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How to Lead with Influence

Nicola Heath, in the latest issue of *INTHEBLACK*, says that leadership today has less to do with hierarchy – it's all about influence. She then goes on to describe the views of various leadership consultants.

She notes that in his work as a global change expert, Campbell Macpherson made an alarming finding: 90% of change undertaken in organizations fails. "Why is that?" he asks. "It's because a lot of leaders are command and control – 'Do as I say. You're either on the bus or you're under it.'" Where change succeeded, it was because leaders took a different approach: They took their teams along for the journey. "Leadership is about helping people to want to change," says Macpherson, who used this insight as the basis of his leadership program, *Leading with Influence*.

When considering the extraordinary leaders he'd worked with, Macpherson realized they shared one quality: "They deliver sensational results that are sustainable," he says. "And how do they do that? They deliver results through engaging people." He adds that using influence rather than authority is a more effective way to achieve these exceptional results.

Steve Vamos, a former CEO of Xero, also recognizes the power of influence in leadership. The article quotes him as saying that "as an organization grows, the need for influential leadership grows, too. Once you become a company that serves multiple markets with multiple products, you inevitably end up with senior people having to collaborate because they can't control the whole organization."

In his leadership program, Macpherson identifies 12 essential traits shared by extraordinary leaders, including integrity, humility and clarity. "They're really clear about what they want, what they're seeking to achieve and why," he says.

Critically, influential leaders care. "That may sound fluffy, but it's not," Macpherson says. "They care about the outcomes, the organization, their people and the customers."

Heath points out that influential leaders empower their teams by creating an environment where people can thrive. But empowerment isn't just about the wins. Macpherson emphasizes that "empowerment requires trusting people to deliver and then picking them up when they falter and not blaming them for failure. Empowering leaders to try to remove failure from their lexicon – it's about learning lessons. It's having a glitch or making a mistake and learning from that."

The article stresses that influencing others requires understanding their motivation and goals. Ahead of any meeting, Macpherson recommends getting into the habit of asking a series of basic questions: "Who are the key people you need to influence in this meeting? What is their situation? What are they seeking to achieve?" Before engaging with these key stakeholders, Macpherson recommends running through American psychologist Robert Cialdini's six principles of persuasion – reciprocity, consistency, consensus, authority, liking, scarcity or unity – to establish if any fit the context.

To most people, the importance of trying to be a leader who is caring and enables their team to succeed, accepts mistakes and is willing to listen and learn is obvious, Vamos acknowledges. “The reality is, though, when I’m thrown into a changing situation or I’m under pressure, it’s not easy to think in a sensible way. The only way you can do it is if you are self-aware in the moment and conscious of how you’re reacting.”

One of the best ways to develop self-awareness is to seek quality feedback. As a first-time manager at IBM in the 1980s, Vamos had a mandatory six-month review, which included feedback from his team. “I thought I was doing a great job,” he recalls. The results from his team shocked him. “They thought that I was task-oriented, that I had no interest in them, and it was all about them being a tool to get my job done.” He had no idea his team perceived him in that way, and the insight shaped the leader he would become.

“It changed me and made me aware [that] the way I interacted was creating that impression,” he says. Vamos’s advice? “Always ask for feedback.”

For more check out [How to lead with influence | INTHEBLACK \(cpaaustralia.com.au\)](https://cpaaustralia.com.au/intheblack/how-to-lead-with-influence).