

EDITORS' PICK

# How To Build Influence Without Authority At Work

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Imagine this scenario: After months of asking for a promotion, your boss finally offers you an opportunity. She has a high-profile initiative that she wants you to oversee, and you are thrilled. The only drawback is that it's not a promotion. She's asking that you act as a team lead. Situations like these are prevalent, especially in [matrix organizations](#) with multiple reporting obligations. If you're tasked with leading a project "unofficially," you must master the art of building influence without authority at work.

Whether you are a team lead or the manager of a cross-functional team, influencing without authority is a critical skill for any leader. To accomplish this, you must be able to motivate people of all levels with your confidence and expertise rather than a fancy job title. A key benefit to this approach is that leaders who inspire and persuade tend to be more productive than those who command and control. [Research conducted by Bain](#) found inspired employees to be more than twice as productive as satisfied employees.

To build influence without authority, you'll need to master a special set of skills. Let's take an in-depth look at the top five.

## 1. Build relationships

Building relationships is one of the most impactful ways to exert influence without authority. Having meaningful connections with co-workers fosters trust, which inspires them to help you reach your goals. This skill becomes even more important when managing virtual teams separated by multiple geographies and time zones. Start by finding common ground. Then, take the time to truly get to know your colleagues and [develop your emotional intelligence](#). Emotional intelligence is a soft skill that allows managers to

influence, persuade and connect with others. By being the compassionate leader your team needs, you can boost employee engagement, strengthen cooperation and increase performance.

## 2. Create a network of allies

Besides your manager, you'll want to assemble a group of people who believe in you and your mission. For one, allies are a source of emotional support during what can be a challenging time. They can also act as advisers when you need guidance and champions when persuading others to endorse the project. Plus, when you find yourself at a roadblock, drawing on a network of supportive counterparts can be beneficial. Remember that it's a two-way street. If you want others to support you, look for opportunities to advocate for your colleagues.

## 3. Position yourself as an expert

If you want to build influence without authority, it helps to boost your industry presence. That way, you position yourself as an expert, which makes it easier to influence people to change their behavior. Thought leaders can drive meaningful change. To stand out as someone who inspires others and offers guidance, [focus on your personal brand](#). Identify what makes you unique and build a brand that reflects your work and the value you bring to the table. While creating a personal brand takes time, it's well worth the effort.

## 4. Rely on storytelling

To influence without authority, you need to be able to express your ideas in a way that makes people want to support you. One effective way to communicate with your team is through persuasive storytelling. Sometimes, research and data aren't enough to convince people to see your point of view. Creating a compelling narrative helps establish a connection between the data and why people should care. This technique is instrumental in high-tech environments where everyone has a different level of specialized knowledge. In that case, storytelling creates a shared vocabulary that helps explain complex concepts so you can persuade stakeholders and secure buy-in.

## 5. Embrace resistance

When you are asked to lead without positional authority, you're bound to encounter resistance. Embrace it! Part of being a true leader is recognizing

that you can't know everything. If there is pushback, take the time to learn where it is coming from. There may be an issue that you can address. Otherwise, see it as an opportunity to explain your ideas more compellingly.

Exerting influence without authority doesn't happen overnight. But with time and patience, you'll build a reputation for being a trustworthy, results-oriented leader. Eventually, that reputation can help you earn an official position of authority within your organization. Regardless of the outcome, remember that leadership isn't about positions or titles—it's a mindset.