves making healthy behaviors *intrinsically* desirable. To mobilize personal motivation requires transforming the meaning of loathsome (unhealthy) behaviors into gratifying (inspiring) ones. Influencers do not use forceful methods to prod change, rather they create either new experiences or new motives. In doing so, they surrender control to gain committed hearts.

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Table 1. A Model for Influencing Change: Synthesis of the Work by Vital Smarts¹

	Motivation	Ability
	Addresses Question “Will It Be Worth It?”	Addresses Question “Can I Do What Is Required?”
Personal Theoretical foundation in psychology Use personal sources of influence as first line of attack.	Make the undesirable desirable. Make pain of the undesirable pleasurable, tap into intrinsic motivation. Create new experiences, achieve flow. Create new motives, tap into moral thinking and action.	Surpass your limits. There is hope for everyone. Much of will is skill. Much of prowess is practice. Perfect complex skills. Build emotional skills. Kick-start your brain.
Social Theoretical foundation in social psychology Use social resources of influence as first line of attack.	Harness peer pressure. Recognize the power of one, <i>the</i> right one. Enlist social support. Recognize the power of everyone.	Find strength in numbers. Enlist the power of social capital. Build social capital.
Structural Theoretical foundation in organizational theory Use structural sources of influence as third line of attack.	Design rewards and demand accountability. Choose extrinsic rewards. Use incentives wisely, they might backfire. Choose punishment carefully and use only as a last resort.	Change the environment. Recognize that the physical world has a profound effect on behavior. Learn to notice the physical environment. Make the invisible visible. Mind the data stream. Make change easy and unavoidable.

The ability to create new experiences requires encouraging others to try new things; even though at first they may not like them, but in the end, they will be thankful for the opportunity. This “try it, you’ll like it” strategy has an element of “no pain, no gain” and derives from either seeing others grow in a certain activity (living vicariously) or personally experiencing that activity (flow). The term *flow* relates to a feeling of enjoyment that comes from losing yourself in an engrossing activity.¹ To achieve flow, individuals need to approach reasonably challenging activities with clear goals, frequent feedback, and an almost gamelike zeal. Once individuals can convert simple tasks into accomplishments, this results in achieving small milestones that get people “in the flow” and keeps them engaged in doing what they may have initially found undesirable. With flow come the intrinsic rewards that make further movement toward change more effortless and sustainable. An example of creating new experiences and achieving flow may come from participating in a program of exercise to deal with the problem of obesity. At first, the activity is painful to begin, but once enough effort takes place and a healthy, toned desirable body results, intrinsic motivation emerges to predispose continuation of the activity.

The ability to create new motives recognizes that many human endeavors are not inherently pleasant or motivating. To achieve personal motivation involves connecting with the person within to identify a greater sense of purpose. This approach implies getting people to pause and consider how their immediate choices reflect their values to engage them in deeper moral thinking and action. Influencers must help

others to “see their choices as moral quests or as personally defining moments, and they must keep this perspective despite distractions and emotional stress.”^{1(p96)} An example of creating new motives may involve the act of holding colleagues accountable for a higher standard of practice that is tied to living an organization’s quality mission. Although it might not be pleasant to have to confront an underperforming colleague, doing so connects the enforcing colleague to a greater purpose that is mission driven and taps into the moral duty to ensure patient safety. According to Patterson et al,¹ engaging others in moral thinking and connecting behavior to moral values resonate more when sharing stories that spotlight those consequences that come from omissions. Sharing the stories that derive from failure results in creating zealots for change and improvement because, in listening to the stories, people can no longer remain morally disengaged.¹ Ultimately tapping into people’s desires to do what is right harnesses the more powerful intrinsic motivation and more easily makes doing the undesirable desirable.

Personal Ability

This source of influence addresses the question “Can I do what is required?” The authors suggest that instead of having a “fixed mind-set,” individuals should adopt a “growth mind-set,” one that lends itself to mental agility and possibilities.¹ Although most people are actually born with the “right stuff,” it may take them time to figure out how to get it to work for them. This assertion implies that to maximize personal ability requires a will to develop

personal skills and the self-discipline to delay gratification to achieve better long-term outcomes. Personal ability goes beyond genetics to necessitate deliberate practice.¹ In fact, failure to deliberately practice crucial skills (such as in conversation and confrontation) results in “arrested development” of the skill set¹ and subsequent ineffectiveness with the use of the skills.

Building emotional resilience is crucial for enhancing personal impact. To do this, individuals must learn to manage their emotions. Patterson et al¹ suggest that a helpful approach would include not letting the “go” system of our brains take control from our “know” system. In other words, when reacting to an instinctive demand that might feel threatening, individuals should avoid reacting too quickly and reflect on the situation before responding. This cognitive reappraisal approach then allows individuals to “kick-start” their brains to gain personal control and an appropriate perspective that facilitates thriving not just surviving.¹

Social Motivation

Social motivation refers to the persuasive effect that people in our social networks have to move others to action. The presence and the voice of one person, especially the right person, can have a profound impact in motivating others within the group. For example, a respected individual taking the risk to be honest and transparent can exert social influence on others and motivate them to embrace an innovation. By first engaging and partnering with opinion leaders, it becomes easier to move others to enact desirable vital behaviors that support change. Patterson et al¹ suggest that to become effective influencers, individuals must become opinion leaders within their work settings. Opinion leaders must not only be knowledgeable, respected, trusted, and well connected within organizations, they must also be generous with their time and giving of their expertise.

Motivating individuals requires tapping into not just the opinion leaders but also the power of everyone within the group. Sometimes, change efforts require challenging widely held norms (ie, culture of silence) to openly hold difficult conversations. Patterson et al^{1(p160)} recommend that “making the undiscussable discussable allows members of the group to embrace rather than fight the power of social influence” and to exert peer pressure that is conducive to change.

Social Ability

Social ability refers to our resourcefulness in gaining assistance from others. Having “a little help from our friends” is seen as a key way to exert influence.¹ Tapping into the enabling power of our social network of relationships allows for building social capital. Lin,^{5(p30)} a sociologist and scholar in the area of social capital, defines the term as “investment in social relations with expected returns in the marketplace.” Building social capital facilitates group synergy and enhances collaboration to make change inevitable. Importantly, accessing our network of friends and colleagues is not usually an expensive proposition, but it certainly is a most powerful one to influence others.

Structural Motivation

Structural motivation addresses the organizational reward system. A major assumption of the 6-source model is that people should intrinsically *want* to participate in influencing change. In a well-balanced change effort, extrinsic motivators or rewards should come third.¹ If rewards are used to motivate vital behaviors, these should be used wisely because they may backfire. For example, small symbolic and heartfelt rewards may be more effective than large, unsustainable bonuses that could create a sense of entitlement. It is important to reward the vital behaviors desired, not just the desired results achieved. When rewarding only results, this might encourage individuals to justify pursuing *all* actions that achieve results, actions that may or not be morally, legally, or socially desirable.

Structural Ability

Structural ability refers to nonhuman forces (buildings, space) that can be brought to bear in an influence strategy.¹ This source of influence acknowledges that the physical world has a profound effect on behavior that should not be ignored. Often, the physical environment is taken for granted without considering that a less-than-appealing environment, over time, may take a toll on behavior. For example, a physical environment that is unkempt may signal that disorganization and squalor are expected standards of behavior. Over time, this deterioration in standards produces detrimental performance outcomes. Individuals must make it a habit of learning to notice and improve their physical environments, fully understanding that dozens of silent environmental forces drive individual decisions and actions in ways that people rarely notice.¹

Structural ability also involves making data visible to effect change. In organizations, different people see different data, which explains why individuals may have such different priorities and passions.¹ To influence change requires bringing to multiple groups data that are fresh, consistent, and relevant so that all can understand and accept as a rationale for change. Armed with the data and equipped with processes that minimize complexity, change ideally is made easy and unavoidable.

APPLICATION TO CNS PRACTICE

Clinical nurse specialists have the ability to be the influencers among us. The Vital Smarts 6-source influencer model¹ assists the CNS in facilitating change by introducing a variety of influence techniques that, when used alone or in combination, are capable of changing most any behavior. Instead of persistently tinkering with problems, long-term change best emerges when leaders can build a comprehensive influence strategy that is evidence based and inspiring for others to follow.⁶ In using the model, the CNS should first identify the daunting challenge and then customize the strategy using the source of influence behind the behavior that the CNS is trying to change. If one source does not work, this may require tapping into multiple sources of influence or visiting the Web site

<http://www.influencerbook.com/home> to access a worksheet that helps the CNS prepare for and organize an influence project. Also on the Web site, the CNS can log into a virtual community of bloggers with similar issues or complete the influencer self-assessment to discover strengths and weaknesses in their current influence style and build this skill set for the future.

CONCLUSIONS

The ability to facilitate change is an important CNS leadership competency. Understanding the elements of the 6-source influencer model equips the CNS with a practical approach filled with an assortment of strategies helpful in leading change that will be effective and also last.

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