

Business Insights

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HOW TO INFLUENCE WITHOUT AUTHORITY IN THE WORKPLACE



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 Career Development, Leadership, Leadership Principles

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Consider this scenario: You're tasked with leading a project within your organization, but in an unofficial capacity.

Technically, you're not in a position of leadership, but you've been given managerial responsibilities, such as generating a budget, creating a schedule, and managing and coordinating a team. So long as everyone else plays along, you should be fine. But that can be a big ask.

While your co-workers might not be intentionally trying to thwart your success, their priorities are naturally going to align with those who hold authority over them and their jobs—their supervisors. Without a position of authority, your priorities are likely to take a back seat to everything else on your team's plate, often to the detriment of your initiative.

Does this sound familiar? If so, then you understand just how difficult it can be to lead without authority. Luckily, there are steps you can take to [improve your leadership skills](#) and become more adept at influencing those around you, even when you don't have a job title that commands respect.

SOURCES OF AUTHORITY

While a managerial title might be one of the most obvious sources of authority for working professionals, it isn't the only place influence comes from. There are many sources of authority you can leverage to inspire others to follow your lead. Some of the most important of these include:

1. Your Expertise

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If you want or need to influence others in your organization and motivate them to listen to you, one of the surest methods is to develop expertise in your discipline, industry, or both. Doing so allows you to position yourself as an authority and a resource. Using your expertise to back up your recommendations, plans, or projects can lend an air of authority and convince others you really do know what you're talking about.

It can pay to be different, too: The more unique your skill set and knowledge are from others on your team, the more valuable your insights are likely to be.

In short, expertise implies you're so qualified that other people *want* to listen to you, even if they don't have to.

Want to be seen as an expert? The first step is to develop your knowledge and skills to the point that you deeply understand the subject matter so you can speak to it when necessary. But it's not just about what you know; you also have to make sure others know what you know. Earning a certification or attending a course focused on that specific subject can also be helpful in conveying your expertise.

Related: [How to Be an Effective Leader at Any Stage of Your Career](#)

2. Your Relationships

Regardless of job title, an [effective leader](#) is someone who understands that relationships can be a powerful tool for influencing others.

When you have real, meaningful relationships with colleagues, it's possible to build trust and understand their personal and professional motivations—both of which will put you in a better position to inspire them to follow your direction. People will be more inclined to listen to you and help you reach your goals if they view you as a person, not just a co-worker, and if they believe you would do the same for them given the opportunity.

Want to develop stronger relationships with your coworkers? Your best bet is to work on developing your [emotional intelligence](#), a soft skill that underpins all effective management. In general, emotional intelligence refers to your ability to understand and manage your own emotions, as well as recognize the emotions of those around you. Taking the time to truly get to know the people you work with can mean the difference between a potential ally who wants to help you succeed and someone who is indifferent to your success or failure.



3. Your Corporate and Organizational Understanding

Just as expertise within your particular discipline or domain can help you achieve authority as an expert, having a thorough understanding of how your organization operates offers another source of authority to leverage. This authority comes not from your knowledge of the industry at large, but the inner workings of your business.

Most companies, especially larger or more established ones, have particular processes in place to accomplish tasks. If you're the person who knows how to get things done, go through the process correctly, get signoff on key projects, initiatives, or resource allocation, then people will naturally want to hitch their wagon to yours.

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Similarly, if you can tie your project back to an important strategic initiative within your business, it may be easier for you to inspire others to follow your lead, as they'll want to share in the credit of a job well done.

Want to develop your organizational understanding? Doing so is likely to take time, due to the way most organizations function. Take every opportunity you can to learn about your company by sitting in on meetings—whether or not they're related to your department or role—developing relationships with important people from other departments, reading corporate strategy documentation, or finding a mentor. The more you can understand how your business functions, the better.

OTHER TACTICS FOR INFLUENCING WITHOUT AUTHORITY

There are many other tactics and strategies you can use to influence your organization even if you don't hold a position of authority.

For example, someone who works in their organization's accounting or finance department can hold incredible influence over a project during the budgeting and planning phase when resources are being allocated. Similarly, human resources—as gatekeepers during the hiring process—can hold a tremendous amount of influence and sway over a range of projects and departments due to their role.

By understanding your unique position, it's possible to identify the key ways in which you can influence the organization, affect real change, and bring about your desired outcomes.

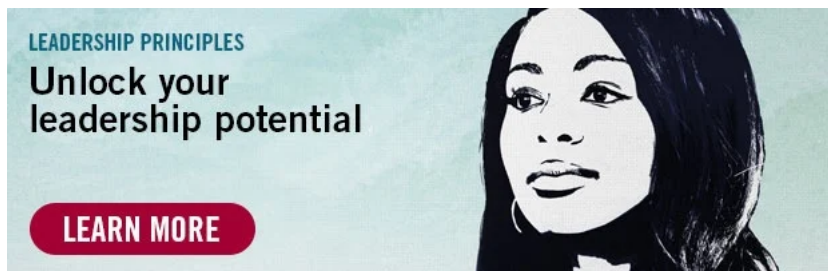
***Related:** [6 Characteristics of an Effective Leader](#)*

WHAT TO DO WHEN NOTHING WORKS

Sometimes, these tactics won't be enough to convince others to follow your lead. While it's always best, if possible, to handle this problem on your own, in some cases it may be wise for you to ask your supervisor to step in and make it clear to everyone else that you've been tasked with leading the project and that they should support you to the best of your ability.

Another alternative, especially if you're regularly tasked with leading projects in an unofficial capacity, is to convince your supervisor to adjust your title. In addition to the [professional boost](#) this can offer your career, the right title will be one that implies to others you have at least some level of authority over them. It doesn't matter if they *want* to follow your lead; they *have to*.

This is called **positional authority**, and it can be very effective.



Not sure how to convince your supervisor that you are deserving of a title change, or that such a change could help you be more effective in your role? [Developing your leadership skills](#) by taking a course or completing a related certification can help you demonstrate that you take your career seriously. At the same time, you'll learn [leadership principles](#) and gain valuable insights and skills that you can put into practice to become a more effective leader.

Do you want to enhance your leadership skills? Download our [free leadership e-book](#) and explore our online course [Leadership Principles](#) to discover how you can become a more effective leader and unleash the potential in yourself and others.



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