

Self-Leadership Challenge #7: How Great Self-Leaders Influence Others — Even Without Title or Authority

My executive coaching client, Mei, had just received a high-visibility promotion. It would shift her from leading the sales function (with full profit and loss responsibility) to taking over a regional sales job in charge of 11 countries. However, with this new move, P&L responsibility would remain with the 11 country heads.

Her new regional job meant that there were dotted-line reports in each of the 11 countries, but she had no “direct” authority over those reports or the country heads. Essentially, Mei shifted from a post with full authority and title to a position without any official power. She could no longer rely on an “I’m the boss” approach.

Mei came to me for [coaching](#) because she had never been in a job which required her to rely solely on her ability to influence others; she had normally relied on authority and title to get things done. As such, she felt the need to strengthen her *influencing* skills—and quickly—if she was going to succeed. Given the high visibility of her new position, not to mention how critical this was for her career, one thing was clear: Failure was not an option.

The need for greater influence skills is more and more common in today’s matrixed world. Indeed, due to flattening organizations, many executives today don’t have the positional power they had in the past.

To further complicate matters, in today’s global work world, the need to influence frequently happens *remotely*, with less face-to-face contact than in the past. That means we don’t have the benefit of reading body language or using our facial expressions to help us persuade others to our point of view. Often, we must speak to people in different time zones late at night or early in the morning, when we may not be operating with the full energy required.

As a result, influence is one of the most important skills of contemporary [self-leadership](#), and that’s why it’s also one of the most common issues I see in my executive coaching practice.

How Great Self-Leaders Influence

When you think about people who have a great deal of influence, does someone in your organization come to mind? What does this person do to influence others? Is the influence based solely on position and title, or is it based on a skill or quality like warmth and likability?

Even though my client, Mei, had never previously been forced to rely solely on influence, I reminded her that she had certainly influenced her colleagues and others on a number of occasions. I asked her to make a list of ways that excellent [self-leaders](#) persuade, recalling situations during her career in which she herself had successfully done so, as well as times she had observed other great leaders compel others to act.

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Here is Mei's list:

- *“Great self-leaders influence by being fair and objective with others. A number of my colleagues have reported to bosses who treated them unfairly at some point in their careers. That stays with you, and when you work with someone who does treat you fairly, you want to do right by that person.*
- *Great self-leaders influence by having no hidden agendas. It's important to be transparent. If people trust that I'm honest and up-front, they'll be more likely to accept what I have to say.*
- *Great self-leaders influence peers by earning their respect. If my peers don't respect me, I will be less likely to win them over.*
- *Great self-leaders influence better when not attached to a specific outcome. I'll be more influential if I stay flexible and don't insist that everything must be done in a certain way.*
- *Great self-leaders influence by doing what's right for the team or the organization. I need to keep in mind that it isn't personal; it's about doing what's best for the company.*
- *Great self-leaders influence by [asking powerful, open-ended questions](#) that don't lead to simple “yes” or “no” answers. These kinds of questions encourage dialogue, which, in turn, strengthen trust.*
- *Great self-leaders influence by being inclusive, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, age, or body type. I need to watch any tendency toward unconscious bias and make sure I don't allow labels to negatively impact outcomes.*
- *Great self-leaders influence by not overwhelming others with lots of details. I need to stay aware of how much information people actually need in order to see my point of view, and then offer no more than that.*
- *Great self-leaders influence by steering clear of drama and problems. I need to remain positive and avoid complaining or focusing on what isn't working.*
- *Great self-leaders influence by being excellent listeners. My influence is more likely to be successful if I talk with people, and listen actively, rather than talking at them without listening.”*

Armed with these ideas and the Influence Toolbox included in my book, *Leading YOU™: The power of Self-Leadership to build your executive brand and drive career success*, Mei felt more

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confident about her new position, and her trepidation about taking on the challenge changed to excitement.

What other examples have you seen great self-leaders use to successfully influence others?

Do you want to strengthen your self-leadership skills? Check out my latest book, [Leading YOU™: The Power of Self-Leadership to Build Your Executive Brand and Drive Career Success](#), where I share dozens of tips, tools, and techniques to help you rise to the top in your career.

Brenda S. Bence is an internationally-recognized branding expert, Certified Executive Coach, Certified Speaking Professional, and the author of several award-winning books, including *Would YOU Want to Work for YOU™?*, *Master the Brand Called YOU™*, and *Smarter Branding Without Breaking the Bank*.



In one of her recently released books, *Leading YOU™: The power of Self-Leadership to build your executive brand and drive career success*, Brenda brings her many years of transformational coaching successes, insights, examples, and real-world stories to the rewarding task of helping leaders reach their full potential.

After earning her MBA from Harvard, Brenda spent the bulk of her career as an executive in *Fortune* 100 multinationals, building brands across dozens of countries spanning four continents. Now, as President of her own company, Brand Development Associates International, she travels the world speaking, training, and coaching individuals and companies to greater success through creative, yet practical, personal and corporate brand and leadership development. Visit www.BrendaBence.com.

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