

How to Grow Your Influence

Amy Travis

Would you be surprised to learn that influence is not tied to power? Your level of influence has nothing to do with your position or title. Your ability to lead does not depend on the power—or lack thereof—given by other people or institutions.

Meet Sonya. She was raised in various foster homes and never achieved above a third-grade education. Sonya learned how to work hard to survive in a life that was surrounded by poverty, despair, and single- motherhood. She was married at 13 years old to a man 15 years older than she who rescued her from her home life of poverty and abuse. He was attentive to Sonya, treating her like his “little china doll,” until they had children. Afterward, he became secretive and neglectful and Sonya suspected he was having an affair. She eventually left him when her sons were eight and ten and moved in with her sister and brother-in-law.

Struggling to raise her two sons, coping with anxiety and depression, and trying to make ends meet, Sonya knew she had to turn to God for wisdom.

After one of her boys brought home an unsatisfactory report card in fifth grade, she made house rules to enable the boys to become better students. They were required to visit the library each week and to pick two books to read. Then, both boys needed to write a book report for each book that was read. Afterward, the boys were required to hand in their book reports to their mother.

There was one little glitch in her plan... eventually her boys figured out that mom didn't know to read.

Even so, she insisted that they continued to turn in the book reports because she knew that education was the key to breaking the cycle of poverty. More about Sonya in a minute.

What practical steps WE can take to increase our influence?

1. **Focus on the things you can change**

The truth of the matter is that, regardless of who we are, or how many resources we have, or what positions we hold, there is very little that we have 100 % control over.

I can't control the weather, I can't control my government, I can't control other people, even my own husband and children. But what I am responsible for is myself, my attitude, and ability to learn and grow. We are responsible for ourselves, first.

You have the ability to make changes that will positively impact your life, your families lives, and the lives of other people in your church, community, and country.

2. Look for opportunities

Sometimes, we start to think that we're stuck, and we don't have a choice. We think that there is nothing that we can change. There is always something that we can change, but we have to look for opportunities.

George Washington Carver was an African American man who lived in the early 1900's. Carver was a chemist by trade. He wanted to help poor farmers be able to make a living, feed their families, and improve their quality of life. By encouraging farmers to rotate their crops, they could restore the soil and grow plants that their families could eat. He prayed to God, and the Lord gave him 105 ways that a peanut, the most basic of crops, could be prepared for human consumption.

This amazing discovery, along with his research on sweet potatoes, and other products helped poor southern farmers vary their crops and improve their diets.

What changes can you make? What can you do to help yourself? To help your family or community? One change you can always make is to show kindness to others. Being kind doesn't cost us anything.

3. Pray for a solution

Once you have identified a problem to be solved. Pray for God's wisdom in how to fix it. This is what Sonya did. Even though she couldn't read, God told her to have her children write book reports.

God's solutions are so much more creative and effective than ours. I generally know when the thought that pops into my head is from God because it catches me off guard; it's something I had never thought of before. Typically, it's very simple, easy to implement, and is more logical than anything I could think up on my own.

The more you practice praying for a solution the better you will become at discerning whether the idea presented is yours or from God.

Once you have identified a solution, the next step is to...

4. Ask for what you need

We don't like to ask for what we want, or even what we need. It makes us uncomfortable. We risk offending people and making them mad at us. But know this... Leaders make it happen, followers wait for it to happen.

If we are going to be leaders, and then others under our care, we have to ask for what we need. I struggled with this for a long time. After time, however, I've learned some very practical ways to be strategic in this area:

a. Be specific

We have to be very specific when we ask for help. For example, Let's say I ask you for a piece of fruit, and you give me a pear. Great! I like pears. Let's say I ask for a piece of your fruit and you give me a banana. I HATE bananas, but it's my fault that you gave me a banana because I wasn't specific.

When you ask for something, be specific on what it is that you want.

b. Make a process

Any result that you would like to be repeated, can be made into a process. A process is simply a list of instructions to follow in particular order in order to achieve the same result.

For example. When if you want to hold a leadership conference, there is a process to follow:

1. Find a venue
2. Pick a date a time
3. Decide on your target audience
4. We picked a topic
5. Promote the events

Some of the steps may change, but if we miss a step it could be disastrous. I remember a time when I was attending a leadership conference with another group in Philadelphia. After we checked into hotel, we met in the lobby to go to the conference. The man who was leading the group couldn't decide if we should drive there or walk. After some debate (and lost time) we decided we should drive to the venue.

We drove to the location to discover that the conference wasn't there! The organizer neglected to look at the event ticket to see where the conference was held. We were at the wrong venue. After driving 10 minutes across town in heavy traffic and finding parking, we missed the first two hours of the event.

The bottom line is that we need to define a process and follow it.

c. Be Persistent

If you're like me, this isn't your favorite thing to do. We don't want to risk offending anyone, aggravating them, or making them mad. But once again, leaders make it happen, but followers wait for it to happen.

It's not fun to be persistent. We can annoy people when we ask more than once. But it's very necessary, and sometimes our lives depend on it.

When I was nine years old, I had surgery to put tubes in my ears. During the pre-op interview the doctor asked me if I was allergic to any medications. For some reason, my mom wasn't in the room when I told him that I was allergic to Penicillin. I knew the doctor didn't hear me—or wasn't paying attention—so I said it again but still no response. When my mom returned to the room, she said to the doctor, “you know that she is allergic to Penicillin, right?”

“Oh wow, I wasn't aware. I'm glad you told me,” the doctor responded.

The older I get the less I'm concerned with whom I may offend or irritate by my persistence. More often than not, it's worth the risk.

Persistence can even be considered a virtue. Jesus said, in Matthew 7:7 “Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you.”

Jesus told another story Luke 11: “Suppose you went to a friend's house at midnight, wanting to borrow three loaves of bread. You say to him, ‘A friend of mine has just arrived for a visit, and I have nothing for him to eat.’⁷ And suppose he calls out from his bedroom, ‘Don't bother me. The door is locked for the night, and my family and I are all in bed. I can't help you.’⁸ But I tell you this—though he won't do it for friendship's sake, if you keep knocking long enough, he will get up and give you whatever you need because of your shameless persistence.”

If we need to be shameless persistent when asking God—who already knows our every need and thought—how much more do we need to be persistent with mere humans (like ourselves) when asking for what we need.

If we're going to lead effectively, we have to be able to risk making someone mad, or offending someone because leaders make it happen, but followers wait for it to happen.

5. **Be Strong**

Make a decision and follow through. The reason this is so important to increasing our influence is that the fastest ways a leader can lose credibility is to:

1. fail to make a decision;
2. make a decision and change it on a whim;
3. make a decision but not follow through.

We need to be strong, courageous leaders. We need to make decisions and follow through.

Harriet Tubman is regarded a hero for her work to free slaves in America in 1850's. She was born a slave and endured brutal beatings, one of which left in a comma for days, at which she suffered permanent brain damage. She fled slavery in 1849 but returned over 19 times to the South to lead her family and hundreds of other slaves to freedom. In all of those trips, she never lost a single man, woman or child.

Do you know what her secret was? There were several instances when a slave would be struck with fear and want to turn back. In order to help them muster the courage to continue she would hold a pistol to their head and say, "Dead men don't tell tales!" Everyone knew that a runaway slave caught by his master would be tortured until he gave up information about others that had also escaped.

Men and women followed Harriet Tubman en masse because they trusted that she would not allow a weak, fearful individual to endanger their lives and the lives of their families. They trusted her because she was bold, and not weak.

Indecisive leaders create a vacuum. They can unwittingly leave an opening for others to exploit the situation to promote their self-interests.

When good people have the ability to make changes but don't, people suffer. You may not be able to make many changes, but if you don't do what God is calling you to do, those around us will pay the price.

*“For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid,
but gives us power, love and self-discipline.”*

2 Timothy 1:7

The woman mentioned above is Sonya Carson... mother of Ben Carson, world-renowned neurosurgeon famous for the only successful separation of conjoined twins and current director of Housing and Urban Development in the Trump Administration.

Like many others, Sonya could have struggled in poverty all of her life, and no one would have blamed her. The deck was clearly stacked against her. But rather than play the victim, Sonya—by the grace of God and through the guidance of the Holy Spirit—recognized that she had a choice. She couldn't immediately change her economic and social situation, but she could take steps to better herself and her sons.

When we discuss how to increase our influence, it's important for us to make the distinction between leadership and power. Leadership is not the same as power. You can be a leader without having a position of power. Leading well has everything to do with influence.

Sonya Carson never held a position of power, but she exerted great influence. Even though she couldn't read herself, she led the transformation of her son's academic careers. Even though Ben had been a below-average student, and by his senior year he scored in the 90% percentile. A score high enough to earn his entrance to the top university in the country. And the rest is history.

Don't allow fear to hold you back!

Understand this... you are a person of influence. You have the ability to make choices which will directly impact yourself and those around you, regardless of your current situation. Don't allow fear to render you ineffective. You have the ability to influence your family, your church, your community, your country, and the world.

If you enjoyed this please follow me...

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/amy.geiertravis>
and Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/beacatalyst100/>