



The State of Leadership Influence

Seven strategies for expanding your influence in uncertain times

By David A. O'Brien, WorkChoice Solutions

Back in the fall of 2018, I first started thinking about what leadership would look like in 2020. Although the new decade of leadership was months away, I had a strong sense that it would bring many new challenges for leaders everywhere. My curiosity stemmed from my interest in providing leaders with a 2019 roadmap that would help them to be well prepared for whatever leadership challenges 2020 might bring.

To be sure, I could not have imagined the full magnitude of leadership challenges we face today, but I was certain that leaders would be ill prepared for the new decade of leadership if they did not re-examine and even challenge some of their popular notions about leadership.

The result of my curiosity took shape in the form of my January 2019 feature article, [The State of Leadership 2020](#). In it, I presented a roadmap for leaders that, if followed, would position them to meet the new decade of leadership with clarity and purpose.

While all of the strategies outlined in the original article still apply today, one in particular is more relevant today than in late 2018 when I wrote the article. Specifically, the need and opportunity to reflect, reframe and recalibrate our own leadership

compass to align our capacity with the new demands of leadership.

Never before has leadership clarity and influence been so critical to so many. In these rapidly changing times, they are essential factors in mobilizing and motivating teams everywhere. Despite the progress many leaders have made since the onset of the pandemic, most leaders would agree that this period of great uncertainty demands true leadership at its highest level. It also requires us to create a “new normal” context that inspires hope among those we lead. In order for leaders to fully align their capacity with the evolving tides of leadership, they must first examine their own leadership formula and its impact on team morale.

How we view uncertainty determines how we respond to it and ultimately, whether we leverage it to harness our team’s overall capacity to be engaged and successful, or not. There are a multitude of ways we can view uncertainty but at the core of our perception is either *fear* or *opportunity*. Choosing to see the opportunity arises from leadership clarity, a key driver of leadership influence. When we make a deliberate effort to uncover the opportunity, our leadership influence expands through a heightened sense of purpose.

Continued

While writing my first book, *The Navigator's Handbook, 101 Leadership Lessons for Work & Life*, I explored leadership influence at some length. In an effort to create simplicity, I defined leadership influence as having two distinct forms. Namely, productive influence and destructive Influence. In sum, productive influence encompasses such leadership characteristics as integrity, respect, transparency, authenticity, humility, and self-regulation. By contrast, destructive influence encompasses such leadership characteristics as hubris, micro-management, pessimism, control, closed mindedness, and disrespect. Not surprisingly, the impact that each dimension has on employee morale and engagement is predictable.

Twelve years and countless leadership conversations later, I've come to believe that leadership influence encompasses more than the original two forms. While productive and destructive influences are still very real and certainly applicable, the bigger question is, what drives productive influence?

On a foundational level, productive influence encompasses these five dimensions:

- **Values** – Focusing on what is enormously important in your life and work
- **Intentions** – Focusing on your aim, plan, and purpose
- **Attitude** – Focusing on your beliefs and opinions
- **Behavior** – Focusing on how you show up and how you act
- **Results** – Focusing on the outcome of your efforts

When the five dimensions are aligned, the benefits are numerous. Beyond the heightened clarity and purpose that results for the leader, their team members are more apt to be engaged and satisfied. At an even deeper level, the productive influence fosters a sense of community where everyone feels valued and respected.

At times like these, the quality of our leadership will be determined not only by how we use our influence but perhaps more importantly, our level of clarity about the full scope and impact of our influence.

Although no one can accurately predict how the pandemic will play out later this year or next, conventional wisdom tells us that continued uncertainty on a scale few have witnessed will likely be the norm. Our ability to navigate these uncharted waters may very well be the impetus that defines the new normal for many years to come.

Seven Strategies for Expanding Your Influence in Uncertain Times:

1. Consider these three questions: *Who am I as a leader, what do I want to be known for as a leader?* and, *what would it take to make 2020 my best leadership year ever?* Also identify one development opportunity related to your pursuit of leadership excellence and map out a series of small, doable steps that you will take between now and year-end.
2. Take the time to consider what it is you stand for as a leader and how that translates in terms of your core values. Identify your top 5 work and life values and consider how you live and demonstrate these in every role you play. Initiate a conversation with your peer group, trusted mentor or coach about the characteristics that embody leadership integrity and explore how those characteristics are linked to your top 5 values.
3. Invest the time to consider your leadership motivations and intentions and how they translate into what you expect from your team as well as what you expect of yourself as a leader.
4. Take the time to consider how your team and other stakeholders would describe your attitude. Also consider what impact your attitude has on engaging and motivating your team. Map out a series of small steps you can take between now and year-end to become more mindful about your attitude and the impact it has on helping your team to be successful.

How we view uncertainty determines how we respond to it and ultimately, whether we leverage it to harness our team's overall capacity to be engaged and successful, or not.

Continued

5. Consider these three questions: *How do I achieve congruence between my values and my behavior? What value does congruence create for me and my team? And finally, am I consciously role-modeling the behaviors I wish to see from others?*
 6. Make the time to consider how you use your influence and ultimately, what impact it has on your team, your success, and your reputation.
 7. Invest three minutes to complete the free [Leadership Influence Survey](#) on the WorkChoice Solutions website.
-

About David A. O'Brien

David is President of WorkChoice Solutions, a trusted provider of leadership and team effectiveness training, coaching, and consulting services founded in 2000. He works with a wide range of corporate, nonprofit, and public sector clients to help bring about sustainable improvements in organizational effectiveness. His first book, *The Navigator's Handbook, 101 Leadership Lessons for Work & Life* is available on-line and in bookstores nationwide. His second book, *The Navigator's Compass 101 Steps Toward Leadership Excellence* was released in 2016 and is also available wherever books are sold. Additionally, his articles have appeared in a wide range of local, national, and international publications. To learn more about the scope of David's work in helping leaders and teams to be more effective or to arrange for David to speak at your next conference or other special event, please visit [WorkChoice Solutions](#) on line, or call him directly at 860.242.1070.

