Influence

The ability to persuade others to pursue a particular action—despite natural or hidden/inherent resistance, or apathy. The ability to understand what motivates others and design an approach to leverage those motivators.

When he penned the iconic book *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, almost 80 years ago in the midst of the Great Depression, Dale Carnegie advanced the innovative idea that success in leadership was due primarily to “skill in human engineering—to personality and the ability to lead people.”

Carnegie advocated an approach to management that emphasized winning influence and motivating employees by listening, encouraging, and praising. Carnegie quotes Charles Schwab—the person he named to head the United States Steel Company—to summarize the essence of his philosophy of management: “I consider my ability to arouse enthusiasm among my people,’ said Schwab, ‘the greatest asset I have and the best way to derive the best thing that is in a person is by appreciation and encouragement.”

This was a radical viewpoint in a world where imperious executives wielded power from a plane high above their workers. In this authoritarian environment, Carnegie’s comments must have seemed naïve to many. Nonetheless, today we recognize that winning influence through “human engineering,” or, as we might say, “people skills” is a vital business skill.

This is particularly true for diversity and inclusion practitioners given that most D&I offices have small staffs and small budgets. However, they also often have a high profile and carry the burden of the organization’s high expectations of what the D&I office can accomplish. This means that D&I practitioners must excel at influence to encourage others in their organizations to adopt comprehensive diversity strategies and initiatives when the authority and firepower to enact such measures may be lacking.

Instead of thinking of the situation as a deficit, however, in reality it can be one of your most robust leadership competencies. This is because effectively leveraging influence does more than simply ensure adoption of diversity strategies. It can gain you supportive organizational allies that can make things happen in a long-term sustainable way where they provide the necessary resources and sponsorship.
The ability to exert influence in business, government, and with individuals is a powerful force. Every organization is in the influence business – from enticing customers to buy, to persuading employees to give of their discretionary time and effort, to prompting positive stories in the media, and convincing colleagues to adopt innovative strategies.

For instance, consider how the chairman of the Federal Reserve System influences monetary policy in the largest economy in the world, the United States and, through this, worldwide. On a more individual level, there is Malala Yousafzai, the Pakistani teenager who was attacked by the Taliban for being a girl who dared to aspire to learn and who now has become a powerful voice for girls’ education around the world. Because of its efficacy, influence rests at the core of leadership. James Humes, speechwriter for five presidents from Dwight Eisenhower to George H.W. Bush, said about speeches “a major medium for influence” “The art of communication is the language of leadership.” To paraphrase, the art of influence is really the art of leadership.

Your title, formal authority, or position in an organization also does not guarantee the ability to influence others. It can be helpful, but have you ever wondered how some people lacking title, position, or formal authority seem to have the leverage to get things done or affect events that are way above their pay grade? Those individuals possess an influential competency that has little to do with formal positions. A survey by the American Management Association confirms this reality. The study of nearly 1,200 senior business and HR executives from more than 40 countries found that more than 50 percent of the companies define leaders not by their position but by their influence and performance.

As D&I practitioners it is critical that you leverage your influence, whether you have the formal authority or not, to move your organization’s diversity agenda forward. This may be one of the most important leadership skills in your toolbox, because through this competency you move others to action, tap into their own reasons for supporting diversity, and broaden your circle of high-value allies. And, like all competencies, the ability to influence can be learned and sharpened.

We often equate power and authority with the size of our budget and whether our teams are growing. In the command and control era of business, power and authority flowed from our titles and positions in the corporate hierarchy. Now, power comes through the ability to influence others to do what they would not have otherwise done were it not for our ability to see what is in it for them in supporting D&I. This kind of influence increases the capability of protecting your budget from crazy cuts as well as to more creatively to tap into the hearts and aspirations of your colleagues across the company to drive the diversity strategy and ensuring it has adequate funding.

What are the key characteristics of those who move with influence? They are:

- **Competence**
- **Courage**
- **Ability to establish trust**

**Competence.** Put simply, if you don’t do the basics well and you don’t demonstrate a differentiated skill set, you will not be seen as competent in ways that those you want to influence need.

**Courage.** In an article in the Society for Human Resource Management’s *HR* magazine Elizabeth Larson, CEO of Watermark Learning, a Minneapolis-based company that teaches influence and project management skills, puts it this way: “It takes courage to recommend the right thing for our organizations like a new direction, a new process or a long-range solution when the organization only wants short-term fixes.” She goes on to tie it to the first characteristic: “In order to have courage you need to know what you are talking about.” You also need the personal fortitude and political savviness to speak the truth in ways that invite responsiveness rather than defensiveness.

**Trust.** This characteristic requires a little more elaboration. Trust is built on the quality of relationships. One does not exist without the other. D&I practitioners with the greatest amount of influence have strong relationships with key people in the organization.

On this issue of trust, Allan Cohen, business professor at Babson College, says that the “heart of influence is reciprocity and exchange, and it begins with an intimate knowledge of...customers.”

“I always say to avoid the Golden Rule,” Cohen says. “It is not ‘do unto others as you have done unto you’ but rather ‘do unto others as they want to be done unto.’” It is essential that you figure out the worldviews and motivations of those you want to influence and link your strategies to their objectives. A way to do this is through the art of asking questions to identify what is important to them instead of telling them what you want them to do.

The authors of *Collective Genius: The Art and Practice of Innovation* state, “A leader of innovations creates a place—a context, and environment—where people are
willing and able to do the hard work that innovative problem solving requires.”

They define a new form of leadership based on trust: “Without leadership, internal conflicts common to virtually all groups will stifle and discourage innovation ...we show how our leaders overcame these destructive forces by creating communities whose members were bound by common purposes, shared values, and mutual rules of engagement.” The successful leader, then, builds trust, which is the essence of community. The words “common,” “shared,” and “mutual” underscore the importance of trust among the team members, which includes the leader’s trust in them and their trust in him or her.

When trust and understanding of others is absent, when you lack the ability to effectively persuade others to follow our lead, the fallout can be disastrous. Take for instance, Robert Nardelli’s very public and well-reviewed downfall as CEO for Home Depot in the mid-2000s. Nardelli continues to be used as an example of what not to do as C-suite executive as it relates to influence.

According to Tim Irwin, author of Derailed: Five Lessons Learned From Catastrophic Failures of Leadership, which tracks the failures of five CEOs, Nardelli missed this critical element of influence: trust. He did not trust his colleagues and they did not trust him. The book states, “If he actually trusted employees, the sentiment didn’t transfer outside Nardelli’s own head. People worked in constant twofold fear: of failure and of job loss. In an article in BusinessWeek written after his firing, one former executive confessed: ‘Every single week you shuddered when you looked at email because another officer was gone.’”

One of his greatest mistakes was in dealing with the well-established Home Depot culture. It was well known as a “relatively laid-back organization” with independent managers and “the folksy, entrepreneurial style of retired co-founders Bernard Marcus and Arthur Blank.” According to one of Home Depot’s three co-founders, Kenneth Langone, Nardelli was “maniacal about goals, objectivity, accomplishments within the boundaries of the values of the company.” This emphasis on numbers and his abrasive style was tolerated—even lauded by some—when Nardelli’s aggressive management appeared to bring significant financial rewards to the company, but he found he had few allies when the housing market collapsed and same-store sales declined 5.1 percent in the third quarter of 2006.

Nardelli’s “in your face style” had managed to alienate top executive, rank-and-file employees, customers, the people of Atlanta where the company is headquartered, and the financial community. His arrogance and failure to understand his company and workforce had cost him his influence. In reviewing the public ouster of Irwin’s five CEOs, Donna Dale Carnegie in the revision of the original book, How to Win

As the Nardelli story illustrates, one may have the power of authority, but this does not translate directly to having the power of influence. Conversely, one can have the power of influence even without the power of authority. The multi-Oscar winning film, The King’s Speech, provides a clear example of influence without authority. It details how Lionel Logue (played by Geoffrey Rush), an unknown and unconventional speech therapist, played a key part in WWII by helping England’s King George VI (played by Colin Firth) overcome a speech impediment to make his first radio broadcast and declare war on Germany. The influence Logue had with King George went far beyond speech therapy but extended into matters of policy, because the King admired Logue’s willingness to speak truth to power. Logue’s influence boiled down to relationship building and results that led to trust on the part of the King.

Let us now take these characteristics and embed them through the following behaviors and skills as described in the staged competency model:

• Persuade Others to Particular Action Through Interpersonal Skills and Authenticity
• Uncover What Motivates Others
• Persuade Others to Particular Action through Insightful Communications
• Persuade Others to Particular Action through Professional Expertise

Persuade Others to Particular Action through Interpersonal Skills and Authenticity

Early-Career Professionals/Individual Contributor

For D&I practitioners who are early in their career journey, persuading others requires being enthusiastic and energetic about the field and its contribution to the organization. Passion and excitement are infectious. Demonstrating that enthusiasm means being constantly aware of D&I opportunities for self-learning and for ways that diversity can support the company. Be a lifelong learner of D&I. Read widely, particularly subjects and authors of which you may be unfamiliar. Venture out of your comfort zone into new cultural experiences. Continuing to learn about different cultures and expanding your personal network as you meet others at these
events will increase your influence by giving you new and differentiated resources and insights to draw from.

Here is an example of the unexpected learning one can glean by participating in an event they would not likely attend, but where one could develop a unique perspective that could increase their influence. Deb Dagit, former vice president of diversity and work environment at Merck, describes a conference in Washington, D.C. attended by more than 700 people with a condition called osteogenesis imperfecta (OI) or brittle bone disease. Many people with OI experience upwards of 90 bone breaks throughout their lives. They can also have heart valve and colon challenges, hearing loss, and severe curvature of the spine. “And yet, this is not a group of unhappy sad sacks,” Dagit said. If one looks beyond their physical challenges, you will find leaders in government, actors, doctors, business owners, people in all types of occupations and walks of life, who have full lives that include family and being a part of their communities. “But able-bodied people would walk into this conference and see something that is tragic, that needs to be cured, that we need to research,” she continued, “Ironically, those with a disability often look at the ‘poor able-bodied people’ who don’t get to experience this unique perspective because they’ve not had to struggle with some dimension of disability.”

That is what venturing into new spaces and learning about different groups can do for you: inform you of perspectives and worldviews that you did not know even existed. That kind of depth in understanding pays off greatly as you develop your influence competency and enriches your relationships with others.

However, these budding relationships can only be strengthened once you are viewed as principled, fair, and honorable in your interactions with colleagues, partners, customers, and supervisors. Those characteristics also form the basis for trust, another essential component of influence. These sentiments are not novel and can be found in the philosophies, sacred texts, and words of wisdom handed down through the ages. It is how you apply them in your daily routine and in your persuasive efforts on behalf of diversity and inclusion that will set you apart. The company’s Retail Employees with Disabilities Initiative (REDI) program prepares qualified candidates for employment of a more productive and loyal workforce. The company’s Retail Employees with Disabilities Initiative (REDI) program prepares qualified candidates for employment at Walgreens retail locations, as well as with other retailers that require similar skills. As of October 25, 2012, more than 400 candidates had completed REDI training, 66 percent of which had acquired the full skillset needed to perform a service clerk position in a similar retail setting. Approximately 130 had been hired by Walgreens. The company also designs its distribution center facilities to accommodate people with disabilities. These centers help drive opportunity, efficiency and productivity for the entire workforce. At the Connecticut facility, more than 40 percent of the workforce is made up of people with disabilities. This influence in action.

By listening and taking time to understand the needs of people with disabilities, Walgreens, the largest drugstore chain in the United States, reaped the reward of a more productive and loyal workforce. The company’s Retail Employees with Disabilities Initiative (REDI) program prepares qualified candidates for employment at Walgreens retail locations, as well as with other retailers that require similar skills. As of October 25, 2012, more than 400 candidates had completed REDI training, 66 percent of which had acquired the full skillset needed to perform a service clerk position in a similar retail setting. Approximately 130 had been hired by Walgreens. The company also designs its distribution center facilities to accommodate people with disabilities. These centers help drive opportunity, efficiency and productivity for the entire workforce. At the Connecticut facility, more than 40 percent of the workforce is made up of people with disabilities. This influence in action.

Strengthening your influence competency is also bolstered as you support and encourage others to accept formal and informal leadership roles in your personal challenges in this area, along with an openness to new learning situations. Here, too, even mid-career practitioners must consistently seek opportunities to learn how others view the world and what can prompt them to action.
organization’s D&I strategy. It unleashes energy that multiplies what you are able
do on your own. U.S. Cellular, a wireless communications company, operates
four inclusion councils across the country as part of its diversity strategy. These
councils operate similarly to employee resource groups (ERGs), except where ERGs
typically are based on diversity dimensions, such as gender, race, ethnicity or sexual
orientation. U.S. Cellular’s councils are regionally based and reflect a council area’s
geographic and demographic diversity.

In a 2013 interview with Diversity Best Practices, Linal Harris, senior director and
chief diversity strategist, explained that, normally, employees are nominated for
council membership by their supervisors, colleagues, or managers. These employees
have some level of influence with their colleagues. However, you can bolster your
influence with direct action. For instance, during a recent round of nominations,
one employee nominated himself to serve, which was the first time something like
this had happened. According to Harris, the employee said, “I just really want to do
this work.” Impressed by the employee’s willingness to serve and his desire to play a
more influential role in the company, Harris made sure that he was selected for the
council.20 Influence comes to those who actively and openly seek it out.

Senior-Level Executives/Leader
D&I leaders are expected to be able to persuade others to specific actions through
the power of influence but, as stated earlier, position or title is often not enough to
influence others. You are often under intense scrutiny by your subordinates and
superiors to see if your behaviors align with your statements. You must walk the
D&I talk. Walking the talk shows your confidence in diversity and inclusion and,
equally as important, your authenticity on the subject. CHRISTUS Health’s Velois
Bowers said, “Influence comes with a level of confidence in the work and yourself.
A leader has to know the field and constantly work to remain current and relevant,
because others have to believe that you know your stuff.”

But your own confidence and authenticity are only a part of the effort. You must also
inspire others to increase their effectiveness as inclusive leaders as well as demonstrate
a sincere support for others’ success. Bowers gives an example through supplier
diversity. “A lot of organizations, particularly in healthcare, don’t pay attention to
supplier diversity,” she said. Yet this is an area that needs accountability. “The supply
chain should be accountable, procurement should be accountable for the goods that
we purchase. It is important to ensure that we are opening the gates and widening the
nets for women, minority, and veteran owned businesses,” Bowers continued.

She tells of supporting CHRISTUS’ Louisiana CEO Steven Wright’s efforts to
boost supplier diversity. Bowers made sure that he was a member of the company’s
system wide diversity council, where he would address diversity issues along with
his counterparts at the regional level and corporate leadership, such as the chief
operating officer and the corporate CEO. When discussions turned to supplier
diversity, Bowers made sure that Wright’s efforts were highlighted, which supported
Wright and encouraged other regional leaders to take similar actions.

Wright succeeded with his supplier diversity initiatives by making sure that
accountability for supplier diversity was embedded in CHRISTUS Louisiana’s
strategic plan. That organizations can tout their supplier diversity initiatives,
including them in the strategic plan with specific accountabilities, represents a new
level for healthcare organizations. “Steven has one of the most amazing supplier
diversity initiatives,” Bowers said and she played a key influential role in helping set
him up for success.21

Uncover What Motivates Others

Early-Career Professional/Individual Contributor
In order to uncover what motivates others, you must understand others. You must
be open to learning about the experiences and perspectives of individuals and
groups that are different from your own. In developing benefit programs, you should
evaluate the make-up of your workforce to identify the plan components that are
most relevant and valuable to your employees. This includes understanding the
specific needs of the different generations in your workforce “in order to effectively
attract, motivate, and retain these individuals to work together, share and transfer
knowledge, and stay engaged and productive in the workplace.”22

Thus, employee benefits should be flexible and customizable enough to enable you
to create benefit packages that conform to generational needs and preferences. For
example, short-term bonus programs are more likely to appeal to younger workers
while older workers often prefer incentive compensation that vest over a longer
period of time.23

Mid-career Professionals/Leveraged Contributor
Here it is important to understand, monitor, and manage your own biases and filters
when listening to others who may hold a different worldview. What can seem wrong,
inappropriate, or just “off” can be, in light of understanding different perspectives
and motivations, viewed as viable and reasonable alternatives to operating and
accomplishing goals.

Let us take the example of what it takes to retain employees from communal
cultures, such as Blacks or Latinos. Sometimes their needs and preferences may
vary from what had been the majority culture. You may have noticed that talented professionals of color are often the recipients of recognition and numerous awards granted by their communities. This recognition is accompanied by an array of honorifics, such as Outstanding African American Professional of the Year, Latin Pride, Community Role Model of the Year, and so on. These awards are given out at elegant banquets and trumpeted through press releases. And you may see the plaques and trophies proudly displayed in offices or cubicles.

But what has often been observed is that the companies these professionals work for often are oblivious or tend to inadvertently minimize the meaning of these awards, perhaps due to a more understated approach to recognition. Not surprisingly then, these employees can, in a moment intended to be uplifting and affirming, feel “dissed” by their own organizations.

Understanding this dynamic and finding ways to make the occasion move D&I forward would be a way of exerting influence. So let us explore what may be taking place in the reactions different players are having to these external recognitions.

Publicly recognizing people of color for their achievement is more than just an affirming statement for an individual, but often represents an act that bestows dignity on an entire group. Such recognition confronts centuries-old messages that people of color do not matter or that they cannot succeed. So when third-party recognition is overlooked by the companies these employees work for, it undermines the very thing it was supposed to accomplish. Conversely, when company colleagues and leaders show up to support their employees of color, it sends an affirming message that is magnified exponentially, because recognition can be a powerful motivator.

To be influential in this example, it is not sufficient for mid-career professionals to simply understand different cultural perspectives. Now you must apply this knowledge to navigate through influence to a more constructive place. If the achievement is significant enough, you can help your organization appreciate the value of leveraging the company’s communication or public relations function to make the community aware of these awards and garner influence both within and outside the company. You can invite key colleagues and leaders to the honoring ceremony or encourage a public shout out on the part of the leaders.

Another example: How often do you or your company leaders attend heritage month events or other occasions sponsored by your employee resource groups? Employees in these affinity groups never fail to notice when the CEO, executive leaders, and even middle managers attend these events. Nor does their absence go unnoticed. Leaders may try to minimize the impact of their presence since all they did was show up.

But you can help influence attendance at such events by communicating to company leaders the very positive impact it can have if employees see their leaders there.

**Senior Level Executives/Leader**

Finding the motivational element for your peers and subordinates is part of your responsibility. This may require asking questions to clarify deep-rooted assumptions, while leveraging these motivations to make the case for diversity and inclusion strategies. Bowers explains how she has become such an influential leader, not only at CHRISTUS Health, but also in the entire diversity field: “You have to know how to reach your leaders. Some, like Ernie Sadau (CEO and president of CHRISTUS Health), I reach out to his compassionate side to get things done. For others, I may have to appeal to another side. I like sizing my leaders up and seeing what makes them tick. What gets them up in the morning? I’ve asked that question. ‘What gets you up in the morning and keeps you driving as a leader?’ In healthcare, they typically talk about the patients. Some leaders talk about their people. Then I step back and think about how I can support their concerns. So when we’re at a meeting, for instance, I’ll ask accordingly, how their patients or associates are doing. A simple question like that lets that specific leader know that we have a connection and that I also care about what he or she cares about.”

When Bowers worked with Steven Wright on supplier diversity, for example, she recognized his key motivators. “Steve thrives on being a leader and being the first. I have leveraged that part of him. It is not that he wants recognition because that’s a totally different thing. Steve wants to be the first and he wants to have something that others can use and that has driven him to support me extremely well,” she said. Bowers has used her understanding of Steven Wright — his motivations and his goals — to gain an ally and they leverage their joint influence on CHRISTUS’ diversity initiatives.

**Persuade Others to Particular Action through Insightful Communications**

**Early-career professionals/Individual Contributors**

Stories and anecdotes are powerful. They bring to life the often-dry statistics and business case metrics that support diversity and inclusion strategies, by adding color and spice to the message. Your company’s diversity and inclusion story is important. Here is where the early career professional can help persuade others to action. You can ensure that the documents and stories about your company’s diversity journey are available — both the stumbles and successes — because we learn a great deal from our challenges, while our successes help support continued efforts.
These documents need to concisely and directly communicate the D&I messages. Yet merely serving as a repository for D&I anecdotes and data is insufficient. You must also have an understanding of communications channels (internally and externally) and cycles to ensure that these are factored into various project plans. This may mean that collaborating with your organization’s communications function to make sure that D&I stories are consistently included in your company’s internal communications efforts. It can also mean that you become the “go to” person who can identify internal experts who can talk about your company’s efforts on a variety of D&I issues when reporters call. Consider how much influence you’ll garner with your communication colleagues when you have already uncovered how your global enterprise will handle, for instance, Russia’s assault on the rights of LGBT people as happened in 2013, as reported in the media.

Mid-career Professionals/Leveraged Contributors
Mid-career professionals have the responsibility of making sure that the D&I story is captured and represented in all forms of internal communications. If we neglect to tell our stories, who will? Who cares as much about getting out the D&I message than HR and diversity professionals?

When Jim Norman, former vice president of diversity and community involvement for Kraft Foods, introduced the company’s “Efficacy” initiative nine years ago, communications was an essential element of the effort. Efficacy, which is a course originally designed by J. Howard, was constructed to address the specific challenge of high turnover among women and employees of color who were high-level professionals. The challenge was particularly critical because these employees were leaving Kraft after five to seven years, just when they had reached the associate director level or higher and had developed mission critical skills. This talent exodus effectively depleted the talent pipeline of diverse and experienced individuals.

Even with a compelling business rationale for the Efficacy program, the effort faced numerous challenges because this was the first time an initiative was targeted specifically to women and people of color. Communicating the justification, the benefits, the processes, and procedures was crucial to its success. Norman held special sessions for the managers of participants before the initial class started. He made sure those sessions covered the goals and processes.

“We identified what the benefits were going to be for the managers,” he explained. Participants were provided with suggestions on how to communicate with their managers once they returned to their normal work routines. And Norman held 90-minute “lunch and learn” sessions for the entire organization, so “anybody who wanted to come could attend so the whole organization would know what’s going on.”

After the initial pilot, Norman shared the feedback of participants and their managers with other company leaders. This communication effort paid off; because once the initial rounds were completed, Norman said, “Then we had other leaders like in the manufacturing area, say ‘I’m in, give me a course.’”

Senior Level Executives/Leader
Communicating a company’s diversity story must be a well-honed skill in any senior leader’s toolbox. Through prepared and extemporaneous remarks, senior leaders must be able to use their personal connection to their company’s D&I strategy and speak before a variety of audiences—from entry-level employees and executives to external partners, in compelling and business-grounded ways. You must be able to sort through the data and anecdotes and identify the threats facing your organization if it does not actively promote diversity and inclusion, as well as the opportunities it will gain if it does.

At CHRISTUS Health, Bowers’ influence was key in supporting Steven Wright’s presentations about the organization’s equity of healthcare efforts to diverse audiences to address healthcare disparities. Earlier in 2013, Wright spoke at the local Rotary Club about the equity of care strategy. Following that address to the business community, according to Bowers, Wright was inundated with other requests. Through her influence and support, the two reached out to the local NAACP chapter, a local ministerial alliance, and the local Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. The communications effort made sure that CHRISTUS connected with a variety of organizations in the community and, Bowers said, “To share the equity of care strategy: the what, the why, and the how.”

Knowing your company’s diversity stories, capturing them, and then leveraging those anecdotes represent powerful actions in support of D&I. Diversity and HR practitioners must leverage their influence and the full communication spectrum to deliver winning D&I arguments to a variety of audiences in order to move others to action.

Persuade Others to Particular Action through Professional Expertise

Early-Career Professionals/Individual Contributors
Your professional expertise in D&I will grow and evolve over time. But this expertise requires that you develop a reputation for competence, accountability, integrity, and trust. Tack on a “can do” attitude that sees obstacles as stepping stones, and you are on your way to obtaining influence in your organization. Your credibility and capability to influence within your organization, at this level, will depend on your...
reputation as someone who manages projects well, is reliable, and who can get the job done.

To use a lighthearted example, in the 2012 movie, *The Avengers* (an obvious parable about the benefits of diversity), the four superheroes bring different strengths in their battle against the villain Loki and an invading army of aliens. While many may focus on the heroics of the major characters Iron Man, Captain America, the Hulk, and Thor, the characters of Hawkeye and Black Widow provide an interesting counterpoint. These two did not get their abilities through some fortuitous laboratory accident, chemical enhancement, or a suit with super powers. They honed their natural talents through training and some government assistance. Their inclusion in the group is essentially a testament to their influence in subtle, not showy, approaches to challenges.²⁹

As a member of your D&I team, one who is growing in expertise and professionalism, you, too, can gain influence and credibility by demonstrating a solid understanding of D&I and being willing to share that knowledge.

**Mid-career professionals/Leveraged Contributors**

Your influence capability is complemented by your ability to leverage a wide network of thought leaders, experts (internally and externally), and colleagues to establish your company’s credibility with external partners. Your reputation as a knowledgeable D&I resource broadens your circle of influence as you help company leaders navigate the issues surrounding operating the business and supporting diversity and inclusion.

**Senior Level Executives/Leaders**

D&I and HR leaders are expected to possess a particular level of expertise in the field. To attain even greater influence requires a macro understanding of the business, global insights on the economy, and how those factors affect your company’s D&I strategy, domestically and internationally. However, broadening your influence requires that you become a thought leader in the field, one that contributes to shaping the D&I discipline and practice. This is accomplished by speaking and writing about diversity issues, but also by understanding how to integrate D&I into organizational processes, systems, and procedures that contribute to the success of the business.

Deb Dagit is just such a person. Not only is she a highly sought after speaker on diversity, including the issues surrounding people with disabilities, Dagit thoroughly understands the issues about integrating diversity throughout an organization. In an interview for this book, she explained, “It used to be that you had to create a business case for your company and sometimes just for your industry. Now it has to be differentiated by function, R&D, manufacturing, the commercial side of the business even functions like IT and legal, and by geography or each of the counties where you’re doing business.”

Dagit provided an example of how the different processes and functions connect with consumers in the filling of prescriptions. It is well known that physician prescribed medications are often not filled or refilled at pharmacies, and this non-compliance is significantly higher for patients from diverse groups than for white patients. In explaining the “below-the-water-line” diversity implications of this information, Dagit said, “That is a huge market opportunity for people who make products that require a prescription. They have to unpack and understand why this happens and recognize that 70-90 percent of health care decisions are made by women. And it is closer to 90 percent if we’re talking about women of color or women from multi-cultural backgrounds.”³⁰

Once you have this type of information at hand, Dagit believes that it helps make the case for the need for more diversity in clinical trials. But it goes further. “Why does manufacturing have to care about the package inserts, or the product labeling, or how easy it is to get the product open, or how a blind person would access their product? What role can IT play?” she asked. In answering her own questions, Dagit posited, “Well maybe they need to make the apps and tools that address how consumers link to the products and services. They need to be accessible in terms of language, culture, and ability. There is a strong business case across the board.”³¹

Dagit’s professional expertise and personal experience have served as a robust foundation for her efforts to influence others to actions that have implications for the health care of millions of people.

**Derailers to Influence Capability**

At the heart of the influence capability rests the tenets of change management. It is not easy changing your organization and yourself, especially as it relates to D&I. The derailers to your effort to become more influential are also at the heart of change management. When you resist learning about new cultures, new perspectives, and even reject learning from more experienced colleagues, you derail efforts to develop or sharpen your influence.

A tendency to be aloof and to resist building relationships can derail any efforts toward influence. When you are cynical about the ability of others to change their behaviors or how they reach a goal using an unfamiliar methodology, you weaken
your future ability to influence them. When you run roughshod over others’ ideas and agendas, your ability to influence them is left in the dust. And when you fail to engage others in this change process in terms of how it affects them and the benefits and threats, your ability to influence another goal, another direction, or another strategy is left wanting.

Let us return to Bob Nardelli’s story in Derailed. Nardelli’s lack of influence was certainly one of the factors of his downfall. More than a general lack of influence, however, are the specifics surrounding his leadership deficit. The real lesson is how influence and profitability are mutually inclusive; one without the other is not enough. According to Derailed: “As the earnings went up under the Nardelli equation—they had nearly doubled by the time of his departure—the stock went down (at a time when Lowe’s soared 200 percent) and the human spirit went out.”

Nardelli’s doubling of earnings could not override his lack of influence within the company. The reverse probably also would have been true – robust influence capability will not override poor performance, but it might buy more time. It takes a merger of both performance and influence for Next Generation diversity leaders to be effective.

**Conclusion**

The influence competency is more than just moving others to behave in ways that support diversity and inclusion. It is about moving others to care about D&I to the point that they are willing to put their own skin in the game. It is about leveraging their motivators – the personal interests, passions, intellectual appeal, vulnerabilities, or business impacts – to help your colleagues learn about and perform the actions that make D&I an integral part of your organization.

You will have to tap multiple tools and communication strategies, from presentations, writing and social media, to one-on-one conversations, peer pressure, and regulations in order to exert your influence. HR and diversity professionals will have to tap into their people skills to develop or sharpen the ability to persuade and influence.

Influence guru Dale Carnegie put it this way, “Ultimately, gaining influence is about setting yourself apart, stepping to a higher plane in the mind and heart of another.”

As you climb up this higher plane, you will start to notice that your circle of influence begins to widen and more people will express their interest in D&I. It will be a subtle change; a seemingly irrelevant question about something diversity related, or a statement of support for a D&I initiative. But, it will be a change that indicates your actions are taking hold.

Another nuanced change to notice: You may find yourself reaching out to new or unfamiliar people for their insights on an issue or incident. You will start to see yourself changing as you help others to change. Perhaps you start to notice that you think about, read about, or seek out information that on the surface may have little to do with your business or D&I. On reflection, though, you may see connections that you might have missed earlier.

There is the story of author Ralph Waldo Emerson and his son. They were trying to get a calf to return to the barn, but the calf had other ideas, which did not include going back to the barn. They tried pulling the calf, which only dug in its hooves and refused to move. The two tried pushing the calf, to no avail. This went on for several minutes as the Emersons worked up quite a sweat, but no progress.

A house worker watching their futile efforts decided to offer her assistance. She calmly walked up to the animal, stuck her finger in her mouth and then stuck it in the calf’s mouth and led it willingly to the stall where milk was waiting. Without authority or might, with little standing or position, but with a clear understanding of what motivates young cows, the house worker was able to remind the calf what was waiting in the barn and influenced the animal to do what the Emersons wanted.

When you have developed or honed your ability to influence others, you will have the ability to persuade others to pursue a particular action – despite natural or hidden/inherent resistance, or even apathy. And you will also have the ability to understand what motivates others and design an approach to leverage those motivators.

And that is how you get transformational change to happen.
**Conversation Starters**

How can members of the D&I function at your company better leverage their influence within the organization?

What actions by others could be advanced by an increased level of influence by D&I team members?

Who are the D&I thought leaders in your organization? Why are they considered to be thought leaders?

Where do your organization’s D&I leaders go for information or insights about business challenges?

How would you expand that circle of influence to include others who are not normally consulted?

**Endnotes**


17 Telephone interview with Deb Dagat, 2008

18 Telephone interview with Velois Bowers, CHRISTUS Health, May 2013


20 Telephone interview with Linal Harris, senior director and chief diversity strategist, U.S. Cellular, held on March 15, 2013.

21 Telephone interview with Velois Bowers, CHRISTUS Health, May 2013


24 Telephone interview with Velois Bowers, CHRISTUS Health, May 2013

25 Telephone interview with Velois Bowers, CHRISTUS Health, May 2013

26 Telephone interview with Jim Norman, April 2013
27 Telephone interview with Jim Norman, April 2013
28 Telephone interview with Velois Bowers, CHRISTUS Health, May 2013
30 Telephone interview with Deb Dagit, May 2013
31 Telephone interview with Deb Dagit, May 2013