

Note: This article mentions understanding the values of those individuals under your authority. What about your values? Have you clearly articulated your values? The act of articulating them will surely clarify them—you can't describe something you've not thought about.

If you haven't done so personally and for your family, I suggest you allocate the time to brainstorm/list the completion of these two sentences:

--What's important to me in life is _____.

--Among all that is available to me in life, I value _____.

Among the concepts you listed, did you include valuing the freedom of those you influence to choose their own behaviors? Do you value their willingness to collaborate on improvements in your organization and its processes? Do you realize that collaboration is a choice? No one collaborates because they are commanded to do so! A person may go through the motions, but it won't be heartfelt and genuinely creative and supportive.

As it says in this article, isn't it far better when people make a choice because it's the right thing to do rather than because you've forced them?

Maybe that's why God gave humans the freedom of choice. It is much sweeter for us to love God and be grateful for God when it is our free choice rather than a robotic, programmed response! Genuine love, like genuine collaboration, occurs only when the person has the freedom to not participate!

Dennis Hooper

August 12, 2009

Leadership is Influence, not Control—Part 2

by Dennis Hooper, copyright © 2009, published in the *Houston Home Journal* on August 9, 2009

“Leadership is influence--nothing more, nothing less.” This assertion by John Maxwell, noted authority on leadership, appears four times in his book *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*. Nowhere in the book does he declare, “Leadership is exercising control.”

Another respected authority on leadership, Stephen Covey, also has something to say about influence and control. His best-selling book, *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, is still a favored source of leadership advice twenty years after initial publication.

Covey approaches the topic by representing everything that might be of concern to you as being within a “circle of concern.” Everything that is of no emotional or mental interest is outside the circle.

You can do something about only some of the items inside your “circle of concern.” Covey suggests that you focus all your available energies on the items inside this smaller “circle of influence.”

Still, some of us think and talk about the many items that are outside the “circle of influence” but inside the “circle of concern.” Examples include the weather, our past, and policies of foreign countries. Covey points out that placing our attention on items we can’t influence results in “blaming and accusing, reactive language, and increased feelings of victimization.” There’s not much hope for success in that!

Instead, let’s focus on opportunities within the “circle of influence.” Some you can control directly. These are items that involve personal choices, such as the meaning you make of situations, how you spend your time and energy, and the specific actions you take in response to a given situation.

Many situations inside that “circle of influence,” however, are not under your direct control, though you do have the ability to influence them. Covey says on page 86 that “I have personally identified over 30 separate methods of human influence.” He shares seven of those methods: reasoning, persuasion, confrontation, fight or flight, empathy, and setting an example.

In a recent compact disc, Covey identifies additional methods for influencing people: fairness, equity, justice, kindness, respect, developing and using talent, providing a sense of meaning, and integrity around principles.

Covey contends that “most people have only three or four of these methods in their repertoire.” As a growth opportunity, I suggest you gather your inner-circle friends and colleagues and collectively identify the various methods of influence you currently use. Work to identify additional potential influence methods you might try. Then start stretching yourself!

In my experience, you are able to influence others better if you know and relate to their values. We all have values, though most of us are not able to easily articulate and explain them. More than anything else, our values drive our behaviors.

For example, Baby Boomers sometimes have difficulty understanding choices made by Gen X and Gen Y contributors. It takes time to listen and understand what’s important to each individual. Presuming that what you value is also what’s important to everyone else can lead to genuine misunderstandings.

If you can index into what others want in their careers and lives, you’ll be able to find ways to engage them that will be beneficial for them personally and for the organization. Isn’t it far more effective when people make a choice because it’s the right thing to do rather than because you’ve forced them?

A command and control approach usually results in people doing only what’s required to avoid negative retribution. Under pressure, people tend toward one of two extremes. They become compliant and passive, doing exactly what was requested and no more. Or they become angry and rebellious, actively resisting the directions they’ve been given. Neither is conducive to a reliable, predictable operation.

Sustained success, innovation, and improvement come more readily to individuals who are committed and enthusiastically engaged. Such a condition is generated far more frequently by a leader who understands that the power of productive influence consistently trumps the application of position power.

Dennis helps leaders understand and use their influence to build future leaders. Contact Dennis at dhooper2@juno.com, call 478-988-0237, or find his website at www.buildingfutureleaders.com.