



# Lead from the Middle

## 11 Questions to Cultivate 360° Influence

*"Authority gives you the power to change short term outcomes; influence gives you the power to change culture."*

### Leading Down

**1. You don't have to be the star**

*Key Question: "How can I publicly appreciate my team and celebrate their accomplishments?"*

**2. Give permission for feedback**

*Key Question: "If you were doing my job, what would you do differently?"*

**3. Give them your time**

*Key Question: "How can I re-prioritize my calendar in order to spend time with those I lead?"*

**4. Serve them**

*Key Question: "What do you need from me this week?"*

### Leading Across

**5. Build a friendship**

*Key Question: "Can I buy you a coffee?"*

**6. Help them win**

*Key Question: "What have you been having a hard time with at work recently?"*

**7. Help them win**

*Key Question: "What books or resources have had the most influence on your work recently?"*

### Leading Up

**8. Care about what they care about**

*Key Question: "If I were to let my boss re-prioritize my calendar, what would it look like?"*

**9. Be low maintenance**

*Key Question: "What would my boss' gut reaction be if they found out I was resigning?"*

**10. Learn how to disagree with them**

*Key Question: "When I see something that I disagree with, how would you like me to approach you?"*

**11. Grow**

*Key Question: "What books would you add to my reading list this year?"*

"If I were in that position, things would change around here."

We've all thought it.

"I would do that job better. I would make this organization a better place.

I mean, obviously, I don't have the position or the authority to make that kind of change. But, you know, I would if I could."

Convenient.

Is this reality, though? Do we need authority before we can lead change? Are we forced to sit on the sidelines until we get that promotion? Do we need to be at the top before we can affect the bigger picture?

Thankfully, the answer to these questions is "no".

What we need is not authority but **influence**.

Merriam-Webster defines the two concepts like this:

**Authority** is "the power to give orders or make decisions: the power or right to direct or control someone or something."

**Influence** is "the power to change or affect someone or something: the power to cause changes without directly forcing them to happen."

Authority is appealing because you can implement change quickly and maintain a high degree of control over the whole process. With authority, you can push through opposition and force your agenda. But all of us who have tasted any degree of authority know that this is a quick way to burn out your team and ultimately won't produce long-lasting change.

The minute you take your micro-managing self out of the equation, things return to the status quo.

*Authority gives you the power to change short-term outcomes; influence gives you the power to change culture.*

What you can do with authority is limited, what you can accomplish with influence is immeasurable. And the good news is that influence is something you can cultivate and grow in regardless of where you are in the organization.

So no more excuses. No more criticising from the sidelines. No more feeling powerless. Learn the keys to influence and you can lead from the middle of any organization.

You have a valuable voice that needs to be heard. Let's crank up the volume on that voice by learning to cultivate influence by leading in these three directions:

1. **Down:** Influence with those we lead
2. **Across:** Influence with those we lead alongside
3. **Up:** Influence with those who lead us

Welcome to Part I of our 3-part series. We'll unpack 11 keys to cultivating lasting influence, including a practical question for each that you can ask to begin moving in the right direction.

**\*Important disclaimer:** We don't cultivate influence with others in order to manipulate them for our own benefit; we use influence to serve others and to more effectively move the Church forward in its mission.

With that out of the way, let's begin with your most obvious leadership relationship:

Those you lead.

## Leading Down: Influencing Where You Have Authority

In these relationships, you have legitimate authority and it can be tempting to take the easier route and fall back on your positional power to get things done rather than instilling the values necessary for your team to be able to lead without you. Because of this, some people find this to be the most difficult area to gain real influence in.

Here are 4 keys I've discovered to turn that around:

### 1. You don't have to be the star.

Yes, you set the pace and model what you want to see in your team, but it's too easy to begin to believe that you're always the most valuable player on the team when you're the leader, when the truth is that you're not always the best idea generator, problem-solver, or innovator.

In fact, when I hire new staff I'm looking for people who have the potential to outshine me in as many areas as possible. Listen to your team's ideas, give them the last word sometimes, and publicly celebrate each member's successes. Lift them up and honour them in front of others and you will gain the trust you need for lasting influence.

**Key Question: "How can I publicly appreciate my team and celebrate their accomplishments?"**

## 2. Give permission for feedback.

You have blind spots. We all do. And no one is going to see those quite as clearly as those you lead. When you struggle in areas like delegation, job design, or coaching and motivation, your team will pick up on it far quicker than your superiors.

If we are not consistently creating the opportunity to hear this feedback, we not only short-circuit our own development but we also fail to create the proper channels for our team to express their frustrations, leaving them only informal avenues like the coffee shop or around the water cooler.

Create a safe environment for your team to talk to you directly about your shortcomings and you'll find they have less of a need to talk to others about them.

The reason for this is that your team will feel empowered by being given a voice they didn't have before. This is connected to the somewhat counterintuitive principle of influence:

You gain influence by giving it away. Give someone a voice and you'll find they give you one in return.

**Key Question: "If you were doing my job, what would you do differently?"**

## 3. Give them your time.

I know, everyone wants a piece of your time and you could easily fill your calendar with meetings every week, but no one deserves a spot on your calendar quite as much as those who directly report to you. This includes weekly formal meetings and one-on-one coaching times, but also time for informal conversation and banter as well.

It is sociologist [Peter Berger](#) who is often quoted as saying,

*"The subjective reality of the world hangs on the thin thread of conversation."*

In other words, the culture of your team and their perspective on the meaning of their work is not shaped by that nice collage of vision words on your office wall so much as it is by the words you exchange day in and day out.

This one isn't complicated – if you want to influence your team, you need to talk to them and spend time with them.

**Key Question:** *"How can I change my calendar in order to prioritize time spent with those I lead?"*

#### **4. Serve them.**

This is a valuable concept in all the relationships we're talking about here, but it is particularly powerful with those we lead precisely because it is counterintuitive. Those that report to you should be figuring out how to serve you, right?

When you flip the tables and help them win in their areas of leadership, you prove that you are *for them* and communicate that you believe the work they are doing is valuable.

Now don't get me wrong, this definitely doesn't mean you're doing their work for them, but it does mean that you're regularly doing things like clarifying expectations, providing access to resources, giving authority, and creating the structures and guidelines necessary for them to perform well.

As leaders, we exist to mobilize others and to use our influence to see them succeed. I would argue that if we're not serving those we lead, we're not really leading.

**Key Question:** *"What do you need from me this week?"*

## Leading Across: How to Positively Influence Coworkers

Unless you're a solo pastor in a small church, you have coworkers that you have absolutely no positional authority over (though you would really like to sometimes). Because you are not connected by a vertical line on your Org. chart, these relationships are easy to neglect. You each have your own job descriptions and as long as everyone does what their role requires, everything will be ok, right?

The truth is that these relationships have a surprisingly large impact on our churches' effectiveness. All sorts of negative tendencies pop up when we don't get these right:

- Silos form. Entire ministry areas become disconnected from each other and begin competing for resources such as money, volunteers, spaces, etc.
- Comparison creeps in and you begin to ask questions like, "Why is that staff person getting paid more than me? Why didn't their budget get cut? Does anyone else feel like that person is getting more attention from the Lead Pastor?"
- A "Golden Calf" mentality develops. Author [Matt Wilks](#) uses this term to describe the situation when people believe that their ministry area is more important than others

As a ministry leader, you can't afford to neglect what your co-worker is focusing on. They may be the ones creating the ministry environments that those you lead will one day be a part of. If you're in children's ministry, your co-worker may be the main influencer in the lives of the parents of those children. For the sake of those we lead, we need to learn to cultivate influence in these critical relationships.

Here are 3 principles I've learned over the years to do just that:

### 1. Build a friendship

People who like you are far more likely to listen to you.

Thanks to psychologist [Robert Cialdini](#), this is now an undisputed principle of influence. Our common sense confirms this, of course, as we all know that we are not about to imitate someone if we think they're a jerk.

But we need to be careful with this principle. We can't do this to be manipulative or simply persuade someone for self-serving purposes. Inauthenticity will never win anyone over.

But don't ignore this principle either. If your church or organization is going to move forward, you need to have a voice in your co-worker's leadership and they need to have a voice in yours. Building a friendship with them leads to trust and we are increasingly realizing that [trust is the primary currency](#) of both work and life.

One thing that I've observed is that building this trust is often connected to our willingness to be vulnerable with each other. I've seen strained work relationships turn around simply because one person walked into another person's office and asked them to pray for a challenge they've been facing recently. Don't be afraid to show weakness and let your softer side out. In other words, **be human**.

If you want to see a deeper sense of community form in the teams you lead, it needs to start on the teams you're a part of.

So, learn to listen, find common ground, and make opportunities to connect outside of work. You'll be amazed at how the silo walls begin to fall around you.

**Key Question: "Can I buy you a coffee?"**

## 2. Help them win

Quite simply, when you see something in your co-worker's ministry area that's not working, you need to care about that. For instance, when they are frustrated and losing volunteers, instead of immediately trying to recruit those people to your ministry (you know you were thinking it), empathize with them and offer help. If you're honest, you may even have a few volunteers of your own that aren't in their "sweet spot" and may do really well in another area.

[Andy Stanley](#) emphasizes the need for mutual submission in our organizations by suggesting that each person on the team needs to learn to genuinely say:

*"I'm here to facilitate your success regardless of where our names are on the Org chart."*

For some, this may sound like a revolutionary new idea for the workplace. As church leaders though, we have to admit that it also sounds an awful lot like Jesus: *"Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all."*

When we help others win, we eliminate competition and communicate to the team that we value what they're working on.

**Key Question: "What have you been having a hard time with at work recently?"**

### 3. Learn what they're learning

How much you value something is directly connected to how much you understand it. If you don't really know what your teammate is working on or why it matters, you'll continue to believe that your ministry area is the most important one in the church.

One of the most effective ways that I've found to guard against this "golden calf mentality" is to intentionally expand your learning goals.

If you lead teens, read a book on leading children. If you're a Children's pastor, read a book geared towards Lead Pastors. Wherever you are, develop yourself to be not only a specialist but also a generalist. Be the most avid learner in the office and you will find that your co-workers begin to come to you seeking your input and perspective on the projects they're working on. This is one of the surest sign that you have gained trust and influence in another person's life.

**Key Question:** *"What books or resources have had the most influence on your work recently?"*

If we can learn to improve our relationships at this level, we'll improve the health of our entire organizations. Remember, you're modelling with your co-workers what you're hoping to see in the staff and volunteers that you lead.

**Bonus:** You've also given you and your team the potential to win huge credibility and influence with your boss. It's added stress to them when their team doesn't work well together. If they can see you actively addressing issues and intentionally bringing the team together, your value in their eyes just went way up.



## Leading Up: How to Impress and Influence Your Boss

Monkeys in a tree. This may be familiar to you but I had not heard this analogy before this week. I was sitting down with a business leader over coffee and he explained to me that when you're a monkey in a tree and you look down, you see smiling faces looking up at you, but when you look up, well, let's just say the view is quite a bit less flattering.

I wish there wasn't any truth in this analogy. Unfortunately, it is easier to see the faults of those who lead you directly than just about any other person in the organization. Mostly, I think, because their bad decisions can affect you so much more heavily. If I were to name one dynamic that most often sours relationships with bosses, this would be it. If we're going to lead positive change in our organizations, we need to curb our criticism and learn to cultivate influence instead.

Whether or not your boss will admit it, they need your help to lead well, but they'll never accept it from you unless you first learn to build trust with them.

Here are just a few principles I've learned that will help you impress and influence your boss:

### 1. Care about what they care about.

Your boss has to lead at a different level than you do, think through challenges that you don't have to, and plan farther into the future than you do. They care about what you do but are more concerned with how it fits into the bigger picture and aligns with the overall strategy of the organization.

This is good. They need to do this. We may get frustrated when they don't seem to really understand what we do or ask us to do something that is far more work than they realize, but it's because they need to be leading at a higher plane than we are.

Instead of fighting against this, embrace it and help them accomplish what they are responsible for. Prove that you care more about the future and success of the church than you do about getting that budget increase this year and you'll go a long way towards gaining their trust.

You want a simple way to prove that you care about what they do? Next time they bring forward a church-wide or staff-wide initiative and need to form an ad hoc team to accomplish it, be the first to raise your hand.

**Key Question:** *"If I were to let my boss re-prioritize my calendar, what would it look like?"*

## 2. Be low maintenance.

Regardless of what your position is or what task you've been given to do, figure out how to do it better than anyone else. It doesn't matter if you're an intern working the copy machine or leading a team through a major new initiative, be the one that your boss never needs to worry about. They know you're going to get it done and get it done well. In the midst of high pressure or stressful seasons, you need to be, as Clay Scroggins puts it, "[an oasis of excellence](#)" in your organization. Don't be a burden.

This seems like it should be obvious advice – work hard – but it's amazing how quickly a proper work ethic can set you apart. Do NOT fake this, though. If something really isn't working well in your area of responsibility, don't create the illusion that it is. You don't have to be perfect, but you do have to be honest.

If you want to gauge how you're doing in becoming this "oasis", Scroggins recommends this key question:

**Key Question: "What would my boss' gut reaction be if they found out I was resigning?"**

## 3. Learn how to disagree with them.

Ok, take it easy on this one, no one really wants to work with someone who is constantly the dissenting voice. But the opposite is also true. I don't need my team to always agree with me; I need them to be effective.

If we're going to see the right ideas come to the surface, we need to develop the art of the "pushback". Respectfully, and with humility, provide some opposition and ask some tough questions. No leader has all the answers or is thinking about all the angles; the best leaders out there are the best because they're surrounded by the best teams.

Our churches don't need charismatic, rock-star, pastors calling all the shots; they need healthy teams of leaders who are willing to wrestle their way to truth and discern together where God is leading them.

The key to gaining influence through this is to learn to disagree with them while still continuing to honour them as your leader (i.e. this is not a license to criticise them behind their back). If your boss can trust you to be honest with them in private, while honouring them in public, you'll become invaluable to them.

**Key Question: "When I see something that I disagree with, how would you like me to approach you?"**

#### 4. Grow.

Don't be a static member of the team. The need today is for dynamic leaders who are constantly learning, adapting to changing cultures, and not afraid to innovate. Be intentional in carving out time regularly for your own leadership development.

While your boss should be encouraging and equipping you to do this, not all of them do; in the end, your growth is always your responsibility. Prioritize this and you'll find it far easier, and more natural, to be the one who is bringing new perspectives and fresh ideas to the table.

If you really want to grab their attention, take some books from their reading list and add them to your own. Find out what books have influenced them the most in the last year and then pick up a copy (or borrow theirs to see what they've highlighted and underlined).

Apart from books, consider other avenues of growth like getting a coach, taking online courses, joining a mastermind group, or attending conferences. Whatever you do, just do something. Don't rely on your degree from 2008 to effectively lead the church in 2018.

**Key Question:** *"What books would you add to my reading list this year?"*

There are so many other ways that you can build trust and learn to influence those you work with. These 11 questions are a starting place; now it's up to you to get to know your team personally and adjust your strategy accordingly.

Whatever you do next, I hope you have a new appreciation for your ability to Lead from the Middle. You don't need the authority that comes from position or title. You are perfectly situated to lead change in your church/organization right now, regardless of what the sign on your door says (or even if you have a door).

-Dan

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