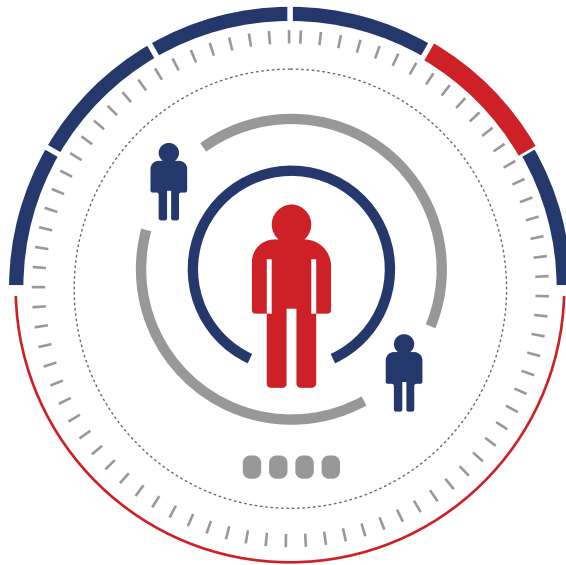


*How Inside Out Leaders
Influence Organizational Culture*

A stylized logo featuring a white thread forming a large 'C' shape, with a blue needle passing through it. The needle has red and white stripes on its handle.

MOVE
THE NEEDLE

Robb Holman



CHAPTER - 1

INFLUENCE THAT MATTERS

“The key to successful leadership is influence, not authority.” — Ken Blanchard

One Friday night, my soon-to-be wife and I were watching a movie when I received a startling phone call. I heard the voice of a young man I’d met just a week earlier. It didn’t take long to realize he was under the wrong kind of influence.

“Robb, I’m going to kill myself.”

I felt paralyzed. I was imprisoned in fear.

With each second that passed, he became more incoherent over the phone. Time was of the essence. All I knew was that I cared for him and wanted him to live. I was compelled to act.

I asked him where he was, and he shared his home address. Quickly, I drove over and knocked on the door. His mother frantically took me back to the kitchen where he was lying face down, passed out on the floor.

I talked to him as though he were awake. I rubbed his back and prayed that things would be different for him moving forward. After about 45 minutes, I felt like my time with him was complete. I re-entered the family room to spend time with his mom.

Just moments into our conversation, and to our complete surprise, he entered the room with what seemed to be a newfound sense of purpose. It's still difficult to find words to describe the miraculous turn of events that night. What I do know is that I befriended someone in great need, and I was compelled to help.

From that day forward, the young man began healing his addiction and depression, entering into a season of hope, encouragement, and community. It wasn't long after that he began mentoring someone who faced similar challenges. I'll talk more about this later in the book.

The right kind of influence is what makes an effective leader - one who can really impact people's lives. There are four behaviors I learned that helped me have an *influence that matters*.

1. First impressions set the tone!

The first time I met this young man, we were both our authentic selves. He was honest about the help he needed. I was eager to provide encouragement and much-needed support. I told him he was significant and was given a unique purpose that only he could fulfill. After we talked at length about his situation, we exchanged contact information and I said, "Feel free to call me anytime as I'd love to continue our conversation." As a result, *trust was built* immediately and something special happened. This is the kind of influence that matters.



Did you know you have between 1/10 of a second and 7 seconds to make a good first impression?

Think about that. We have such a brief window that can set us up for lasting influence or a lost opportunity.

The reality is, if we don't make a good first impression, it takes up to 7 additional meetings to make up for lost ground. Doesn't it sound much easier and more genuine to get it right the first time?

Here are 5 practical things you can do to make a good first impression, build trust quickly, and create a lasting impact in your sphere of influence:

1. Authentic appearance: How you look should reflect who you are.
2. Smile: A kind physical gesture goes a long way.
3. Eye contact: Look people in the eyes to communicate presence.
4. Verbal communication: Initiate conversation in a kind and friendly manner.
5. Ask great questions. Get them talking about themselves. Don't make the conversation all about you.

You might be thinking, "Ok, but how do I influence relationships that I've had for a long time?"

2. Treat people as human beings, not human doings (projects).

In the story I shared, imagine if I was driven more to meet a quota, praying for a specific number of people after each church service? Would this have changed my approach, how I allocated time, or my willingness to meet and talk with this young man?

I'm not saying there is no room for quotas and processes. However, I am saying that we need to prioritize.

Leaders of growing organizations are often tempted to prematurely put processes and systems in place before people and things develop organically. The danger in doing so is that we put things before people.

I call it putting *form before function*.

In American culture, it's so easy to adopt the "build it and they will come" mentality. We are obsessed with numbers, equating exterior growth with success. Furthermore, we are driven by the consumerism our culture dictates. It is easy to build something that looks

attractive and invites the masses to come. However, this often sets people up for a false sense of belonging when they are not truly the right audience. Their values don't always align. Instead of this strategy, I've found that the most impactful and influential organizations put *function before form*.

When we let the goals and measures of success override our investment in our people, team members perceive themselves as a means to an end, a product to be consumed, to achieve some stated objective, not the objective itself.

Wanting something right away is not inherently bad. Gratification is a good thing. However, what separates children from adults, the immature from the mature, is the ability to forgo instant gratification for something better - something longer-lasting. As we grow and mature, we realize that some of the sweetest things in life take time to develop through *influence that matters*.



My wife Karen and I once grappled with major tension when our family went on vacations. Basically, our children wanted to buy almost everything they saw. They were caught up in emotions - They wanted it and they wanted it now!

But our maturity allowed Karen and I to see things the kids could not see. So we came up with a plan and decided to give each child a budget for the entire week of vacation. They then knew for certain the dollar amount they had, and if they used it up on the first thing they laid eyes on, that was it for the rest of the week. This is one simple thing we implemented to help our children mature and feel empowered to make responsible spending decisions. Similarly, the mature decisions we make today help us put people before things in the long haul.

3. Rhythms are necessary. Interrupting rhythms may be more necessary!

It is human nature to develop patterns and rhythms in life. The brain doesn't want to work hard, so it finds ways to help us function more efficiently. This is necessary, as it brings a sense of calm and order to our crazy lives. As Henry David Thoreau famously claimed, we like to march to the beat of our own drum.

But then disruption arrives.

Have you ever fallen out of rhythm, feeling disjointed and disconnected from your life source?

The night I received that shocking phone call, I was in my usual rhythm, enjoying Friday night with Karen. At that moment, my rhythm was completely disrupted. However, I knew getting involved was the right thing to do. I was willing to embrace the disruption of my rhythm.

Obviously, the severity of the situation factored in. But the subtle reason was discernment - I knew when to marry my rhythm with someone else's. This discernment is

rooted in your purpose, which compels you to action. We'll talk more about this in Chapter 2.

Much like individuals, organizations have rhythms. Every team member has rhythms. The magic happens when we coordinate them. This is what moves the needle for us as leaders.

Move the needle is a commonly used business term that means shifting progress to a noticeable degree. The 'needle' is the measuring instrument, much like a speedometer.

There is always room for routine and familiarity - going to certain places, meeting with certain people, and performing certain tasks at a certain time. However, if we stay in routine too long, we lose vibrancy, passion, and enthusiasm. We need spontaneity.

Playing professional basketball for 7 years taught me a major lesson. When training, athletes eventually hit a plateau and cannot move past it unless they do something different.



They change their routine, introducing variety into the training regime. Doing something totally unexpected brings a much-needed pattern interruption that breathes life into the minutia.

An organizational system can (and should) have a rhythm. But the beauty of rhythms is that you can adjust season to season around priorities and changes. The problem is, it's not always easy to adjust organizational systems - especially large ones.

Regardless of size, infrastructure, and receptivity of new rhythms, the secret to moving the needle of organizational influence lies in the words we speak.

4. Use language that enables change.

Inside Out leaders use language that guides people. Inclusive, uplifting, and directional language keeps your team members on the same page, headed in the same direction you are. As I told the young man in my earlier story, only you can fulfill your unique purpose. With these simple words, I opened the lines of communication and shared something he might not have expected.

I was reminded of the power of language when one of my team members had a pressing issue that needed to be addressed with the rest of the team. This person held a strong belief that the others didn't share. Knowing he was in a very different place than the others, I met with him before the general meeting to hear what he wanted to express. I knew that his convictions might come off as controversial, so we agreed on a general flow for the meeting and how I would facilitate it.

I knew my role would be to use the meeting as an opportunity. Regardless of differences in opinion or belief, I wanted honor to be at the forefront of our time together. I define honor as holding one another in high esteem. Anchored in this core value, I also viewed the meeting as an opportunity for team members who disagreed to be stretched in a way they otherwise might not experience. This particular team member was very progressive

in his thinking, and I wanted the meeting to move the needle for our team in two ways:

1. To help us learn to respect each other despite our differences
2. To create a safe place for this team member to be heard

As the meeting began, I explicitly set the tone by laying out the ground rules for our time together. I shared that it was an opportunity to listen, learn, and honor rather than debate, fix, or give opinions.

I call this “facilitating the moment.” I came prepared, shared the meeting’s purpose, and allowed everyone’s perspectives to be expanded.

In the end, the group listened openly and demonstrated what holding one in high regard is truly all about.

Summary

Having *influence that matters* is messy, disruptive, raw, and totally inconvenient. It requires patience, discernment, empathy, service, and charity.

The 4 Key Take-Aways:

1. First Impressions set the tone!
2. Treat people as human beings, not human doings (projects)
3. Rhythms are necessary. Interrupting rhythms may be more necessary!
4. Use language that enables change.

Who’s in?

The good news is, as you carefully consider this kind of leadership lifestyle, the fruits of your labor await you - perhaps even a miracle or two.

Reflection:

- Recall a time when you helped someone in great need. What were the results?
How did it make you feel? How did it make them feel?
- Remember a time when a first impression you made or encountered wasn't great.
What is something specific you can do to make a better first impression?
- Write down an intentional step you are willing to commit to in the next 30 days
that will a) disrupt your natural rhythm and b) support someone in your sphere of
influence.