

Praise for *Influence at Work*

“Readable, invaluable and based on the evidence. You can’t ask for a better guide to influence than Steve Martin.”

– Tim Harford, presenter of BBC Radio 4’s *More or Less* and host of the *Cautionary Tales* podcast

“With his characteristic rigour and clarity, Steve Martin presents a practical and powerful framework for persuasion. This book is an essential read for leaders, managers and anyone who wants to increase their impact at work.”

– Daniel H. Pink, *New York Times* no. 1 bestselling author of *To Sell Is Human* and *The Power of Regret*

“Outstanding. The best account I have seen of how to acquire and employ the highly desirable prize of influence. Engagingly written, evidence-based and ethically sound. This book is superb.”

– Robert B. Cialdini, bestselling author of *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*

“A modern-day manifesto for an age-old and crucial skill. Practical, immediately usable tools to boost your influence without sacrificing your integrity.”

– James Timpson, CEO of Timpson’s and *Sunday Times* columnist

“A clever, entertaining jaunt through the unspoken rules which govern influence at work.”

– Camilla Cavendish, *Financial Times*

“Eminently practical and evidence-based, this terrific guide will help you wield more influence at work and beyond.”

– Katy L. Milkman, professor at the Wharton School and bestselling author of *How to Change*

“An absorbing, credible and applicable guide for anyone interested in successfully persuading others. Which is all of us.”

– Senator John Barrasso MD, United States Congress

“Steve Martin reveals the underlying formula of that most elusive of skills, influence. An extremely practical guide full of precise, actionable steps that anyone can take to become more influential at work.”

– Vanessa Bohns, Professor of Organizational Behavior, Cornell University, and author of *You Have More Influence Than You Think*

“A comprehensive map for navigating the modern workplace. Clear and evidenced, the book should be required reading for any practising leader.”

– Alex Aiken, Executive Director, UK Government Communications

“I love this book. It provokes curiosity every time I pick it up. Steve has a wonderful way of helping you understand how to influence through clear, principle-based thinking. An outstanding resource that I recommend for any leader.”

– John “Mitch” Mitchell, England Head Coach, Rugby Football Union

“Written with skill and humour, this accessible and practical book shows how all of us can gain more influence at work and in our personal lives too.”

– Stephan Meier, James P. Gorman Professor of Business at Columbia Business School and author of *The Employee Advantage*

“A great read. Practical, to-the-point advice for anyone who needs to boost their influence.”

– Dil Sidhu, Head of Birkbeck Business School, University of London

Influence at Work

Capture attention, connect with others,
convince people to act

Steve J. Martin

The
Economist

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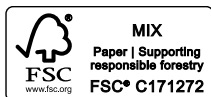
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To Bob.

And to Linds.

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He lives in London.

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Contents

Introduction	1
Part 1: Influence: what it is and why it's important	7
Overview	9
1 Your influence, at work	11
2 The history of influence	21
3 Influence: meanings, myths and motivations	31
Part 2: The Influence Equation	55
Overview	57
4 Influencing with evidence	61
5 Influencing with economics	87
6 Influencing with emotion	111
Part 3: Influence at work: principles, practices and ethics	133
Overview	135
7 The principles of influence	139
8 The practice of influence	177
9 Influencing (ethically) at work	194
Epilogue	209
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	215
<i>Notes</i>	219
<i>Index</i>	233

Introduction

“What am I doing wrong?” asked Sam, looking up at her friends, her expression a mix of frustration and fatigue.

Everything had been going so well. Despite being in her job for almost three years, her delight at being offered a dream role with a well-positioned company in the city had never faded. It had been a busy time. And a successful one. Pushing any insecurities she felt to the back of her mind, Sam had committed to grasping every opportunity that came her way. As a result, she had captured the attention of several managers in the firm who seemed happy to champion her enthusiasm, work ethic and attention to detail. Within a year she landed a promotion. Shortly after her second anniversary she stepped up again. This time as a manager herself, a role she was assured would offer more responsibility and influence. But as she reflected in the company of friends, she realised that only the first of these turned out to be true.

More responsibility? Certainly. Sam had never been busier. But influence? Not so much.

A case in point was a meeting that had taken place earlier in the week. As part of her responsibilities, Sam attended the quarterly resources meeting. The gathering required a dozen or so junior managers to deliver updates on people and projects to the company's directors and, in doing so, make their pitch for the resources needed for the next three months. Sam had been told how important it was to prepare for these meetings,

which would routinely descend into a bunfight. The latest meeting was no exception. Despite her meticulously prepared spreadsheets and thoughtful contingency plans, she found herself losing out again to others whose appeals for extra resources were certainly no better than her own. Some were considerably worse.

“Tell me about it,” grumbled Jake, who was sitting at the table listening. “I’ve been at my place for almost five years. Nothing ever changes. We’re told that to get anything signed off we need to focus on the two essentials: facts and finances. So that’s what I do. Yet I can count on the fingers of one hand the number of times that people listen. You’d think the bosses of a data analytics company might actually use data to inform their decisions. But no. We’re told what we need to do to influence the decision-making, but the reality is very different.”

*

Sam and Jake’s situations are very common. Every day we face the challenge of influencing and persuading others at work. Sometimes the people we need to persuade are higher up the organisational food chain: bosses, managers and senior decision-makers. At other times they are our peers. Sometimes they are team members who report to us. Often, they’re not colleagues at all but customers, clients, constituents or patients.

Regardless of who they are, the odds of us accomplishing our goals and objectives will frequently be determined by our ability to influence and persuade them. But skills like influence and persuasion are not straightforward. We might like to believe that appeals and requests based on the best evidence and backed up by the right economic arguments win the day, but the reality is often different. In today’s competitive,

fast-moving and attention-scarce world, having a good case to make is simply not enough. Because, as Sam, Jake and millions of others like them are realising, having a good case to make is not the same as making your case well.

To be successful at work you have to be influential at work, which requires an understanding of how the rules of influence work. Not just those dictated by logic, finance and company policy but also the unspoken rules. The rules people rarely talk about, but that frequently have an outsized impact on who and what is listened to and done; and who and what is ignored. Understanding and navigating these rules of influence is crucial to your persuasive success.

I'm often asked whether some people are simply born with these skills. Are they members of a lucky group who have the instinctive ability to persuade others? Although it may be true that some people are naturally blessed with more than their fair share of persuasive powers, that certainly doesn't mean that the rest of us will never be able to compete, for an important reason. Influence is a skill that can be learned and mastered. No one need resign themselves to looking on enviously as others achieve their goals and objectives while their own languish. Anyone can become a more successful and accomplished influencer and this straight-talking, practical book will show you how.

This is a book about how to make your case well.

Although this book focuses primarily on improving your ability to influence people at work, the lessons and insights are equally applicable in your personal life. Crucially, it will help you to become an effective persuader without compromising your ethics, your values, or feeling as if you're being manipulative.

*

This book is divided into three parts, each comprising three chapters. In Chapter 1 you will get the chance to assess how influential you are currently. The short test will provide you with feedback on the approaches you most commonly rely on when attempting to persuade others at work. You don't have to complete the test to read the rest of the book and you can skip straight to the beginning of Chapter 2 if you prefer. But I recommend you complete the test because it will provide a potentially helpful and personalised benchmark to track your progress as you develop your skills and knowledge.

Chapter 2 explores the history of influence and defines what it actually is. This is important because the term "influence" is frequently used interchangeably (and even confused) with other concepts like persuasion, power, compliance, negotiation, campaigning and selling. Although there are parallels and similarities, influence is arguably more important because it lies at the heart of any meaningful change.

Chapter 3 busts some of the common myths and misperceptions about the influence process. Much of the received wisdom about how to influence others is often more fiction than fact. This book provides you with the facts. In addition to exploring the fundamental human motivations at the heart of why people do what they do, Chapter 3 also introduces you to the Influence Equation. Consider it a formula of sorts, which anyone can use to become a more successful influencer. The Influence Equation shows how anyone can create a successful influence strategy based on the optimal combination of evidence, economics and emotions; with the amount of each depending on the context of the situation you face. Put another way, successful influence is about building and communicating your case based on the right mix of facts, finance and feelings.

Part 2 dives deeper into the three components of the Influence Equation, devoting a chapter to each. Chapter 4 explores how successful influence is frequently achieved not necessarily by the volume and quality of evidence presented but by the way certain evidence is presented. I will show how the person who delivers a message is often more important than its truth and how stories often supplant statistics in the minds of those we want to persuade.

Chapter 5 focuses on how to influence people using economic and financial arguments. I will show that people's reactions to incentives are often shaped by psychological mechanisms rather than rational computation. Don't get me wrong; I am not dismissive of incentives. They can be a wonderful tool for influence – universally loved, widely understood and easy to implement. But that doesn't make them universally successful. I will outline some of the upsides and downsides of using economic incentives to persuade others and suggest how best to deploy them.

Chapter 6 explores the role that emotions play in successful influence strategies. Many people claim that all decisions are triggered by some emotional element or component. It is a perspective I tend to agree with. The chapter describes specific emotions that can have a particularly powerful and persuasive effect on people, along with suggestions on how to use them in effective and ethical ways.

Part 3 is all about the principles, the practice and the ethics of influence. Chapter 7 reviews seven universal principles of influence founded on the work of the eminent social psychologist Robert Cialdini, with whom I am lucky to have trained and worked for more than two decades. In Chapter 8 I turn to the practice of influence by reviewing some of the common challenges that people face at work. Although most of

us believe our influence challenges are unique, in reality many of the challenges we face when persuading others are similar. Chapter 8 offers practical, actionable approaches and strategies for a range of common influence scenarios with suggestions about how they can be tailored to your own context and circumstances. Chapter 9 wraps up by exploring an important aspect of modern-day influence: its ethics. Just because we can influence others doesn't mean we always should. The book ends with a checklist that you might find helpful to create influence strategies that are effective yet do not compromise your values or integrity.

In today's workplace of flatter structures, virtual working and cross-cultural collaboration, where coercion is reviled, playing the "I'm the boss" card can cost you dearly and sucking up "sucks", there is one skill more than any other that is critical to your success: the ability to navigate the rules of successful influence at work.

In the following pages I will show you these rules and also how to employ them effectively and ethically to command attention, connect with others, win over the sceptics, sway the undecided, unify the polarised and motivate people to act.

PART 1

Influence: what it is and
why it's important

Overview

LinkedIn – a social media platform owned by Microsoft and primarily used by professionals to network, share ideas and find jobs – frequently conducts surveys to keep abreast of workplace trends, the interests of employers and the changing views of workers. Given that millions use the platform to share unbridled views of their bosses' shortcomings, colourful accounts of co-workers' oddities and updates on the “state of work”, it can be considered a useful barometer of the current attitudes and perspectives in offices and factories around the world.

One survey asks a straightforward question: “What are the most important and desirable skills that employees should possess?” Dynamic markets require a dizzying range of changing skills and smarts, so answers vary over time. Context matters too. Certain industries and jobs require skills that others have no use for. The ability to ensure that a balance sheet balances is a useful skill for financiers but not so much for firefighters. Yet one skill appears ubiquitous to employers' wish lists, regardless of the job or where in the world it is located.

Influence.

Surveys like these illustrate the vital role that influence plays in the workplace and in life more generally. They show why the demand for people who possess the skills and abilities to convince and motivate others has been a near constant since the dawn of humankind. Influence is rather like a secret sauce.

Without influence it's hard to make progress and effect change. Influence can transform an otherwise routine idea or easily ignored message into a compelling vision that opens minds and doors, turns doubters into supporters and intentions into actions.

But influence is also frequently misunderstood. Over the next three chapters I will explore what influence is and, importantly, what it isn't. I will review some of the received wisdoms about how to connect with, convince and change the actions and minds of others and, in doing so, question how reliable they really are. I will highlight some of the common myths and misperceptions about how the influence process works. And I will provide an approach, in the form of the Influence Equation, that any inspiring influencer can use to create powerful and persuasive influence strategies.

To begin with, though, I want to give you the chance to assess your current and preferred approach to persuading others.

1

Your influence, at work

This short test will help you assess your current approach to influencing others and demonstrate where and how you could improve your skills. Although primarily designed for workplace situations, the insights could be useful when influencing people in your personal life too. It should take no more than 15 minutes to complete and is entirely optional. If you would prefer to get straight into the book, skip directly to Chapter 2.

If you would like to take the test online you can follow the QR code below or visit influenceatwork.co.uk/the_economist. And if you are a manager or leader of people, you are free to share the QR code with your teams so they can take the test too (it's completely free).



How the test works

In this test you will be presented with 10 influence challenges, each with three possible approaches to dealing with the situation. Consider each challenge in turn and distribute a total of 10 points across the three suggested approaches in a way that best represents how you would act if you were facing this situation in real life.


For example, if you feel that one of the responses is completely aligned with how you would act, assign all ten points to that scenario and zero points to the remaining two responses. However, if you are wavering about how you would react, distribute the ten points across the responses in a way that best reflects your point of view. For example, you might assign six points to the approach you are leaning most towards, three points to your second-choice answer and one point to the approach you are least convinced about. You can distribute the ten points across all three responses, or to just one or two, but it is important that the points you distribute for each scenario always add up to ten.

There are no right or wrong answers.

The 10 influence challenges

1. At the last minute your manager has asked you to prepare a presentation for an important meeting she is attending tomorrow. As you are working on another project that also needs finishing today, you need to ask one of your colleagues for help. You have a reasonably good working relationship with this colleague but wouldn't consider them a friend. What would your approach be?

Use the boxes alongside the three suggested approaches to distribute a total of 10 points in a way that best represents how you would act.

a. Ask your colleague to prepare the whole presentation. If they say no, ask them if they could at least contribute in some way, perhaps by reviewing some of the data you have collected.	
b. Before asking for their help, explain what has happened and promise that if the situation was ever reversed, you would obviously be more than happy to help them.	
c. Offer to take them to the pub for drinks on you in exchange for their help.	

2. You have been tasked with crafting an email designed to persuade your colleagues to attend a training course. Attendance at previous training events have been notoriously low. What approach would you take to increase attendance?

a. Highlight the fact that there are limited places on the course and the next course may not be for several months.	
b. List three clear reasons why people should attend at the top of your email invite.	
c. Tell a compelling story about how a lesson you gained from the previous company training event has had a huge impact on you.	

3. A new piece of software has been made available that will increase the efficiency and quality of your team's output. But resources are tight and your department's budgets have been pared back considerably. How would you persuade your boss to prioritise your need for the new software over the appeals of your colleagues who are also pitching for funds?

a. Demonstrate the future savings that the company will lose out on if you do not get the software.	
b. Produce a set of slides summarising your proposal, supported by financial facts, figures and a benefit analysis.	
c. Enthusiastically paint a picture of how your boss will benefit, by describing how everyone using the new software will be so much more efficient in the future.	

4. Your company has been slow to adopt some of the environmental practices being promoted in the office such as recycling, sharing rides to work, reducing the use of paper, and turning off lights and appliances when not in use. How would you persuade more of your colleagues to embrace sustainable initiatives and act on them every day?

a. Introduce a competition between departments where those with the lowest annual energy consumption are rewarded with an extra day's holiday.	
b. Display provocative pictures around the office on the impact of climate change (e.g. sad-looking polar bears on melting ice caps), with a request that people "conserve energy for the sake of the environment".	
c. Clearly communicate the obvious advantages of the energy-saving measures being advocated, like saving the company money.	

5. Your department has identified a way to make a significant efficiency at work and you are keen to trial the idea. But employees are becoming fatigued with the sheer volume of initiatives and are often resistant to new ideas. What approach would you take to open their minds?

a.	Present everyone with two options: one requiring much more effort and harder to implement, and a second, more realistic idea. The hope is that most people accept the easier, more attractive second option.	
b.	Ask teams to calculate how much time they are currently wasting by not embracing this new approach. Then ask them what they would do with the additional time created by the initiative you are proposing.	
c.	Be up front and honest. Admit there have been a lot of previous initiatives that probably haven't worked but passionately express how if your department keeps doing things the "old way", it will never grow and prosper.	

6. You and your team are leading a project that desperately needs additional resources. But other departments are also competing for limited resources. How will you persuade the decision-makers to prioritise your project when they allocate resources?

a.	Conduct a thorough analysis of the various projects that need extra resources and then ask someone who you know is close to the budget-holder to speak on your behalf.	
b.	Describe the negative impact of your project being under-resourced by comparing your situation with "a football team that has six players for an 11-a-side game" – a match they are sure to lose.	
c.	Demonstrate how your project serves a joint purpose that helps other departments. Make the point that starving your project of resources will result in many other projects being at risk of failure.	

7. You excel in your role and believe you deserve a pay rise. How do you persuade your manager that the value you provide to the company is worth a salary increase?

a. Be empathetic. Acknowledge how annoying it must be for your manager to have people coming to them all the time asking to be paid more. Say that you are struggling and, given your good work record, you believe your request is reasonable and fair.	
b. Be bold. Say you have heard that some of the company's competitors are offering 15% raises to some of their staff, but you'd be very happy with 10%.	
c. Get your timing right. Wait until the beginning of the new budget year, so your request is a much smaller proportion of what's in the overall pot than it is now.	

8. You and your colleagues are seeking to convince bosses that offering remote working on certain days will boost both productivity and work-life balance. How do you persuade them to adopt a more flexible approach?

a. Book a series of face-to-face meetings with various managers to provide a human account of how productivity and staff well-being improves on the days that people work from home.	
b. Prepare a presentation with data showing the relationship between productivity and well-being, pointing out the time and productivity lost through commuting.	
c. You suspect your manager isn't convinced about home working, so enlist the help of one of his peers who not only supports home working but does it herself. Sometimes it's not what's said but who says it that matters.	

9. You have developed a new product, but early feedback suggests some customers are sceptical about its viability. How would you build a proposition that communicates the clear benefits of the product and also gains the buy-in of some of your sceptical but important prospective clients?

a. Develop a programme to educate customers so they can come to an informed, rather than an intuitive, decision about it.	
b. Do a deal with a smaller number of trusted clients who will trial the product and provide feedback, allowing you to adapt and co-create the final release together.	
c. Draw a parallel between your product and a now-well-known and extremely successful product that was also subject to a great deal of scepticism during the early days of its release.	

10. Two members of your team have just had another heated disagreement, which is having a negative effect on the rest of the team. You need to mediate and persuade them to work together amicably. What approach do you take?

a. Assign them both to an important, high-profile project that they must jointly lead and be responsible for delivering successfully. Inform them that a member of the executive team is a sponsor, implicitly suggesting they will look like fools to leadership if they fail to work together.	
b. Get them to look beyond their disagreement and create a sense of connection. Arrange a meeting where, before discussing their differences, they identify a shared commonality before delving into the reasons for their dispute.	
c. Play hard ball. Explicitly lay out the likely outcomes and sanctions they could face, including disciplinary action for them both, if they fail to manage their frustrations with each other.	

Scoring sheet

Once you have completed the test, transfer the points from each scenario to the scoring sheet. Please pay careful attention and note that the order of the responses is not the same in every row. Once you have completed the scoring sheet, add up and complete the total for each column. This will give you an overall score for evidence-based, economic-based and emotional-based influence approaches.

1	a		b		c	
2	b		c		a	
3	b		a		c	
4	c		b		a	
5	a		c		b	
6	a		b		c	
7	b		a		c	
8	c		a		b	
9	a		c		b	
10	c		b		a	
Totals	Evidence score		Emotions score		Economics score	

I scored highest on Evidence: the data aficionado

People who prefer to base their arguments on evidence are typically detail-oriented, ensuring they offer advice and build proposals based on a solid foundation of data and proof. They might spend time carrying out research and will be careful to gather data, facts, statistics and expert opinions when constructing a persuasion strategy. They ensure that their arguments are well structured and logically coherent, drawing on credible information to back up their assertions. They are

more likely to value accuracy and precision when it comes to persuading others. Their desire to persuade people to change might sometimes result in them overwhelming people or becoming impatient when others are slow to connect the dots.

When it comes to influence at work, these are the people most likely to say: “It’s all about the facts!”

I scored highest on Emotions: the empathetic orator

People who place emotional appeals at the heart of their arguments strive to persuade people by prioritising feelings over facts. They frequently empathise with their audiences, tailoring messages in a way that resonates on an emotional level and takes account of different perspectives. They create connections with others that foster trust and will often use anecdotes and analogies to make their arguments more relatable and powerful. They can be skilled at defusing tension, helping people to find common ground and promoting constructive dialogue. They are often creative and can think “on the fly”. Some people might accuse them of being idealistic and may even question the practicality of their ideas.

When it comes to influence at work, these are the people most likely to say: “Focus on feelings!”

I scored highest on Economics: the calculating connoisseur

People who favour a pragmatic and rational approach to influencing and persuading others will often incorporate economic reason and incentives into their arguments. They will often evaluate the costs and benefits of various options and then make their appeal based on what people will stand to gain or lose economically. They like using financial incentives to influence others, believing that most people care mostly

about money, costs and resources. Some people might view them rather like “a spreadsheet in human form”.

When it comes to influence at work, these are the people most likely to say: “It’s about the finance!”

*

The test you have just undertaken has not been designed to provide a definitive evaluation of who you are, or of your personality traits. There are much better tests designed specifically to do that and they are readily available should you wish to seek them out. This test should be viewed as a simple snapshot of your preferred style when it comes to influencing and persuading others. Consider it a starting point for learning more about the influence process and as a way to identify how you might hone and improve your skills.

In reality, the effective influencer leverages a combination of approaches appropriate to a specific context or situation, rather than relying on a single approach. The ability to influence and persuade others is not one-size-fits-all. It is much more dynamic and context-dependent, requiring agility, alertness and a willingness to experiment. It is also a skill founded on a set of robust principles that anyone can learn more about and apply. In the same way a skilled chef combines flavours in a dish, or a mixologist blends ingredients in a cocktail, the master of influence is successful by combining the optimal mix of evidence, economics and emotions into their appeals and arguments.

2

The history of influence

The first act

The history of influence is a long one. The desire to capture an audience's attention, convince the undecided and inspire people to change has been a near-constant since the dawn of humankind. Some of the earliest written records about how to influence others are not in the texts of Greek philosophers but in the works of the ancient Egyptians and Chinese. Ptahhotep was a city administrator and vizier (akin to a modern-day minister) during the fifth Egyptian dynasty. He wrote what is widely regarded as the world's oldest textbook. Titled *Maxims* and written in the early 24th century BC, Ptahhotep offered advice and wisdom on the betterment of society by encouraging citizens to establish a "cosmic order" and "social harmony". He wrote about the importance of good table manners, how to conduct oneself appropriately in social circles and how to reason with (or, better still, avoid) argumentative people.¹ At over 4,000 years old, it is probably the world's first recorded text on social influence.

Lao Tzu, a Chinese "Old Master", similarly wrote an ancient text providing insight and wisdom to citizens, which went on to influence the major schools of Chinese philosophy and religion. A mark of the book's impact is that it remains in print today.²