



## TRANSCRIPT

### **Episode # 15: Your Character Impacts Your Influence**

Hi, everyone! You know, sometimes all you need to do to grow your influence is to show everyone who you are.

Now you've heard me say before (and you'll probably hear me say again), that we often have a lot of misconceptions about what we need to do to grow our influence. We can reflexively think of time-consuming and inauthentic activities, like constant networking or strategic flattery.

But one of the points that I like to make over and over is that growing your influence doesn't have to be that way. The actions you take can be simple, easy, and genuinely a part of who you are. And those simple actions can be powerfully effective. They might be a slightly slower way of building your influence than the

stereotypes, but they end up being more effective and more enduring than the superficial stuff.

And remember, the skill of influence is a long-game skill. As we mentioned before, the definition of influence is creating an environment where you are taken seriously. And creating an environment doesn't happen overnight, even when you engage in the stereotypical influencing building activities. When it comes to growing your influence, slow and steady always wins the race.

Today, we'll be exploring one of those simple and very powerful activities that build great influence over time. That activity is our character.

Now that might sound like an odd way to put it, I guess. We don't normally think of character as an activity. We have a tendency to look at it as a collection of traits that are innate. I call that the Popeye syndrome. Like the old cartoon, it's this tendency to say to ourselves, "I yam what I yam!"

But you know, hear me out on this! I think there are at least two ways in which character can be considered an activity. First, we're all human beings with the capacity to learn and grow and deepen over time. I suspect if you're listening to this podcast, that process of learning and growing and deepening is something

that you're committed to. So, it probably makes sense to you that your character is something that changes over time as well. It's an active process, not just something you're born with.

But there's another way in which character can be considered an activity. Because in certain contexts, it's important not only to have good character. It's also important to demonstrate that we have good character. We see that time and time again in the important relationships in our life. For example, with our family and our friends, it's often not enough to have good intent. We have to show that good intent in our actions as well. Put another way, we have to engage in the activity of good character.

So as you think about yourself in the workplace, you might want to say, "Well, Kathy, everyone knows I have good character. My character speaks for itself." To which my reply is, well, that's great.... but is it really true that everyone knows?"

I mean when you think about it, it can be all too easy to overlook the longer-term messaging that we are sending to everyone around us. It's pretty easy for us to get overly focused on completing our weekly to-do lists and putting out the periodic fires. Are we really making our character clear as we rush around? And if we aren't doing that, how are all the busy people around us going to pick up on that?

The fact is that if you're not actively demonstrating your character, you're not going to get credit for it. When others don't see evidence of these traits in you, it can lessen the amount of credibility and influence you have with them. In other words, this lack of evidence can be a derailer for you in your leadership journey.

So how do we avoid that outcome? Well, we want to become more intentional and mindful in our behavior and our decisions. We want to ask ourselves, "What message is this action that I'm taking saying about my character?"

And we also want to be especially mindful of some of the character traits that I'm going to tell you about in a moment. These are character traits associated with good leadership. Now, these aren't the only traits that help grow your reputation and influence. But they do happen to be traits that I hear about frequently as a coach when a client is telling me that someone else in the organization lacks leadership.

So, let's go through the top 4 leadership character traits I hear CEO's talking about as they evaluate the potential of otherwise talented executives.

First is ownership. Now the minute I talk about this with an executive, they often are immediately confident that ownership is something that they are already demonstrating in their work.

But I'm referring to something more than just owning your assigned responsibilities. Ownership in a leadership sense means taking responsibility for everyone and every aspect of a shared project or even taking some measure of responsibility the entire enterprise.

Now, that level of ownership doesn't require you to do the work of others, of course. But it does require you to check in as much as possible to ensure the work is in fact getting done, and it's getting done well, and it's getting down on time, so that others who are dependent on it are not let down.

It might be a light-touch check-in with colleagues on enterprise-wide issues. It might be a more detailed and specific check-in with members of a team working on a project with a deadline.

But whatever the level of check-in, you need to be thinking like a boss and not simply assuming that other people are doing their jobs. It's that sort of demonstration of ownership that people take notice of and that builds your

influence. In contrast, if you just focus on your own work and let everyone else take care of themselves nothing much might happen to you in the short-term. However, in the longer term, people who see that sort of detached attitude are going to assume that you don't have the inclination or capability to oversee things in a broad way...in a way that contributes value to the larger good. And as a result, your influence and credibility will take a hit.

Another leadership character trait related to ownership is accountability. Again, we're not talking about accountability in terms of getting your assigned tasks and responsibilities accomplished. Instead, we're referring to holding yourself accountable to the important aspects of the culture and values of your organization.

Let me give you an example here. Imagine how much your influence might grow as a functional leader if you let people know that you were holding yourself accountable to a particular timeline and financial constraints in the same way that someone who owns a P&L does. And by the way, you don't have to go overboard on that—you just need to have the intent to hold yourself accountable and then put a few monitoring and other accountability constraints in place to demonstrate your leadership alignment with your business colleagues.

Or imagine embracing the company values as a way to drive performance and hold the people in your team accountable for meeting these values. Both of these accountability strategies speak volumes as to your leadership character and earn you further influence.

Another character trait that's associated with good leadership is emotional equilibrium. Emotional equilibrium is not always talked about that much, but it pays big dividends in terms of the degree of influence you achieve.

Big or consistent displays of negative emotion---frustration, anxiety, anger, cynicism, overwhelm, etc.—may be perfectly understandable on a human level and yet not serve you well in terms of acquiring influence. I know of an exec in one of my client companies who has enormous talent, experience, and insight. Yet his influence lags far behind because of his lack of ability to manage his emotional states. Those emotions become everyone else's burden as well as his.

On the other hand, executives who are calm and measured, no matter what the crisis, often earn a fair share of goodwill and influence. People appreciate that such execs create environments that help everyone manage their emotions productively. We know from the research that emotions are actually infectious

on a human level, like yawning. A leader who doesn't lose their cool creates teams that don't lose their cool.

And some accomplished executives do even more than that. They remain light-hearted and even humorous during conflicts and crises. The result of that? Well, since those emotions are infectious, they actually make everyone on the team feel better as well. Leaders like that often have enormous influence and followership. Who doesn't appreciate a leader who makes you feel better, no matter what the circumstances?

Finally, the last leadership character trait you want to have on your radar screen is strength. Strength is a trait that we could really spend a lot of time exploring, and unfortunately, we don't have the time in this episode to do that. It really deserves its own episode.

However, here is a very important take-away for you to think about right now. That is... we may like people regardless of whether they exhibit strength. But we rarely respect them if they are not capable of demonstrating firmness and strength when it's called for.

What does that mean for you, and how you show up in the workplace? Well, when we seek to gain influence, we can sometimes play it too safe. We can avoid making the tough calls, or calling someone out for inappropriate behavior, or holding powerful people or our friends accountable.

Yes, taking such actions can be uncomfortable and even dangerous, and I'm not someone who recommends that you take unnecessary risks. But as leaders, it's inevitable that we encounter times when we have to show strength and courage, not just on our own behalf but on behalf of others.

To me, that's the essence of leadership.... to take on greater risk, to even take on personal career risk, for the sake of the greater good. If you don't do that when it's necessary, you still may be a good human being... but it's really hard to see you as a leader.

So, strength and courage are some things you need to be attentive to if you really want influence and followership at a meaningful level. Don't be impulsive in demonstrating this, but do cultivate the skills that will allow you to use strength skillfully. And be ready to exercise that strength when the situation really calls for it.

Ok, everyone, I hope I gave you some helpful stuff to ponder today. I don't know about you, but I love the insight that our character is a powerful and effective way of building our influence. I've always found that observation inspirational. It means that not only should we be showing up and doing good for its own sake. It also means that our character is foundational to our ability to lead by example. And demonstrating that good character also often leads to getting a bigger seat at the table, a seat that gives us the opportunity to add more value and to make more of a difference in our organizations. It's a beautiful intersection of values, reward, and effectiveness.

Alright my friends, go forth and do good. And here's to an awesome week ahead for all of you! I'll see you in our next episode.

Thanks for listening to this episode of Mastering The Power Skills. If you like what was offered in today's show and want more insights and resources from Kathy, check us out at [www.significagroup.com](http://www.significagroup.com).