

The Key to Professional Success Is Intrapersonal Relationships It's not what you know; it's who you know." Most of us have heard this cliché at some point during our careers, usually as a reminder to network or find a mentor. But have you ever stopped to think about why? Why is it considered more important to know the right people than to know the right things or have the right skills? Competencies, skills, and talents are extremely important—that's why we spend years going to school to learn them, often followed by years of college, trade school, internships, or career certifications. But competency will only take us so far in our lives and in our careers. Opportunities, promotions, and advancement are often connected to having a relationship with someone or, more importantly, having influence with the right person, for the right reason, at the right time, and in the right place. On paper, competencies, skills, and talents can increase our influence with others. And that may be important for opening doors at times. But the outcome of the interview is usually based on the ability to influence those who are doing the hiring, selecting, or promoting. Knowledge and skills aren't enough to ensure professional success because it's not just about what you know how to do; it's also about how you do what you do. Look at it this way: Employees are hired for what they know and their ability to do a job. But most often they are fired for who they are and how they do their job. It's their character traits (attitude, disposition, timeliness, teachability, integrity, and so on) that will determine their professional success. Interestingly enough, those same traits also determine the quality of our personal relationships at home. Even if we can't articulate them, we know the character traits of a person determine most of their success. That's why we usually interview candidates before we hire them, or why we consider the track record of an employee before investing in their development. If there are two equally qualified candidates on paper, the opportunity will go to the one who is seen as a high performer with the most perceived potential. We often look for the characteristics that don't directly show up on a resume. Anyone can list themselves as "highly motivated" on their application or LinkedIn profile, for example, but we know not everyone truly is. So, we look for clues in their professional attire in the interview, volunteer service, or track record. You can influence people regardless of your title, position, or location on the organizational chart because influence isn't based on any of those things—it's based on your level of personal growth and leadership development characteristics. So, the old cliché, "It's not what you know, it's who you know," rings true—not just because knowing people is important but because influencing people is important. How much time should we spend developing these skills? As professionals, or even in general, influencing other people is critical; however, not one single credit hour in any of my three management and human resource degrees offered information on improving my ability to influence people. Not one question on my healthcare compliance or auditing professional certification exams referenced the importance of building influence with physicians and nurses, so they would trust me in an audit or when I had to ask them to change a documentation procedure. Not one professional development course I've taken focused on helping me improve relationships by building influence with employees, peers, or managers. Advertisement Yet, all of our personal and professional relationship frustrations are created because we lack influence with others in a particular situation. Are you frustrated because you didn't get the promotion you deserved? It's time to ask yourself how you could have better influenced the situation and the decision makers involved. Upset because your teenagers won't listen? It's time to consider how you

can build more influence with them. Stressed because a talented and coachable employee isn't engaged or receptive to your direction? It's time to consider how you can build trust in the relationship. It's not easy, quick, or magical. Learning to intentionally increase your influence in the right way and for the right reasons takes time and effort. But it's worth it. Here are three key ways that you can start increasing your influence:

1. **Take Responsibility:** It's not about you, but it begins with you. The first step to increasing influence is accepting responsibility for doing so. It's your job to increase your influence and improve your relationships. No one else is going to do it for you. If we all sat around waiting for others to take responsibility, we would spend our lives always blaming others. Sure, in any relationship the other person has responsibility as well, but you can't control them. You can only control what you do, how you do it, and why you do it. Take responsibility for getting to know someone. Take responsibility for improving your relationship with someone because you care about them. As Hal Elrod said, "The degree to which you accept responsibility for everything in your life is precisely the degree of personal power you have to change or create anything in your life." As Jim Rohn said, "Your level of success will rarely exceed your level of personal development, because success is something you attract by the person you become." I write about many of these characteristics of influence in my book, *Leadership Gems: 30 Characteristics of Very Successful Leaders*.
3. **Take Time:** Influence will launch you. Lack of influence will limit you. With people, the little things are the big things. Be little but don't belittle. Keep commitments—even the little ones—or don't make them. Avoid blaming others when a situation goes wrong. Give credit to others when things go right. Go the extra inch and it will take you the extra mile. Be willing to make mistakes and then be willing to learn from them. Some people are more naturally gifted at building relationships, networking, and building trust and influence with other people. Some people aren't naturally outgoing, friendly, or good at building relationships and influence. But we all are capable of improving our ability to build relationships, be trustworthy, and increase our influence. We simply must be intentional about doing so. And we must take the time to do it. As my husband, Mack Story, author of *Defining Influence: Increasing Your Influence Increases Your Options* says, "Influence is built daily, not in a day." Take initiative for learning the principles of influence on a consistent and continual basis. Focus on developing the character traits that will help you become more influential and successful.
- Take Initiative:** Professional success is based on personal growth. Influence is leadership and leadership is influence. Study leadership and influence books. Are they eager to take on responsibility? Are they driven from within? Are they positive?