Some books claim that if you follow their principles you can influence anyone to do anything. According to these authors, you can get anyone to like you, love you, and find you irresistibly attractive. Wow! They assert that you can take control of any situation, win at every competition, and gain the upper hand every time. One book, written for men wanting to pick up women, boasts that by following its mystery methods you can get beautiful women into bed. Another boldly proclaims that you can get anyone to say yes in eight minutes or less. When I read claims such as these, I am reminded of a saying attributed to Abraham Lincoln: “You can fool some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you cannot fool all of the people all of the time.”

Are there secrets that will make you irresistibly attractive to whomever you want? Is it possible to influence people to do anything you want? If these claims were true, then surely some pro-life advocates would have discovered these principles by now and used them to convert all their pro-choice opponents to their position (or vice versa). If it were that easy to influence people, to influence anyone to do anything, then why hasn’t the conflict in the Middle East been resolved? Why haven’t conservatives influenced all liberals to adopt their conservative philosophy and agenda (or vice versa)? For that matter, why hasn’t some influential cook persuaded all other cooks to proclaim that her recipe makes the absolute best authentic Texas chili?

Apparently people aren’t reading these books or aren’t following the advice—or the claims are simply nonsense, and it’s not actually
possible to get anyone to do whatever you want in eight minutes or less. In the real world, you cannot influence some people all of the time. Nor can you influence all of the people some of the time, and you certainly cannot influence all of the people all of the time. People are more complicated than that, generally think for themselves, and may have many valid reasons for not doing what you want them to do or thinking the way you want them to think.

The next time someone promises you that by following his secrets you can influence anyone to do anything, beware: He’s trying to sell you snake oil. In fact, if you have a choice between buying his advice or buying real snake oil, buy the snake oil. It probably has some useful purpose.

INFLUENCE ATTEMPTS AND THE RANGE OF POSSIBLE OUTCOMES

This chapter addresses the fundamentals of influence—what you need to know to understand how power and influence actually work, in life as well as in business. These principles are universal. They apply in China and India as well as in Poland, Canada, Peru, France, and everywhere else around the globe. They apply in families, teams, clubs, and clans as well as in corporations and in one-on-one situations. A first, important fundamental is that influence attempts do not have binary (yes/no) outcomes. When you try to influence someone, the outcome is not simply “yes, she was influenced” or “no, she wasn’t.” In fact, there is a range of possible outcomes to every influence attempt, as illustrated in figure 1-1.

Figure 1-1. Every influence attempt can have a wide range of outcomes.
The Baseline

The baseline refers to the fact that all of us are headed down our own path—doing what we are doing, thinking what we are thinking, and believing what we believe. We will continue on our own path unaware of you and unaffected by you until you try to influence us to do, think, or believe something different. Once you do try to influence us, we may still not be influenced one way or the other. We may remain apathetic or indifferent toward you or what you are proposing—and we may not even consciously recognize your presence. One possible outcome of an influence attempt, then, is no influence. We remain unmoved or unaffected and perhaps even unaware of you.

Each of us is subjected to hundreds if not thousands of influence attempts every day. We talk to others, we see other people, we read books, watch television or listen to the radio, see or hear advertisements, read newspapers or magazines, open e-mails, participate in meetings, work with people, are approached by solicitors, call on customers, and so on. We may be influenced by people we see, talk to, meet with, or read about—or we may not. If we were moved by every influence attempt we experience daily, we would be tossed willy-nilly from one direction to the next and have no constancy in or control of our lives. So an important part of the human experience is deciding (mostly subconsciously) whether to be influenced by something we experience. I see the ad for some product but am not moved to buy it. I see the latest fashions displayed in a department store window but continue walking by. I hear someone complaining about a corporate decision but don’t care. I receive brochures from suppliers but don’t need or am not interested in what they are selling, so I put the brochures in the recycle bin.

I am unmoved. I have not been influenced. I have not changed direction. The baseline is the norm. It’s what exists before an influence attempt and often what exists afterward.

Compliance, Commitment, and Leadership

If an influence attempt succeeds, the most likely outcome is simple consent, agreement, or compliance. The person complies with your request, agrees with your suggestion, or does what you want. You try to persuade a potential customer to look at a demo of your product, and the customer is willing to do so. You ask a colleague to give you feedback on a report you’ve just written, and the colleague agrees. You
tell your teenage son that you’d like help cleaning up the kitchen after dinner, and he helps you—begrudgingly perhaps, but he helps. These are examples of compliance. The person you are trying to influence goes along with what you want. He deviates from the path he was on and consents to do or think what you would like.

Sometimes you want more than compliance; you want commitment. You want the person not simply to agree with you but to agree wholeheartedly, to be enthusiastic and engaged, to consent not merely with the head but also with the heart. Compliance usually implies rational consent. If I were asked why I complied with someone’s request, I would most often explain my decision in logical terms: “It made sense. I had no reason to say no.” However, commitment means to be emotionally impelled, to assume an obligation, to be swept up in an emotional current and be willingly engaged. If asked why I became committed to someone or something, I would usually explain my decision in emotional terms: “Because I believed. Because it was the right thing to do. Because it moved me to tears.” One reason Barack Obama won the 2008 U.S. presidential election and John McCain, his Republican opponent, did not is that Obama spoke to people’s emotions and inspired them to believe in hopeful change, whereas McCain offered rational reasons why he should be president. (“Vote for me,” he said, “because I know how to confront our enemies.”) In essence, McCain asked for compliance and Obama inspired commitment. Whether President Obama has delivered on his promises is another issue. My point here is that candidate McCain’s rhetoric was not as compelling to as many American voters as candidate Obama’s rhetoric. McCain wanted people’s votes; Obama wanted their hearts and minds.

Figure 1-2 illustrates the difference between compliance and commitment. The lab on the left is compliant. It is poised dutifully, obeying its master’s commands to sit and stay. Collar around its neck, tethered to a leash, watchful, it waits to be released. In contrast, the dog on the right is committed. Leaping for the ball, it is as far off the ground as it can get. Ears flying, mouth open, this dog is committed because it is doing something it loves to do. Anyone who’s ever played ball with a dog knows the boundless joy the dog experiences. You are usually worn out before the dog is. These photos illustrate an important distinction between compliance and commitment. Animals and people who comply with an influence attempt often do so because it feels compulsory or required either by the person making the influence attempt or by the situation. They comply because they must, or because they have no reason to disagree, or because it’s what they’ve
been trained to do or have become accustomed to doing. They commit when what they’re being asked to do fills them with joy, engages them emotionally, is rewarding in some way, or is what they love doing anyway.

Beyond commitment, another possible outcome of an influence attempt is leadership. Here, the person is not merely influenced to become committed to the cause but goes beyond that and assumes a leadership role, taking the mantle from the influencer and advancing the cause even further. Throughout history, many people have been influenced to the point of leadership. Ronald Reagan inspired legions of Reaganite fiscal conservatives in the United States and abroad. Mohandas Gandhi moved hundreds of millions of Indians to nonviolent protest and noncooperation with British authorities, which led to India’s independence, and he influenced a number of political protégés to assume greater leadership roles, including Jawaharlal Nehru, who became India’s first prime minister. Prominent figures in the African-American civil rights movement—W.E.B. DuBois, Malcolm X,
Rosa Parks, and Martin Luther King Jr., to name a few—influenced many followers to take leadership roles, among them Jesse Jackson, Julian Bond, Robert Moses, James Meredith, and Andrew Young. A common goal of inspirational leaders is not merely to induce commitment but to inspire others to assume leadership and carry forward the aims of a movement that the inspirational leader could not accomplish alone.

As you will read later in the discussion of each of the influence techniques, some techniques are more likely to result in compliance than commitment or leadership. Logical persuading, legitimizing, exchanging, and stating, if they are successful, generally result in compliance or simple agreement. On the other hand, socializing, appealing to relationship, alliance building, and consulting have the potential to cause commitment, and appealing to values and modeling may result in leadership. This is not to say that you can’t use logic, for instance, to inspire others to assume leadership, but logical persuading is far less likely to have that effect than appealing to values or modeling.

Skepticism, Resistance, and Rebellion

What are the possible outcomes when an influence attempt is unsuccessful? As figure 1-1 shows, the least undesirable outcome, from the influencer’s perspective, is skepticism, which indicates doubt or distrust. Like most people, I receive unsolicited calls now and then from high-pressure salespeople who believe that their unrelenting barrage will convince me to send them money. Regardless of what they are selling and whether I need their product or service, I am so put off by their approach that I am more than unmoved and uninfluenced; I am annoyed and even angry. You could argue that apathy is also an unsuccessful outcome, and it is, but skepticism is more than someone simply being unmoved; skepticism plants the seeds of doubt and distrust in the influencee’s mind and makes it more difficult for the influencer to successfully influence that person in the future.

Even stronger negative reactions to an influence attempt are resistance, where the influencee either actively or passively resists what the influencer wants, and beyond that, rebellion, where the influencee takes the lead in resisting the influencer and tries to enlist others in a rebellion against what the influencer seeks. For instance, imagine I have a colleague who comes to me with a proposal to outsource what I believe is an important part of our core business. She tries to persuade me that we can save money and improve service and quality by out-
sourcing. However, I don’t buy it. I’m skeptical and give her reasons why I don’t think it’s a good idea. Not only did she fail to influence me, she has created doubt in my mind, and I will be less inclined to agree with her in the future unless she returns with far more compelling arguments.

But I might also respond to her influence attempt with active or passive resistance. If I actively resist, I might do some research on outsourcing in this area, compile evidence against the idea, and circulate a report to that effect. My aim is to counter her by trying to influence others against her idea. Or I may passively resist by failing to support her, by voicing my skepticism in private meetings with others, and by working harder to ensure that the area she wants to outsource is performing well. But an even stronger negative reaction would be for me to rebel by taking up the anti-outsourcing cause, visibly and enthusiastically opposing outsourcing, building an alliance of managers who oppose the idea, and waving the flag at the executive level to not only resist her idea but crush it.

The outcomes shown on both sides of the baseline in figure 1-1 are, in effect, opposites. Skepticism is the opposite of compliance, resistance is the opposite of commitment, and rebellion is the opposite of leadership. Of course, reality is not as neat as this figure suggests. How people respond, positively or negatively, to an influence attempt varies tremendously, but the essential point is that with any influence attempt there can be no outcome (the baseline), a positive/successful outcome for the influencer, or a negative/unsuccessful outcome—and these outcomes can vary in the intensity of the reaction. Why is this important? Because a number of personal, organizational, and cultural factors affect how people will respond to you when you try to influence them. Understanding the possible outcomes and what you can do to manage them is crucial if you are going to be more successful at influencing others, especially across cultures.

An important fundamental of influence, then, is that every influence attempt has a range of possible outcomes. To be most effective at influencing others, you need to know how to achieve the successful outcomes and avoid the unsuccessful ones.

**THE TEN LAWS OF INFLUENCE**

There are ten more fundamentals of influence, which I call “the ten laws of influence.”
Law 1:
Influence Attempts May Fail for Many Legitimate Reasons

As I said earlier, the idea that you can influence anyone to do anything is nonsense. There are many reasons why people may not be moved by or even aware of your influence attempt. In his book *John P. Kotter on What Leaders Really Do*, John Kotter explores why people may not respond to a manager’s influence attempts: “Some people may be uncooperative because they are too busy elsewhere, and some because they are not really capable of helping. Others may well have goals, values, and beliefs that are quite different and in conflict with the manager’s and may therefore have no desire whatsoever to help or cooperate.”1 Additionally, the people you are trying to influence may not care about what you want them to support. They may disagree with your opinion, idea, suggestion, proposal, or point of view. They may not need what you are selling, or accept your line of reasoning, or be inspired by what you are saying. Or they may be distracted. Or they may not have enough regard for you or your team or company to pay attention to your message.

Consider this. In business, salespeople spend more time studying and practicing the techniques of influence than any other group in a company, and even the very best of them cannot sell their products or services to every customer all the time. Why? Because as skilled and influential as they may be, there are many valid reasons why they cannot and will not persuade some customers—and those reasons often have more to do with the customers and the situation than with the salespeople. In the real world, many factors affect a buying decision, and even skilled salespeople may not be aware of, and may not be able to change, factors that lead buyers to choose another provider or buy nothing at all.

Law 2:
Influence Is Contextual

People will not consent to be influenced unless the situation and environment are conducive to them saying yes. Agreement is built on the foundations of latitude, interests, and disposition.

By this, I mean that the person you want to influence must have the latitude to say yes, that your request or direction should not be contrary to the person’s interests and values, and the person must be disposed to say yes to you.
LATITUDE—Of these foundations of agreement, latitude is most important. Is the influencee able to say yes? Does the person have the freedom to agree if he wants to? I saw a cartoon recently in which a pollster in ancient times is talking to a peasant in front of a grass hut. The pollster is asking whether the peasant would say that Attila the Hun is a very good leader, a good leader, a poor leader, or a very poor leader. This is darkly humorous because the peasant’s life may be at stake if he gives the wrong answer. He doesn’t have the latitude to render an honest opinion about Attila’s leadership.

Why wouldn’t people have the latitude to be influenced? Maybe they don’t have the authority to say yes. Rules, regulations, laws, standards, or guidelines may prohibit it. Or the person you are trying to convince to buy your product doesn’t have the authority to buy it because of her position in her company. Or the person may already have committed to another course of action and needs to honor that commitment or believes that an authority figure in his life (like a parent, teacher, or boss) would not approve. Or, like offering a cocktail to a recovering alcoholic, you may be asking a man to do something he has vowed not to. The constraints he faces may be internally or externally imposed, and you may not ever know what they are. So a first question to ask yourself when you are trying to influence a customer, manager, colleague, partner, or anyone else is this: Does this person have the latitude to say yes?

If not, you are trying to influence the wrong person. Or else it is not the right time (maybe the person will have more latitude later). Or maybe this influence attempt with this person will never succeed.

INTERESTS—Second, ask whether your request is aligned with the person’s interests and values. If not, then the person’s interests would not be well served by going along with you and, in this situation, most people most of the time will not willingly consent to be influenced. An example is Eric Liddell, the “Flying Scotsman,” a sprinter in the early twentieth century. Representing Great Britain in the 1924 Olympics, he is portrayed in the film Chariots of Fire. A devout Christian, Liddell refused to run on the Sabbath, which took him out of contention for the 100-meter race, his best event. In the film, members of the British Olympic committee, led by the Prince of Wales, are trying to influence Liddell to run the 100-meter trials “for king and country.” He adamantly refuses, and the head of the committee accuses him of being impertinent. Liddell angrily replies that what is impertinent is trying to influence a man to deny his beliefs.
As this example illustrates, you will meet with resistance if you try to persuade people to do something that is not in their best interests or is inimical to their values or beliefs. So you need to understand what is important to them and avoid directly confronting their values. Does this mean that you can never get people to deviate from their values or beliefs, however slightly? No, but experience shows that you must approach them cautiously and must not directly confront, deny, or invalidate their belief system. As the authors of the book Yes! write, “The best way to ride a horse is in the direction that the horse is going. Only by first aligning to the direction the horse is going is it possible to then slowly and deliberately steer it where you’d like to go.”

This makes sense. If you try to change the horse’s direction too quickly, you’ll likely be thrown off the horse. Similarly, you are likely to fail if you try to influence people to deviate from their deeply held values and beliefs and if what you are asking is not in their best interests.

DISPOSITION—Finally, people may not respond to an influence attempt simply because they are not in the right frame of mind. I had a client, whom I’ll call Donna, who was very temperamental. From one call to the next, you never knew whether she would be friendly and collaborative or combative and disagreeable. In my years of working with her, I could never predict which Donna would answer the phone. So I learned that influencing her required patience and perseverance. I had to wait for her foul moods to pass before once again bringing up a point I’d raised earlier, and sometimes I just had to weather the storm and wait until the next call, when she might be more receptive. I’ve never met anyone more mercurial than Donna, but even the most reasonable and receptive of people are occasionally testy. I would venture that all of us get up on the wrong side of the bed now and then and are disagreeable for a time.

Some people may not be in a cooperative frame of mind because they are distracted, busy, or secretive by nature or profession. A scene in the film All the President’s Men is illustrative. Early in the film, during the arraignment of the five men caught trying to bug Democratic national headquarters, reporter Bob Woodward (played by Robert Redford) enters the courtroom and sits behind a country club lawyer named Markham (played by Nicolas Coster). Woodward asks if he’s there in connection with the Watergate burglary, and the lawyer replies that he’s not there. Realizing how ludicrous that sounds, he adds that he’s not the lawyer for the accused burglars. After directing Woodward to the right attorney, Markham refuses to answer more
questions and leaves the room. Undaunted, Woodward follows him into a hallway and asks Markham how he got there so soon, because the burglars hadn’t yet made a phone call since their arrest, the implication being that someone other than the burglars arranged for private counsel. Markham avoids answering the question and returns to the courtroom. Woodward again pursues him, where, upon further questioning, Markham reveals that he met one of the burglars at a social occasion. What Woodward learns from Markham raises his suspicion that what happened at the Watergate is not a commonplace burglary.

In this scene, Woodward is trying to influence a source to provide information. For various reasons, the source is not disposed to cooperate, but persistence on Woodward’s part eventually yields some nuggets that aid in his investigation by convincing him that there is much more to the story. Sometimes, the people you are trying to influence may be uncooperative because they fear you, are suspicious of you, or don’t like who you are or what you represent. Or they may be prejudiced against you for some reason, and you may never know why. All these factors can raise their resistance and lower their receptivity. For people to consent to your influence attempt, they must be disposed to be cooperative.

**THE SIMPLE TEST**—An easy way to gauge how responsive someone might be to an influence attempt is to use this simple test: Ask yourself, *Why would this person say yes or no?* Asking this question puts you in the other person’s shoes. It forces you to see the situation from the influencee’s perspective. Assume that you want to ask a friend to donate money to a college scholarship fund, and what you are asking for would be a sizable donation for him. Why would he say yes or no?

**REASONS HE MIGHT SAY YES:**

1. He likes you.
2. He knows the college scholarship fund is important to you.
3. He’s an alumnus and the college is important to him.
4. He hasn’t given much to charity this year and feels guilty about it.
5. He will do so expecting you to support his favorite charity later.
6. He’s just come into some extra money and is feeling magnanimous.
REASONS HE MIGHT SAY NO:

1. He likes you but has felt some distance growing between you.
2. He is friendly toward you but really doesn’t consider you a close friend and feels no obligation to support your causes.
3. He has no particular allegiance to this college.
4. He doesn’t have the money or is not the charitable sort.
5. He has already given to charity and doesn’t feel that he can contribute more now.
6. He is willing to contribute, but not the amount you are asking for—and he’s annoyed that you are asking for so much.
7. He’s already given to the college scholarship fund and doesn’t want to give more.
8. You did not contribute to his favorite charity when he asked you to, and now he feels no obligation to reciprocate.
9. He’s received some bad news recently and is not in a giving mood.
10. He’s worried about losing his job (or already knows he’s going to be laid off) and can’t spare the cash.

This simple test is a useful exercise even though you can’t divine everything in your friend’s mind. You won’t be aware of all the reasons he might say yes or no, but it is still useful to try to predict them ahead of time. It may help you choose the right influence technique and frame your arguments in the right way. In short, it helps to know what people find persuasive and what they don’t. It helps to know whether they have the latitude to say yes, and if not, why not. It helps to know their interests and values, and it helps to know whether they will be in the right frame of mind to cooperate with you.

Of course, as you are trying to influence your friend, his reactions and responses will reveal information you can use to reframe your arguments in the moment. What you don’t know ahead of time you can learn as you are talking to him, and that will give you more insight into why he is saying no and what he might need to say yes. Then the art of influencing involves being adaptive as well as discerning whether you risk damaging the relationship if you persist. Sometimes, it is wisest to stop while you’re ahead and come back later if you think his circumstances may change or he may change his mind after he reflects on what you are requesting.
Law 3: Influence Is Often a Process Rather Than an Event

As already noted, you may not be able to influence people the first time and in the first way you approach them. Influence is often a process rather than an event. People may not be in the right frame of mind when you first approach them. Or they may be resisting initially because they need to think it over. Introverts, for example, often need some private reflection before they can agree to a proposal. They need to consider the idea, perhaps talk to a confidant, and think through the notion before they buy into it. Or maybe they need more or different evidence. Or, if they don’t know you well, they may need to become comfortable with you before they consent. Some people may feel that agreeing to something too readily could make them appear to be pushovers. Other people are inherently resistant to influence and will push back initially almost regardless of who is doing the influencing.

Sometimes, the influence technique you are using is not one they respond well to. If you keep trying the same approach, you may create greater and greater resistance. A common failing of people who are extremely logical, for instance, is to assume that everyone else is as logical and will be convinced by well-reasoned, logical arguments. When they try this technique, and it fails, they typically resort to more logic, more facts, more evidence—even in the face of mounting resistance. So an important lesson about influencing is that when the technique you are using isn’t working, it’s best to try something else. Don’t keep hammering away, thinking you can wear people down. Brow-beating people into submission only makes you annoying, and if they give in, it will likely be under duress, which is unethical and likely to damage your relationship.

If the influence technique you are using is not working, don’t keep doing the same thing. Try something else.
Law 4:

Influence Is Cultural

What works in Mexico may not work as well in Malaysia, just as the openness and informality typical in Australia, even in business settings, may not be as acceptable in Germany or the Netherlands (in fact, it could cause suspicion). Influence effectiveness depends in part on the conventions, values, and beliefs prevalent in every culture. Throughout much of this book and the related websites (www.terryrbacon.com and www.theelementsofpower.com), I explore how power and influence differ around the world. My benchmark for examining culture is the GLOBE study of sixty-two societies, the most recent and comprehensive analysis of global cultural differences. This study identifies eight dimensions of cultural difference: performance orientation, future orientation, gender egalitarianism, assertiveness, individualism and collectivism, power distance, humane orientation, and uncertainty avoidance.

The GLOBE authors define assertiveness as “the degree to which individuals in organizations or societies are assertive, confrontational, and aggressive in social relationships.” In the GLOBE study, Hungary, Germany, Hong Kong, and Austria were among the countries ranked highest in use of assertiveness practices. Sweden, New Zealand, Switzerland, and Japan were among those ranked lowest. My research on global power and influence shows that people in the countries ranked lowest on assertiveness practices have the following influence characteristics:

- They are more likely to build and use a network of supporters rather than trying to influence by themselves. In short, they build more alliances.
- They are less likely to be perceived as threatening in their behavior.
- They are more likely to build close friendships with others and try to influence by appealing to those relationships.
- They are more likely to take the lead and show others how to do things. In other words, they are more likely to act as mentors, coaches, or teachers.
- They are higher rated in terms of using attraction as a power source, which means they are more likely to have qualities people seem to like. (See The Elements of Power for a fuller discussion of this power source.)

In contrast, people in those countries ranked highest in assertiveness have these characteristics:
They are more likely to legitimize their requests by appealing to some form of authority.

They are more likely to speak boldly and without hesitation and to use strong gestures to make their points.

They are likely to be more creative in finding alternatives or solutions.

They are likely to be more expressive and have a broader network of contacts inside and outside their organization.

It should be apparent from these lists that trying to influence people in high- and low-assertiveness cultures presents different challenges and that some influence techniques will work better or worse in each country depending on this cultural difference alone. If I were trying to influence a customer in Germany, for instance, I would expect the customer to be more responsive to hierarchy and authority, to be direct and perhaps bold in stating her position, and to expect me to respond when she refers to authorities to substantiate her points. But if I then traveled to Japan for a customer meeting, I would expect that customer to involve others in the decision making, to seek consensus around the buying decision, to spend more time socializing before getting down to business, and to value building a closer relationship as a prerequisite to doing business. Moreover, I would understand that my Japanese customer would be confounded and perhaps even embarrassed for me if I were to interact with him the same way I interacted with my German customer. He might interpret my boldness, expressiveness, and directness as impolite and even aggressive. And while these observations may appear to reinforce cultural stereotypes, they are in fact supported by the research on how Germans and Japanese differ in their approaches to power and influence.

Law 5:

Ethical Influence Is Consensual and Often Bilateral

I noted in the introduction that ethical influence is consensual, which means that the person being influenced goes along with the influencer willingly, without real or imagined coercion—although, when the person is responding to someone who has the legitimate authority to ask for or demand compliance, such as when a police officer signals for a driver to stop his car, the person may feel pressured to comply but nonetheless submits to the authority because that authority is socially
sanctioned. Influence by authority represents a special case of influencing, to be explored in much more detail in chapter 3.

In ethical influence without authority, the person being influenced is open to the influence and has the right to say no. So the influencee is aware of the influence attempt as well as the motives of the person behind it. It is ethical if an investment manager advises me to invest in a stock and she earnestly believes the stock will do well in the future. It is unethical if she advises me to buy the stock because she receives a commission based on the sale even though she has evidence, which she hides from me, that the stock is about to fall, and she knows that I risk losing much of my investment. When influence is done with integrity, the influencee chooses to be persuaded, having complete knowledge of the facts, but is fully aware of the option to say, “No, I’m not convinced,” or “No, not at this time.”

Finally, ethical influence is inherently bilateral, which means the influencer is open to being influenced in return. An ethical manager, even while giving instructions and assigning responsibilities to her subordinates, remains open to being influenced if her subordinates have better ideas or suggestions about how to complete assignments more efficiently or effectively. Ethical influence may involve give-and-take as the parties negotiate an agreement or understanding, and the consent to be influenced goes both ways.

**Law 6: Unethical Influence May Succeed— but Always at a Cost**

Throughout human history, tyrants, dictators, and thugs have known that people can control others and impose their will—sometimes over millions of people—through force, brutality, intimidation, and murder. In *The Prince*, Machiavelli said that “it is better to be feared than loved, if you cannot be both.” Centuries later, Mao Tse-tung asserted that “political power grows out of the barrel of a gun.” It would be naïve to assume that destructive influence tactics don’t work. Clearly, they do. Mao tortured and murdered his opponents, reigned over China for decades, became a cult figure, and died in his sleep. Stalin and Hitler prevailed for a time and murdered millions of people. At Jonestown, Jim Jones convinced 900 people to drink the Flavor Aid. And Bernie Madoff bilked thousands of investors out of billions of dollars before his house of cards came tumbling down.

The dark side clearly does work, which is why it is so appealing to those among us with no scruples, but the destruction it causes wreaks
havoc not only upon the victims but ultimately upon the victimizer, if not in body at least in name. Machiavelli also wrote, “The new ruler must determine all the injuries that he will need to inflict. He must inflict them once and for all.” In the epic landscape of national politics, this philosophy of power is most evident in tragedies like Cambodia’s killing fields, but it is also played out, on a much smaller scale, by executives who abuse their power, managers who try to motivate by fear instead of inspiration, and others who try to gain advantage by manipulating the truth. In the end, these tactics destroy trust, damage relationships, and are rarely worth their perceived short-term gains. Nonetheless, they are appealing to those who don’t give a damn—and to other psychopaths among us.

**Law 7:**

**People Respond Best to the Influence Techniques They Use Themselves**

People tend to assume that what they like, everyone else will like; that what works well for them will also work for others. This is the case because, by and large, most people believe that they are normal and that their view of reality is shared by most other people. As Martin G. grew up, for instance, he discovered that he made more friends and had greater influence among his friends when he was outgoing and funny. This became a social pattern for him, and he began associating with other people who were outgoing and funny. Their acceptance of him reinforced his behavior. As he entered the workplace, he was attracted to positions and companies where being outgoing and funny was rewarded. Like all people, Martin works best within his comfort zone, so he tries to influence others by using his strengths, by socializing. Not surprisingly, then, he responds best when others socialize with him. Today, he is a successful salesman with a thick address book and a broad network of customers and contacts.

In contrast, Akiko N. grew up in a family of high ideals, and she attended a school named after a revered national hero. She took pride in her accomplishments and those of her friends and family, and dreamed of a better world where the injustices and inequalities she saw no longer existed. Among her friends and colleagues at work, she is known as an idealist and a dreamer. She often tries to influence people by inspiring them, by appealing to their values and ideals, and this is what she responds to as well. Logical arguments resonate less with her than appeals to her heart.
These examples illustrate an important insight about influence. If people try to influence you through logical persuasion, then they will likely be responsive to logic themselves. If they try to bargain or negotiate with you, then they will probably also respond to exchanging. If they legitimize by appealing to authority, then they probably respect authority and will respond to it as well. Whatever influence techniques people use most often are probably the ones they will find most influential.

**Law 8:**

**If You Are Observant,**

**People Will Reveal What They Find Most Influential**

I think this one of the most profound insights about influence. In many cases, you don’t have to guess what people will find most influential. If you are observant, if you listen to other people and observe their behavior and the environments they create for themselves, you can discover how best to influence most people. In Martin G.’s case, the moment you meet him you see someone who is extroverted and forthcoming. His office is full of mementos from customers as well as samples of his company’s products. There are family and vacation photos on his walls and on the shelves of his bookcase. His environment invites you to ask about his life and find some connection with him. He loves doing business at lunch and is quick to share the latest joke he’s heard. It is abundantly clear that he can be influenced by socializing.

It takes a little longer to get to know Akiko, who is a more private person, but when she opens up you learn that she volunteers at the Humane Society and that she values tradition and has a strong sense of place. She is as concerned about *why* you would do something as *what* you would do. She admires inspirational leaders and listens to new age and classical music. Everything about her suggests that she’ll respond best if you appeal to her values.

People who respond best to logical persuading will show you that they think logically, respect facts and evidence, and are often intolerant of cognitive sloppiness. People who respond best to the consulting influence technique will show that they want to be involved, that they have ideas to share, and that they need to feel a part of the solution. And so on. If you are observant, people will reveal how they like to be influenced, and knowing that will make you much more effective at influencing others.
Law 9:  
Influence Usually Involves a Mix of Techniques

In education and training programs where I have taught others how to influence more effectively, I have observed thousands of exchanges where one person is attempting to influence another. An interesting observation, which I’ve seen confirmed many times, is that it is rare for people to use only one influence technique. Typically, influence involves a mixture of techniques. For example, the influencer begins by trying to explain why she believes X is the right approach or strategy. The influencee pushes back. The influencer tries logic again, offering more evidence or another line of reasoning. When that is inconclusive, she switches to an appeal to values, which creates a spark of interest but still does not succeed. So she tries consulting—asking questions to draw the other person in. This succeeds to a greater extent, even more than she’d hoped. Emboldened, she again tries to seal the deal with logic but is rebuffed. So she legitimizes, gets a strong negative reaction, and goes back to appealing to values, which makes a good connection. To gain final agreement, she offers an exchange, which is accepted.

This is often how successful influence attempts proceed. The initial attempt either is not convincing or is greeted with skepticism, so the influencer tries something else, exploring and adapting as she learns more from the influencee’s reactions and responses. When people stubbornly stick with the technique they started with, they often fail because the influencee’s resistance stiffens. If the influencer persists, despite evidence that it’s not working, the influencee may become annoyed or angry, and the situation devolves into a contest of wills. If you are a parent and have tried to get your children to clean up their bedrooms, you know how it goes. For this reason, I strongly recommend that if what you are attempting isn’t working, try something else.

Law 10:  
The More Power You Have, the More Influential You Will Be

Power is the force that governs how influential you can be. The more power you have, the more potential influence you can wield. Some authors treat power and influence as the same concept, but this muddies an important distinction. You can have great power but choose not to exercise as much direct influence as you could. Gandhi is an
example. As a moral exemplar and political giant in the India of his time, he had tremendous power and could have used it in nearly whatever manner he chose, but he channeled his power in ways he believed were spiritually and morally correct (and his moral stance increased his power within India and around the world). However, Gandhi may be the exception to the aphorism that power corrupts and absolute power can corrupt absolutely. Many people with great power cannot restrain themselves from exercising it, often in ways that harm or inhibit others; others, like Gandhi, have the spiritual and moral fortitude to prevent power from corrupting them. In any case, the more power someone has, the greater potential influence he can exert on the lives, fortunes, thoughts, actions, and ideals of others.

Where does power come from? I answered that question in my previous book, *The Elements of Power: Lessons on Leadership and Influence*. Here, suffice it to say that there is a direct correlation between the amount of power you have and how much leadership and influence you can wield.

**KEY CONCEPTS**

1. No matter how capable an influencer you are, the idea that you can influence anyone to do anything is nonsense. Influence attempts may fail for many legitimate reasons.

2. Influence attempts do not have binary (yes/no) outcomes. They may result in no influence. If successful, the most likely outcome is compliance, but influence attempts may also result in commitment or leadership. If unsuccessful, they may provoke a negative reaction in the influencee, including skepticism, resistance, or rebellion.

3. People will not consent to be influenced unless the situation and environment are conducive to them saying yes. The foundations of agreement are latitude, interests, and disposition. For you to successfully influence people, they must have the latitude to say yes, saying yes must be aligned with their interests and values, and they must be disposed to say yes.

4. To gauge how responsive someone might be to an influence attempt, use the simple test. Ask yourself, *Why would this person say yes or no?*

5. Influence is often a process rather than an event. Sometimes, people may not be influenced the first time you approach them. You may need to keep trying. However, if the influence technique you are
using is not working, don’t keep doing the same thing. Try something else.

6. Influence is cultural. People in different countries and cultures may differ in how they respond to the different influence techniques. To influence effectively in different cultures, you need to understand how power and influence are used in that culture and adapt accordingly.

7. Ethical influence is consensual and often bilateral. Unethical influence may succeed—but always at a cost.

8. People respond best to the influence techniques they use themselves; and if you are observant, people will reveal what they find most influential.

9. Influence usually involves a mix of techniques.

10. The more power you have, the more influential you will be.

CHALLENGES FOR READERS

1. Consider some of your most recent attempts to influence others at work or in your life. Reflect on three or four influence attempts that succeeded. What were you trying to do and, more important, why were you successful?

2. Now reflect on three or four influence attempts that failed. What were you trying to do in these cases, and why weren’t the people influenced as you had hoped? What could or should you have done differently? What might have made the difference?

3. Reflect on how other people have influenced you in the past. Has someone ever been so influential with you that you became committed to that person’s ideas or course of action? Have you ever been moved to assume a leadership role? How did the influencer accomplish that? What was so compelling for you?

4. Conversely, has someone ever tried to influence you, and your reaction was to actively or passively resist or to instigate a rebellion? If so, what prompted your reaction? What did the person do or say that exacerbated the situation? What should the person have done differently?

5. Has anyone ever tried to influence you to do something that was contrary to your interests or values? What was your response?

6. One of the foundations of agreement is disposition. Think about the times someone has tried to influence you, and you didn’t cooperate
simply because you weren’t in a cooperative frame of mind. When is the best time to approach you? When would conditions be most favorable? Now think about your boss or a peer. When is the best time to approach that person? When is the worst time? What does this suggest about influencing anyone?

7. Apply the simple test to someone you need to influence about something important: Why might this person say yes? And why might she say no? In light of your answers, how should you approach this person to ensure success?

8. Have you worked cross-culturally? Or worked with people from different countries in your own culture? What differences do you perceive in how power and influence work in different cultures? Consider some influence approaches you have made that did not work as you expected with people from other cultures. Why were those approaches ineffective?

9. People respond best to the influence techniques they use themselves. Consider your boss and the three or four other people you work with most closely. How do they try to influence others? What techniques do they use? Logic? Authority? Inspiration? Familiarity? Consulting? Next, consider some customers you work with frequently. How do they attempt to influence you or others? What techniques do they prefer?

10. Remember, if you are observant, people will reveal what they find most influential. Think about some of the people you work most closely with. What are the best ways to influence them, and what cues do they give that reveal the best ways to influence them? What about you? What is the best way for someone else to influence you? What do you do or say that reveals that? What about your office or home environment suggests the ways you are able to be influenced?