



TRANSCRIPT

Episode # 17: Influencing Tips from the World of Diplomacy with Angie Bryan

You are listening to Episode 17 of *Mastering The Power Skills*. What if one of the biggest measures of success in your job was how well you could build relationships through your influencing skills? Well, then I would bet you would have lots of tips and strategies for doing that effectively.

That's certainly the case with Angie Bryan, our guest today, who is retired from a career in the Foreign Service at the State Department. Join us in this episode to hear Angie's insights on some of the very simple things we can do to grow our influence in new environments and with different constituencies.

How much more could you accomplish if you were 25% or even 50% more influential and persuasive? Welcome to *Mastering The Power Skills*, the podcast that provides you with the tips, strategies, and the inspiration to grow your own

power and win support for your ideas. And now here's your host, C-suite leadership coach Kathy Dockry.

Hi everyone, today we're going to be talking about influence skills from the perspective of someone who has had to think about it all the time in her previous professional career. Angie Bryan had joined the Diplomatic Corps fresh out of college at Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas and has spent decades living and working around the world. Until retiring a number of years ago and moving to Portland, Maine, where I now live as well.

As an aside for those of you who don't already know this, Portland, Maine is an incredibly cool town where you're constantly crossing paths with smart, accomplished and fascinating people from around the world. And Angie is certainly one of them. While in the Diplomatic Corps Angie rose through the ranks and has assumed leadership positions in several countries as Consul General and Deputy Ambassador.

While her locations included places like France and Sweden, there were many, many other countries in which she worked as well, including at the frontlines of some very remote and even dangerous areas that we won't be discussing today.

She was also posted to Washington DC which, come to think of it, might be sometimes characterized as a politically dangerous area, where she served as Chief Negotiator for the Union and professional association for diplomats. And then as a member of the Board of Examiners, the entity which conducts the oral assessments of candidates for the Foreign Service.

Angie often jokes that she speaks French and Swedish, but has also studied Arabic, Chinese, Dari, Japanese, Latin, and Pashto, just all with varying degrees of success. Her writing has been published in the Foreign Service Journal over a dozen times, and in other publications as well.

One of her current claims to fame in her retired life is that she's been the cocktail bar reviewer for The Portland Press Herald since 2018. That's a pretty important role in a foodie town like Portland that's on the national and even international restaurant scene. And kudos to Angie for finding a way to get paid for drinking, judging people and writing about it.

In addition to our shared love of cocktails Angie and I share some similar views about the power skill of influence. In other words the art of creating environments, relationships and connections where people find us credible and know, like and trust us. I love how Angie believes this is both an important and an enriching skill, not only in our work lives, but also in our personal lives.

But I'm not going to repeat all her observations here, of course. Let's jump into the interview and you can hear them from Angie herself.

Kathy: Okay, welcome, Angie. And thanks for joining us today. I've just told the listeners the highlights of your professional accomplishments. But we didn't actually meet in the professional world, as I recall. In fact, I know that we didn't. In fact, we first met at a bar at the Cumberland Club here in Portland, Maine.

And I was noticing you, I have to say, at the time. Because before we actually talked I was seeing how, you know, besides the obvious fact that you're whip smart, that you had this sort of easy, relaxed sort of engagement with people, even with people that you didn't know. And you looked like someone who was really good at forming connections, and not only that, really enjoyed the process as well.

So the light bulb went off in my mind. I thought, “Boy, I bet that's someone who's really good at influencing.” And by that I meant being able to grow that know, like and trust factor that forms the basis for good working, and what I came to find out, good personal relationships as well. So I wasn't at all surprised, although really impressed, to find out that you had been a diplomat in the State Department before we crossed our paths.

And one of the things I always wonder when I meet people like you is, were you always that skilled? And was there a time in your life where you suddenly realized the importance of having this skill of being able to influence and connect with people? Was there a point in your life where that suddenly made a lot of sense to you and became more important?

Angie: Absolutely, I would say that it happened long before I joined the Foreign Service. And in fact, in high school, before I even knew what the Foreign Service was, I was running for office. I decided to run for the President of the Texas State Junior Classical League. And you had to give a speech, you know, as you do in a little campaign. You had to give a speech convincing people why they should vote for you.

And it wasn't like a high school club, where everybody already knows you, this was the statewide organization. So most of the people there had no idea who I was. So the only way they were going to vote for you was if your speech was more convincing than anyone else's speech. And I worked really hard on thinking through what would convince people to vote for me.

And not only did it work, at the end of my speech I did stop and say, "Any questions?" And there weren't any. And I remember, like a little light bulb went off in my head like, "Oh, I guess I did a good job anticipating what they would

have asked about.” And then later on, the bigger thing, I'm going to skip forward for one second.

Kathy: Yeah.

Angie: After I'd been in the service probably about 10, 12 years, something like that, I won an alumni award at my university. So I went back to accept it and they asked me to give a speech. After the speech one of the students who was in attendance asked what was the most useful thing I had done in college that helped me in the Foreign Service.

And I'm sure my advisor and other professors were just sitting on the edge of their chair hoping that their class was going to be the one that I mentioned as changing my worldview. And to their horror, I mean, I could almost hear them gasping, I said, sorority rush.

Kathy: I love that. Isn't that the truth? There are so many things that we learn along the way, but it's some of those early experiences that we have that can be really formative. You know, the ones that no one is thinking about.

Angie: Right. And to be clear, I'm not talking about being in a sorority. I'm talking about the process of rushing a sorority where, for those of your listeners who

don't know what's involved, you basically go to a series of rush parties where you know almost nobody, or perhaps nobody in the room. And you have what, one hour, maybe two hours to meet as many people as you can, make a positive impression on them, form some type of connection that makes them remember you and like you.

And then when you're running around campus the next couple days after the party, if you run into any of those people, being able to remember, “Oh, hey, how did your exam go on Tuesday?” Or, “How was that date you were telling me about?” Or whatever it is that you talked about.

And the similarities between how you would have to do something like that successfully and how you would work a diplomatic reception were striking. And it really was one of the most valuable skills that I developed in college, like I said, much to the horror of my international relations advisor.

Kathy: Well, you know, one of the things I love about that story is that I stayed as far away from rush as I could, for mainly one reason. There were a couple of others, but one was I was painfully shy at that point in my life. And I sort of subscribed to the view that either you're born with this gift of being able to come to a setting where you know no one and have conversations, or else you're not born with it.

And I had already put myself in the camp of someone who wasn't born with it. And I certainly changed my opinion on that over the years. And one of the things I'm often saying to listeners of the podcast, and to clients as well, is that these are learned skills. They're not rocket science and anyone can learn them to one degree or another. Sure there's going to be some people who come to it very naturally. But that doesn't mean the rest of us can't do very similar things as well.

Angie: I absolutely, absolutely agree. I actually used to teach a course for Portland Adult Education called expanding your social circle. And while it was focused more on how to make friends as an adult, which was sort of a lesson I learned after for 26 years in the service, moving to a new country every couple of years and having to start from scratch. Not only with my professional contacts but also with my personal ones.

And so there's so many things you can do. And I'm happy to go through that, you know, some of those lessons I've learned or tips that I've picked up along the way, if you would like.

Kathy: I would love that, because Angie and I have been talking about this ahead of time and there are a lot of really fantastic tips that she has for us. So one of the things I wanted to just sort of repeat for anybody who's new to this podcast is when we're talking about influencing skills there's a working definition that we

use. There's a lot of ways of defining that. But the ones that I tend to use is influencing skills are the skills you use to create an environment where you are taken seriously.

And by that I mean, where you're credible. People are inclined to know, like and trust you. And if they're in that sort of position where you've got that relationship with them, in the work world at least, a lot of the stuff that follows, the interactions we have to have, the negotiations around ideas, or proposals or things like that are so much easier when we have been working on creating that environment of know, like and trust through our influencing skills.

So, Angie is a master at this, I think. I know one observation you made is that you can't be passive. You have to be proactive in building that environment. So let's explore that a little bit. Tell me what you mean about that.

Angie: Sure, I can think of three elements right off the top of my head for this. Well, let me back up a second. When you come in as a newcomer to an environment, whether it's work or personal, you have to demonstrate your value. Like why do you want people who already have their own routines and their own circles to include you? Why are they going to be convinced that they need to open up and that you're a valuable addition to their life or their work network or whatever it is?

And so I am a little, I don't want to say aggressive, I think that comes off negatively. But I am the one who makes more of the effort because I know I have to. They're not going to go out of their way to get me to join them. I mean, I'd like to think I'm that fabulous, but they don't know that yet.

So one thing I do is I use social media. So when I meet someone, if they're fun or interesting or I think I'd like to see them again, I will ask if they mind if I send them a Facebook request. Or sometimes I don't even ask, sometimes I just do it. If you don't use Facebook but you use LinkedIn, that's another way you can do it. But it's a shortcut to getting to know someone better.

I meet someone once, I send a Facebook friend request. And then once I start seeing what they're posting I know, oh my gosh, we're both trained cellists. Just for the record I'm not a trained cellist, but you get the point. And I'll give you a specific example of how this can pay off.

When I first came to Portland, before I lived here I was a tourist and I didn't know anybody. I took a food tour and my guide for the food tour was hilarious. He was brilliant, he was funny, he just was such an interesting person. And afterwards, I'm like, look, I know this is super weird but I'm just going to send him a Facebook friend request because this guy is hilarious and I'd love to see him

when I come back. And to be clear, not in a dating situation at all, just a fun, interesting person.

Kathy: Yeah.

Angie: So I sent him the friend request, he answers, we start commenting on each other's posts. And when I come back to Portland for my second visit he happens to be having a party and he invites me to the party. At that party I met two different people who are now in my group of friends and I see regularly.

And then shortly after that he said, "Look, I know you're looking to serve on the board of a local organization. I'm actually on the board of one that I know you'd like and I'm about to leave, they asked me to help find my replacement. Would you be interested?" And so I ended up getting a seat on a board thanks to his introduction. And all of this is from sending one Facebook request to a person I met once as a tourist in a city I didn't live in.

Kathy: Yes.

Angie: So I think that's a powerful example of how those can work.

The second tip that I have in this department is what I like to call an action forcing event.

Kathy: This sounds ominous.

Angie: Which is to organize something so that you have an excuse to invite people to it. Now this does not have to be, I can hear all the people who don't like to entertain or have people over just gasping and clutching their pearls. But it doesn't have to mean that you throw a raging party.

I will say that when I moved to a new country I would always try to organize a housewarming party about two to three weeks after my household goods arrived. For starters, it would force me to unpack everything. But it was just a great excuse to say, you know what? I live here now, I'm having a little housewarming party.

Obviously I'm not going to be able to invite people I know really well, because I don't know anyone really well. So it's not weird that I'm inviting people to a housewarming party, they know I just moved there. And people are nosy. They love to see your house. They love to see how you live.

I tend to get a really high response rate when somebody new invites you to a party or a gathering at their house. Having someone over to your residence also allows them to find things in common with you because maybe they see that you have a bunch of books on a certain artist that they really like. Or, oh, you have a piano? I play the piano too.

Just it brings them into your life in a way that speeds up the process. But it doesn't have to be something at your house. I know a lot of people don't feel comfortable with that. In a work relationship I could identify who my key contacts needed to be, that didn't necessarily mean that there were others who had become key contacts. But there's certain jobs where you know that person is important to you.

So when I arrived on the scene, I would make a point early on to invite them out to lunch and get to know them, not just have a courtesy call in an office. We do the courtesy call in the office first, but then I'd say why don't we get to know each other, a little have lunch, that kind of thing. And it was just a great way in a more relaxed setting without a specific work agenda to get to know the person a little better and have them learn a little bit more about you too.

And then the third thing that I think is helpful for being proactive when it comes to these kinds of things is what I like to call sealing the deal when it comes to acquiring contact information. Now, this is easier in a work setting than it is in a

personal social setting. Because in a work setting it's not awkward at all to get somebody's business card or ask for their LinkedIn handle or anything like that.

But in a social setting, maybe you're at the gym and you're early for your yoga class and you're chatting with someone and they're really interesting. And you're like, "Man, I would love to have coffee with this person." And you think, I'll ask after class, or I'll wait till I've seen them two or three times in a row. Well, what if they normally go to the one that's a different day of the week at a different time and this was the one week they were at that class that you were at?

Kathy: Yeah

Angie: As you're wrapping up the chat when you're going into class go, "Hey, I'd love to meet up for coffee, can I grab your number?" Or do you have a card or, you know, are you on Facebook? Whatever it is just ask. Make the ask, seal the deal, get the contact info. Because maybe they have to zip off the second class is over and you never see them again but you could have had a really good connection.

And this does apply at a work event. If you're at a networking event, or a conference, or a reception and you meet someone interesting. At those receptions you tend to mingle and move on. Well, don't wait till the end of the

reception and try to find their card or their last name. Get it before you move on to your next conversation.

And if you don't feel comfortable asking for it, just have your card ready and hand it to them and say, "It's been so great meeting you, I'd love to continue the conversation another time. Here's my card, do you have one too?" You know? Or just hand them your card and nine times out of 10 they will hand you one. Or they'll say they'll send you a message, which they don't always do. But at least you've made the proactive step of letting them know that you'd like to talk again. So those are my three sort of starter tips for that.

Kathy: And I love the idea of being prompt in that reaching out, whatever tip you're using. Because I think we rationalize to ourselves because we feel uncomfortable a little bit probably sometimes to be the person who's initiating something. And that can particularly happen in corporate environments where there's a hierarchical situation. And so you're thinking, is it an appropriate thing for me to do, given my place in the hierarchy and this other person's place in the hierarchy?

But assuming that it's not an inappropriate thing to do, making that ask quickly bears a lot of fruit. Because even if the person can't have a cup of coffee with you right at that moment, or is so tied up, or is just in town for that day, having made the ask has value itself, right? I mean, it's not the fact that you actually sat down

and had a cup of coffee that makes the other person feel good about your interest. It's the fact that you actually were proactive and made the request.

So I often say to people don't worry about whether whatever you're suggesting actually comes to pass. Having made the request often is enough to signal to other people that we're interested, we'd like to connect.

Angie: You know, I say this all the time when it comes to invitations. Maybe I'm organizing a little gathering and there's some people I want to invite but I know they're going to be out of town. I don't care, I invite them anyway because you know what? Maybe their plans change and then they know that they're welcome.

But more importantly, they know they were on my mind. They know they were invited. They know I'd love to have them there. And then next time around maybe they try a little harder to be there. Or maybe the next time they organize something they're like, "Oh, she's invited me twice to things and I haven't been able to come. I'm inviting her to this."

So it really is always worth asking, even if you know the answer is going to be no. I mean, unless they have a restraining order on you. Don't do that.

Kathy: Yeah, well, we won't go into our past histories here, Angie.

So we also had talked a little bit as we were preparing for this interview about follow up. So that's kind of after you've made the ask or had that first sort of interaction with each other, whatever it is. And you made, again, a point that I have not always been so good at, which is you need to have sort of a prompt follow up.

You know, it can't be a couple of weeks later. I mean that's better than nothing. But you're going to get much more bang for your buck, much more of a sense of connection with someone if your follow up is prompt, right?

Angie: Yes. I mean, I think my first tip would actually be follow up.

Kathy: Right, yeah.

Angie: I don't even put the word prompt in it. It's like if you said you were going to send them an article that you discussed, or that you were going to send them the contact information for your tailor or whatever, send them that. If you promised to do something, like introducing them to somebody or inviting them to the ambassador's reception with a guest musician next week, do it.

I think so many people don't take the time to sort of take a second after they get back from an event or after they get back from a business trip and really just go through, what did I promise people? What did I say I would do? And then doing it. Now, of course, I agree with you on the promptness of it. But so many people just don't do the follow up at all.

And one thing I found really, really useful was, especially as I got more senior, and my schedule got harder and harder to get on, was having my secretary build in follow up into my schedule. So if I had a meeting that was likely to generate some due outs, I would have her schedule 15 minutes, 30 minutes after the meeting was over when I was still considered to be in the meeting and not to be disturbed.

And that would give me time, not only to do something personal like run to the bathroom, or have her ask me anything she might need to ask me before my next appointment. But it would also allow me to sit down, look through my notes, and be, "Oh yes, I promised to tell so and so this." Or "Ooh, I need to send them the phone number for that."

And I would just either do it right then, or if it was a longer task that I didn't have time for, I would put it on my to-do list so that it wasn't lost and like falling out of my head before my next meeting. And you know how it is, you can have day after a day of back to back meetings. If you wait until you have an hour of free time,

you'll be looking at meetings you had a week ago and you're not even going to remember what you promised people. So that's very important.

Kathy: Yeah, or what they said which is worth noting about them so that you remember what to talk about the next time you run into them.

Angie: I'm glad you mentioned that. I used to, I mean, I know people don't use business cards as much now as they used to. But no kidding, I would be at a reception or an event and I would get you know 20, 30 business cards of people that I actually wanted to see again. And as soon as I got home I'd flip those cards over and I'd write down whatever I could remember about that person.

And I will admit, at some events I went into the bathroom and did it there because I was getting too many and I didn't want to forget. And it might be originally from Texas, or has a Labrador named doodle. You know, whatever it is I would just put it down so that I would remember a little bit more about that person when we reconnected.

Kathy: Exactly. I had something that I didn't originally do, because I don't think I did the influencing skills really well in the first half of my career. But one thing I used to do is, you know, the follow up when you're talking to someone, "Oh, I'll send you an article on something.' But I began to realize that worked really well,

but people would mention an article or I would mention an article to them only rarely in the conversation.

So I would come back after a meeting or a conversation and I at least would remember something that they were interested in and I would just do a Google search on it. It wasn't meant to be manipulative. It was meant to say, huh, that was an interesting thing that they said about, usually these were business things, so it was about this business issue or that business issue. We're struggling with this strategy or we're trying to figure out our way through this competitive situation.

And I would go to Harvard Business Review, or I'd go to The Economist and I just would, nowadays you can just go there and put in the topic that we were talking about and chances are there's an interesting article that's not a, you know, it's not like a newspaper article. It's a thought piece about that particular issue and how you might want to think about it.

So I knew it probably would be helpful, or at least intriguing or interesting to them. And so I'd just find an article and send it to them the next day and say, "Oh, I ran across this article." And by the way, I was Googling the topic. But what you said was so interesting, you could say that, what you said was so interesting I decided to look into it and I ran across this article and thought you might want to check it out if you haven't seen it already.

Again, was the article the point of the whole thing? Did it have to be the best article in the world? No, although sometimes it was. You know, sometimes the content of what I was sending was something that was really useful or helpful to them. But the fact that I made what, for me, was at most five or 10 minute effort to locate something that they talked about because it interested me, made them feel recognized, and appreciated, and understanding that, you know, I felt somewhat invested in them.

Angie: Yeah, absolutely. That's next level. I have to admit, I hadn't even thought of doing that until you told me about it. So bravo, I'm going to have to start doing that more.

Kathy: Well, yeah, I needed a lot of help. After the first half of my life I spent the second half of my life thinking, "I've got to do a lot of catching up on this influencing stuff."

So we've been talking about these various tactics, and I know you're a fan of this too, which is just because you should be proactive in doing things and just because you should be intentional in things like follow up and forming connections, doesn't mean that the activities themselves have to be terribly time consuming or burdensome in any way.

When we were talking, you mentioned a couple of tips that are both pretty simple and very quick to do. So I really liked involved memes. I'd never thought of that one before.

Angie: Absolutely, diplomacy through memes. Yeah, I mean, I like to reassure people that you don't, I mean, it's lovely that you look up articles and send it to them. But you know, you can still stay in touch and build connection in a fraction of the time that it takes you to do that. And there's all sorts of different levels you can use or a spectrum. But I like to call it thinking of you, which is essentially exactly what you were saying with your, here's an article.

The point is to let them know that you were thinking of them. Not in a creepy stalker way, but in a, hey, this person was interesting and would like this, or I bet so and so would appreciate that.

So on a friend level, for example, if somebody posts a cartoon, or a meme, or a photo that's really funny, I will often just take five minutes and send that to whoever it is. I mean, it's not even five minutes if it's just one person. But let's say there's six different people who I think would really find that funny, I just send it to them.

Now, depending on how much energy and time you have, you could certainly say, “Thought of you when I saw this.” But you don't have to. It's obvious that you thought of them when you saw it because you are sending it to them.

Kathy: Right.

Angie: It is absolutely okay to just shoot a cartoon to somebody, or a meme, or a photo that they will know you saw that, you thought of them, and they are probably going to laugh. And I cannot tell you how often just doing that not even 30 second action with no text has resulted in someone responding, “It's been too long since we've seen each other, let's get together.” Or, “Oh, I was just thinking of you, I'm having some people over on Saturday. Want to come?”

You're often on people's minds, but they're not taking these proactive steps. So you do it and it will often be the step that takes you through the threshold of a new experience or a deeper relationship.

Another tip I have in this short, simple, quick category, I cannot claim to have invented this by any means. Not that I invented anything that I'm talking about today. I was lucky enough my first tour in the diplomatic service to serve with a colleague named Joe, and he was the master of contact development and what I like to call the short phone call.

I think a lot of times people hesitate to catch up with somebody or to connect with somebody because they've let too much time slide. So yes, there's all sorts of systems and contact management software and things where you can try to ensure that not too much time elapses before you see someone again.

You can say, oh, well this contact I'd like to see every six weeks, or this friend I want to make sure I see at least once every two months. Which sounds calculated, except in real adult life it is easy to let six months slip by without seeing someone you genuinely like.

Kathy: For sure, yeah.

Angie: And if you don't want that to happen, you can put reminders. You know, have you seen so and so lately? But without actually seeing them, you can still do the quick phone call. You call someone up, you say, "Hey, I've been thinking about you, I know I've been out of touch. How you doing?" But you start it off so there's not some pressure to have a big, long in-depth call when they might not have the time or you don't have the time.

And you can say, "Hey, I'm walking to my next appointment. I got about 10 minutes, you want to do a quick catch up?" Or, "I was thinking about. I've got a

call in five minutes, but I figured saying hi and letting you know that I miss you is better than nothing.”

And again, people are almost always happy to hear from you. If they can't talk because they're busy, doesn't matter. It's like inviting someone to a party that they can't come to, they know that you took the time to call them, even if you end up leaving a voicemail. Maybe you really hate phone calls and you feel uncomfortable on the phone. Not an issue, send them a text.

Kathy: Yeah, the miracles of modern technology now, it's so much easier to do a lot of this stuff.

Angie: Right, it is. And just remove the pressure that when you see somebody or catch up with somebody it has to be a comprehensive, you know, one hour long examination of every element of your life. There's a time and a place for that. But half the time just reconnecting, letting them know you haven't forgotten them.

I've had periods where I've been doing extensive travel and when I have an hour one day I'll just pick all the people I haven't talked to lately and I'll shoot them a message, hey, I'm swamped for the next six weeks, or I'm on the road for the next three weeks, but would love to see you when I get back. Miss you, hope you're doing well. I'll be in touch after the 9th or whatever.

Kathy: Yeah.

Angie: But just reaching out, letting people know. Because that can also make the difference in how they're viewing you. If for whatever reason they're thinking, well, I wasn't going to invite her to such and such because I haven't heard from her in six weeks, or I haven't seen her, or she just disappeared, I don't know why, it helps. You know, you don't have to provide a lengthy explanation, just miss you, thinking of you, would love to see you when I get back or love to have a phone call when I'm back can be very effective.

Kathy: And I think that that sort of approach translates well, not just from the social side of things, our social and personal relationships, but also to what life is like for a lot of us in the corporate world. For a lot of reasons these are complex organizations with various different locations, most of my client organizations are global, so many different locations, many different geographies.

And compounding the difficulty of staying in touch with people is the fact that we're doing things more virtually as well. And I think these little pings of, "Hey, thinking of you. Hope that thing that you're working on is going well." That sort of thing is especially important in that environment because otherwise how do we build the interconnectivity that we need when we actually have to start working together?

So someone might be really important to moving forward your leadership agenda, but isn't in your circle right now. You know that person, you met them a couple times when they were visiting the headquarters. But you want to keep that relationship fresh, or just at least existing in a very minimal way because you never know when you're going to next need to really work with that person or get them to agree to something that's on your agenda.

So particularly, I think, I mean you've done this so well on the social personal side of things. But I also know that you were doing that constantly within the work environment. It seems to me, I just love the analogy of thinking of our work lives the way someone who's in the Foreign Service has to think about their lives.

It's that geopolitical environment where there's a lot of different constituencies and allies and adversaries, kind of like the modern work world, right? And you have to navigate your way skillfully through that. And you need to at least get people sufficiently on the same page so that you can actually get stuff done, right?

So I'm sort of rambling on my own here. But I've always loved that geopolitical analogy or framework in thinking about our work lives. And these little ways of reaching out to people work well socially, but we should be really thinking about them in the workplace as well.

Angie: Absolutely. Absolutely. And one thing that you and I had talked about was, and this is related to what you just said, although it doesn't sound like it is, but it is. About the whole extrovert introvert thing.

Kathy: Yes.

Angie: And you don't need to be extroverted in order to grow your influence. And I saw this a lot in the diplomatic service that, you know, when people think of sort of stereotypical what are diplomats doing? One of the things a lot of people think about is diplomatic receptions, you know, these big events that another country or another embassy is throwing. So it's Bastille Day, the French Embassy is having a reception for all of its contacts.

So yes, you know, most introvert's nightmare, you are going to a reception with 600 people there. And sure, eventually, after you've been in country for a while you will know a lot of people at the reception, but in the beginning you won't.

And I like to reassure people that whether it's a networking conference or networking event, a conference for your industry, a diplomatic reception if that's what you're doing, or a sorority rush party, yes, working the room is one way to do it. You know, going through and talking to as many people as you can and

really just trying to hit different pockets in the room. And that's a great strategy for extroverts.

But the bottom line is, the more important thing is building one on one relationships, you know, your analogy of being able to build trust with people. Because I don't need 15 sort of superficial contacts who I don't really know that well but we liked each other at a party. They thought I was fun at a cocktail party. I don't need them calling me to tell me, "Oh, we heard that there might be a coup happening next week."

I need one or two very well developed contacts in appropriate positions in that country who I trust, who trust me. Who I know if they call me up I don't necessarily have to verify it with six other people because these are people who I've built a relationship of mutual trust with. So really, you need a couple of deep relationships, you don't need 15 superficial one.

And a lot of the introverted members of the Foreign Service, that's their skill set. That's their superpower, is finding that one person or those two people with whom they can really connect, skip the small talk and build a deeper relationship.

Kathy: That's such a good point.

Angie: Yeah, it doesn't matter whether you meet them at a big event or whether you meet them at something smaller, or whether you never go to a big event at all, as long as you can find that person you connect with and make those connections.

And I think the fact that we do so many things virtually now is a real help to a lot of the introverted colleagues because you can demonstrate your value online in a way that might be more comfortable for you than in person. You know, if you don't feel as comfortable just saying something on the spot or if you're the kind of person who prefers to process information a little more before you speak or offer an opinion or suggest something, doing it online gives you that time and space to be able to think through your words and plan what you're going to say to whom.

Kathy: You also made a great point when we were talking about introverts. You said that this is something anyone can do, but it's a particularly great technique for introverts to become a super connector. And by that, I interpreted that as meaning someone who simply does what it says, connects other people to each other, you know, forms introductions.

And, you know, if you're not going to be out there working the network yourself, perhaps you can actually architect or design the network by including people in

each other's orbits. I think that's something that people appreciate. And I think it's something, I suspect it's something that introverts do actually really well.

Because if they're forming those deep relationships, when they've stumbled across someone else who resonates with them, they're more likely than not going to be able to see the connection between that person and the other person as well. So connecting them is something that they can do that shows interest in both of them.

Angie: Yeah, absolutely. When I think of super connectors, I think of my friend Dana, who used to be in the Foreign Service and then left for a corporate job. And she was someone, still is, who takes genuine pleasure in connecting other people.

And if you're looking at it from the outside, in most of those cases it's not anything that helps her other than giving her that pleasure. I mean, long term you can certainly argue that those things pay off because people look at you as the go-to person or someone who always knows someone or someone who can connect you. And that, of course, helps down the road.

But just on the surface of it, it's like, "Ah, I met this friend, Kathy, who has a podcast on influence and persuasion. And, oh, I was at a party and I met this guy,

Bob, who is writing a book on influence and persuasion. Guess what? I need to connect those two people.”

Kathy: Yeah, you do, Angie.

Angie: I'm sorry to get your hopes up, I did not meet a guy at a bar who's writing a book. But that's the kind of thing. And so, again, what is that? A five minute email where you just say, “Hey, Kathy, meet Bob. Bob, meet Kathy. Kathy does this, Bob does this. Thought the two of you might want to connect.”

Kathy: Yeah.

Angie: I do that for people who are going to a city where I have a good friend who I think they would like. Not just, oh, I know someone in Chicago. But oh my gosh, you have so many similarities with my friend in this city, you're going there, let me just do a quick intro. And just putting people in touch with each other, you never know what's going to happen.

And I think when people are thinking about how do I connect people, or what might be some examples, this is one of those skills that, like you were saying earlier, you can absolutely develop if it doesn't come naturally to you. And it's sort of a fun little mental game. Try to think, what does person A and person B

or contact A and contact B, what do they have in common that might not be obvious at first glance?

I had a party once when I was stationed in Sweden, and one of my Swedish female friends was and still is very, very interested in sustainability, and the environment, and nature and all of these things. And one of my good friends there was an American guy, a former Marine sniper. So on the surface you might think these two people don't really have a lot in common.

Kathy: How do they connect? Right, yeah.

Angie: Right. And it turned out he is building, or was building, he has it now, a country house, farm project out in the rural, I think it's West Virginia, I'm not sure. And he was trying to build it as green and as sustainably as possible using all sorts of special materials. And they had the longest conversation and were so dynamic about talking about all these different issues. It was just fascinating to watch.

Now, that is not a great example of how I intentionally connected people, but it's an example of how under the surface there's so much out there if you just try to peel back the onion and figure out what two people might have in common. It can be really fun.

Kathy: Yeah, it seems you can almost gamify it, you know? And as you were talking I was really struck by to do this well you just need, you need a couple of things, but just a little curiosity, right? You know, what is the essence of so and so? And what is the essence of this other person? And to just take people at face value all the time, first of all, I think is boring. I like to know what's underneath the surface.

But also when you get to know what's underneath the surface, then you understand the ecosystem that you're in and you can connect people to each other in a very a interesting way which benefits everybody. So I often think that there's something very pleasurable about doing that. And it's also a form of giving people a gift of some kind, you know, when we connect them.

And I think a lot of influencing techniques are, in fact, little gifts that we're giving people. Very little ones, they don't have to be big ones. Just, I'm thinking of you, or you made an impression on me, or you might like this person. Just little things like that. But they're good in and of themselves and they also create the sense of good intent and reciprocity in the other person.

That doesn't mean that they're going to give you the shirt off their back. But they're just going to be more inclined to say Angie is one of the good guys. When Angie comes to me and she has the request, she's a good person, she thinks of

other people. I'm going to give her perhaps a little bit more time and consideration than I would give other people.

That must have shown up for you as well, again, in your work relationships too, because you have to cultivate contacts there for business.

Angie: Definitely.

Kathy: Yeah, in order to get the business of being in the Foreign Service done with allies and other entities.

Angie: Definitely.

Kathy: Yeah. Okay, so we've talked a lot about the skill of building our influence today. And when I was originally thinking of inviting you on, I was also thinking that we would talk a little bit about the skill of persuasion because that's something that is inherently, I think, part of the diplomat's job. But I wasn't really thinking too clearly about that because, of course, there are a lot about your experiences that you really can't be talking about publicly.

But suffice it to say for everyone that Angie is someone who has been in many environments. I'm not just talking about countries, but I'm talking about different

positions where persuasion was a very important part of her job. And I imagine, because of what little I know of Angie now, that she's exceptionally good at it.

But there is one thing that we talked about that is a more general observation about persuasion. And you made a great point about it that I think people forget about in the corporate world sometimes. And that is the reality and the legitimacy of self-interest and acknowledging that the other person that we're trying to persuade has self-interest.

They have their own interest and concerns. They might be high-minded interests, they might be sort of selfish interests. You know, they can be good interests or bad interests, but self-interest is a legitimate thing to be thinking about when you want to form relationships through influence, and also when you want to persuade them. Do you want to elaborate on that a little bit more?

Kathy: Absolutely. Have you ever heard of something called the Leads Club?

Kathy: No, I don't think so.

Angie: This was something I discovered when I was stationed in France, in Leon. I was invited to a Leads Club meeting in Grenoble, which was part of my

constituency. And what it is is it's an organization, and I believe it was just women, although it certainly wouldn't have to be for this kind of event.

And what they would do is they'd get together and, with apologies to any members who are Leeds club members and I'm butchering something, I'm sure your listeners could go to the website and see more about it. But the concept was that people think about networking as what you want, right?

What do you want? What do you need? What do you need to get from these other people? Who can help me with what I want? But it is often, I would say usually more useful and more satisfying, and has a bigger payoff in the long run, if you flip the perspective and look at it as to what you can do for them. You know, why would you be useful for them?

And so, at the Leads Club how it worked was you would show up, and they limited the numbers. And everybody would go around and they would say a little bit about themselves and they would say what they were hoping to do at that event. You know, I'm new to town and I'm looking for a Thai restaurant. Or I teach Pilates and would love to find some new students. Or I am forming a business that does executive coaching, I'm looking for people who are already in the industry that I could do an informational interview with.

Something like that, whatever it is, whether it's personal or work. And you could say one, two or three things in that category that you were looking for, and they did not have to be related. And then the more important part was, you had to say one to three or so things that you might be helpful to somebody else with. Like I know every cocktail bar in town, so if you're looking for a recommendation come see me.

Kathy: And folks, she does.

Angie: That was just an example off the top of my head, but yes. Or I'm an expert in change management, so if your company is going through a big transition, I might be able to be of service. Or I'm a professional editor, but I sometimes do pro bono cases for women of color who are writing their first novel. Pro bono is a legal term, I know, but you get the point.

And then after these little blurbs of what people were looking for and what people could offer, then they just unleashed people on each other. The room was just up for mingling. And you would just sort of go try to find all the people who had things to offer that you were interested in.

And, of course, as people did their little intros there was a lot of crosstalk like, “Oh, hey, you in the red dress, I heard you say you're looking for somebody who knows a good Thai restaurant. I own one, let's talk.”

Kathy: Yeah.

Angie: And so all these connections were formed in an instant before people even had to mingle. And it was just so efficient, so fun, so interesting. It also forced you to think about what you have to offer, as opposed to what you want.

Kathy: I love that because we often don't do that. In the workplace we're kind of head down, really focused on what we need to accomplish and we're not thinking a lot about what we can offer to other people.

Angie: Right. And so I like to say that whether you're dealing with another country, or whether you're dealing with your aunt Judy, or whether you're dealing with a corporate contact, it's really useful to think about what's at stake for them.

So if you're dealing with another country, what is in that country's national interest? A country is not going to agree to vote the way the United States wants

them to vote in an upcoming United Nations resolution just because the person who's in charge of that decision had fun with you out at lunch one day.

I mean, the fact that you've built up a personal relationship with that contact and you all go to each other's houses and you talk about each other's kids, that is very useful in being able to talk about thorny diplomatic topics in a way that each of you listen to the other and really try to understand the other one's perspective. And maybe spend a bit more time on some of these things because you do have that basis of trust and mutual understanding.

But they're ultimately not going to vote the way the United States wants them to because they like you. They're going to vote the way that serves their country's national interests. So if you want them to vote that way, you have a much higher chance of success if you help them realize why voting that way would also serve their own country's interests. Like how is that going to help their country move forward with some of their national interests?

And I would say that the same thing applies, you know, let's say with your boss. They're not going to let you transition to a four day workweek because you just bought a vacation home and want to do three day weekends every week, right?

But they have a much bigger chance of giving you the buy-in that you're looking for if you point out that you working longer hours Monday to Thursday means that the office would have additional coverage late in the evening when the West Coast clients are doing things.

Kathy: Right, yeah.

Angie: You both end up getting what you want, the boss gets more coverage, you get more time on the weekend at your vacation house. But each of you has your own interests being met.

And so whether it's diplomacy, the business world, or Thanksgiving dinner, thinking about what other people want and need is going to be a very good way for you to be able to shape an effective argument.

Kathy: Yes. You know, after we talked about this I actually was drafting the ideas for a future episode of this podcast because I started really thinking deeply about self-interest. And one of the things I'll be talking about it is, you know, for me, when I am pitching ideas in a complex environment, again, with a lot of different decision makers that I have to get aligned and onboard, there are a couple of things that I almost always say.

Not because I'm being manipulative, but because it reflects an understanding of the likely self-interest of the other person So one thing that I often do is say, you know, if this idea goes forward, you're going to look like a rock star.

Angie: I love it.

Kathy: I might say something a little bit less, but actually, I do say rock star a lot because it makes the other person laugh. But I make the point that voting in this way, right, or approving this measure, if it gets pulled off well, will make everyone associated with it look like they were insightful and adding value.

So I want them to understand that, not because I want to manipulate them, but I want them to understand I am looking out for your self-interest, not just trying to move my ego based things forward.

And another thing I often say when I'm trying to persuade someone of something is I'll say, "Don't worry, I've got your back." Because in the corporate world a lot of times people are going to be concerned, and I think this translates as well to geopolitical arenas, which is, if I approve this thing, in theory I like what you're saying, it sounds very reasonable to me. But are you going to execute it well? Or are you going to end up pissing someone else off, right?

Do you know how to handle the politics of this, going forward with this? Because if you drop the ball on that, I get affected as well. You know, in a geopolitical environment, if I'm a small nation and I say, "Yeah, I'll sign on to that UN thing." But a larger nation next to me is adamantly opposed to it, I'm going to be concerned about what my agreement is going to, what the long term implications are.

So to the extent I can, when I'm trying to persuade people, it's got to be real. I've got to be giving them adequate assurances. But letting them know that I have their back is a really important thing to say to them. It's a matter of self-interest that I might not share, but it's legitimate that they have that concern.

Angie: Absolutely. And, you know, you said something that I want to just highlight, which is the importance of being real. You said earlier that it sounds manipulative, or I've had people say, "Oh, well, that sounds transactional." And I say, "Well look, realistically if you just sit back passively, whether we're talking about making friends as an adult, or building a network of contacts for your business, or getting new clients, or becoming a leader in an industry, or even in an organization, a volunteer organization or something.

If you just sit back and wait for things to happen naturally or organically, first of all, they might not. You know, they just might not happen. And secondly, the timeframe, it's going to take a long time. You just have to wait till you happen to

meet someone and then, you know, they happen to suggest you get together or you happen to run into them a second time. A lot of times, that just doesn't happen.

And I think the reason I became a little more proactive, or even a lot more proactive about these things, is that when you move somewhere as a diplomat, you're there for what, two to three years max? And so if you sit around waiting for things to happen, it might be six months before you have a friend, and then a year and a half later you're leaving.

So I see no shame in taking some, okay, you can say calculated steps, but the reason is sincere. The reason is that I find someone interesting and would like to see them again, either for work or personal reasons. And I really do genuinely like them or find them fascinating, that's not fake.

So yes, I may accelerate the process by suggesting we get together or connecting on social media, or inviting them to something a little sooner than other people might. But I still get to where I want to be. And it's a real friendship, it's a real professional relationship. It's just that I try to get there a little more quickly because you don't always have the luxury of time. And that's true in the business world too.

Kathy: Oh, yes.

Angie: I mean maybe you've got a deal that your company is working on, and you can't just sort of sit around. Especially if you have a really busy schedule. You have to plan ahead, you have to schedule things, you have to work them in. So I always encourage people don't let the fact that this sounds like calculated steps, it's skill development.

It's skill development based on genuine interest. I'm not suggesting you do any of this with people or contacts that you find repulsive.

Kathy: Oh, for sure, yeah. That does strike of manipulation. And I often think underlying all of this is that we're considering the wrong question. So when people have objections about, oh, this seems manipulative or calculating, what they're really saying on a deeper level is, how will this behavior strike other people, right?

That's what they're saying. I don't want to do it because that will look like it's manipulative, that will look like it's calculating. But the real question, and I think you brought that out so well, is not how will my behavior look? It's what is my intent? What's my motivation in taking these actions?

First of all, if you have good intent, and I think everything we've been talking about, yes, it helps us, but we're doing it because we have good intent. That's a good thing in and of itself. But if you have good intent, you can also articulate that good intent to other people so they understand you're not being manipulative. They understand that you're not being insincere.

You say to them, "I enjoyed the conversation. You want to have coffee sometime?" You say to them, "I was thinking of that thing you said, I'm going to send this to you." You announce your intent, which a lot of times we do not tell people what our intent is. We assume they're going to automatically know that.

So when you're reluctant to do something, I say to a lot of clients, ask yourself are you doing that because you're concerned about what people will think? Because in that case, let them know your good intent. If you tell people you're good intent, they actually almost 90% of the time believe you. Whether they should or not is another story. But they actually do believe you.

Angie: No, they should because you're genuine.

Kathy: Anyhow, that's for another topic. I really get stuck on this whole thing about behavior and intent because it's something that befuddles us a lot of times when we're making decisions, or also when we're thinking about what we think

about other people. We see their behavior, we assume their intent must be X, without having any idea of what it is. And then all of a sudden we're making judgments about them that are really incorrect.

In any event, I know that your time is very limited today. And I'm really, really grateful that you had the time to squeeze me in because I think these are a lot of really great, very simple, actionable perspectives for the listeners to deal with. And I, again, love the fact that we're framing it in terms of our normal personal lives and we're also framing it in terms of sort of, again, the experiences you've had in a very different setting than the average corporation.

There's some commonality there that we can learn from. And this sort of nose to the ground attitude that we have in the corporate world sometimes makes us a little bit limited in understanding that we're in this larger network of people that we need to be connecting with. So we don't see that as part of our jobs.

Again, if you're in the Foreign Service, you know that that's part of your job in a very real sense. And I think all of us need to know that, that that's part of our job, to be forming those connections. It's good for us, it's good for them. It doesn't have to be hard.

So thank you very, very much, Angie. I'm looking forward to maybe down the road having another conversation with you where we can do a deep dive maybe into the topic of power. I think that could be an interesting one. And we could probably do it over a cocktail and it would get even more interesting for people.

Angie: I love it. I love it, the cocktail power hour.

Kathy: Oh, I love that.

Angie: This was so much fun. I always enjoy talking about these topics. I'm really passionate about helping people be less intimidated when it comes to building connections, whether they're contacts or personal relationships. I think there's so many amazing and interesting people out there in the world, it's a shame not to be connecting with ones who really would resonate with you.

Kathy: I couldn't agree more, I really couldn't. Speaking as someone who was originally a shy introvert, it's been a very enriching part of my life to get over that and start connecting more with people.

Angie: I wouldn't even say to get over it, because I don't think introverts should have to feel like they need to get over anything. That's a key part of their personality and how they operate. I really think it's how do you maximize your

strengths, whether you're an extrovert or an introvert? And how do you use those strengths to help you build connections?

Kathy: Much better framed, yes. Yeah, you're exactly right. And Susan Cain, who wrote *Quiet*, did you ever read that book?

Angi: I have not.

Kathy: Oh, it came out, oh gosh, maybe 10 years ago. One of the best books ever written on introverts. And she's a beautiful writer as well, so it's very well written. But she makes that point that you're making so beautifully. That each aspect of a personality is something that's a strength and can be leveraged in different ways. You know, you don't have to change who you are if you're an introvert. You have actually some superpowers that extroverts might not come to as naturally.

Angie: Absolutely.

Kathy: Yeah, right. Just recognize your superpowers and use those more effectively.

Angie: Exactly.

Kathy: Yeah. Okay, always a pleasure, Angie. Thank you so much.

Angie: My pleasure, have a great day.

Kathy: You too.

Well, talking to Angie today certainly has reminded me that just like her and others in the diplomatic world, building our influencing skills is not just something we do if we have time after our “real work.” It is part of the real work, especially if we want to be effective and successful at what we do.

And our brief discussion on how the self-interest of others is legitimate and needs to be taken into account got me thinking that we sometimes fall into the same trap of thinking that the self-interest of others is not relevant or even valid when we're proposing ideas in the corporate world. So I've done a little bit more thinking and exploration around that and I'm going to share my thoughts with you in an upcoming episode. But until then, I hope you have an awesome week ahead and 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.