



## TRANSCRIPT

### Episode # 36: Influencing For Introverts

You are listening to episode 36 of *Mastering the Power Skills*. So, raise your hand if you're an introvert who feels that you could be doing more to build quality relationships in the workplace. I'm a classic introvert myself and I used to be envious of my more extroverted colleagues. They were networking well and they were forming new relationships all the time.

I thought that they were at an advantage over me in terms of the influence they had. But that was before I discovered that introverts can be world class influencers as well, they just need to play to their strengths versus copying the approaches used by extroverts. Join us in this episode to learn a simple technique that introverts can use to expand and deepen their connections at work.

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.

Well hi, everyone. Recently the topic of introverts has been on my mind. Did you know that the past few decades could be seen as the rise of the introverts in the corporate world? Prior to that, many senior management roles, at least in the US, tended to be filled by extroverts. And I won't get into all the reasons why that was.

But things started to change for a few reasons. First, there was the rise of what had been called knowledge-based industries in the 90s. These were companies that rely more on tech and science and innovation of various kinds. And this rise created a group of founders who were more introverted by nature than prior generations.

And in addition, as companies started becoming more complex and global, it became valuable to have people on the senior team who thought first and talked second. In other words, people who held their cards close to their chest and thought things through before they expressed an opinion. And that, my friends, is the classic definition of an introvert.

But even if there are more introverts at the top and around us in the work world, there's one thing that remains true for us, putting ourselves out there in new situations and with new people can feel uncomfortable. That might not be a problem if we're happy and content in our roles, but if we want to move into larger roles or if we want to have a larger impact on what's happening in the workplace, then we want to grow the power skill of influence.

And to be good at influence we have to start connecting and building relationships with people. But if you're an introvert like me, there are ways of doing this that don't have to feel uncomfortable and awkward. In fact, some of these techniques are things that come very naturally to us. They tap into our superpowers, our introverted superpowers.

And to demonstrate that, we're repeating an early episode of the podcast today. One that we originally called The Power of a Simple Question. Take a listen and you'll learn how one of the introvert's superpowers, asking questions, can be used to grow and cultivate your influence in the workplace.

Hi, everyone. Today we're turning our attention to the power skill of influence. You'll remember from episode 2 of the podcast that influence is the skill that helps you create an environment where you will be taken more seriously.

You're cultivating and strengthening your work connections and your work relationships. You're laying a foundation, a workplace where people know, like and trust you. And you're doing all that so that when you need to propose ideas or actions at a later stage, when you have to use the power skill of persuasion, in other words, those ideas and actions will be taken seriously as well.

Now here's the thing about influence. People have all sorts of misconceptions about it, and as a result, they avoid working on growing their influence. One common misconception is that growing your influence is time-consuming. The thinking is that you have to network a lot and show up to functions and events. Or take colleagues out for drinks or lunch in a way that takes you away from work you need to do or even your personal life.

Another misconception is that to grow your influence, you have to change who you are in some way. The thinking is that you have to be calculating and target people. You have to flatter them and engage in endless small talk. In other words, you have to be inauthentic and not yourself. Well, yuck. Of course, any sane person would avoid growing their influence if any of that was true.

But the reality is none of those beliefs really are true. They're all judgments that we've made about people who often weren't growing their influence very well. So sure, networking might be effective in the hands of an extrovert who genuinely, and let me emphasize that phrase, who genuinely enjoys and is skilled at networking. But it's far from the only tactic for growing your influence. And in the hands of someone who doesn't enjoy it, networking can actually diminish your influence.

And being calculated and inauthentic never works over time. People inevitably see who you are when you use that tactic, and let me tell you, that's not a good look. The people who you're trying to impress may smile at you, but they're not dumb. They see through the manipulation.

So, the good news I like to share with my clients is, you can get rid of your beliefs and misconceptions about influence. It doesn't and shouldn't be time-consuming or inauthentic. Growing your influence can be simple. The tactics you use can be a good fit for who you are, and in many cases, the interactions you have can be even fun and rewarding in the moment.

Today I want to share one of my favorite ways of growing your influence, one that's not only simple, but often enjoyable. It works for anyone, but it's an especially good fit for introverts like myself. All you have to have is genuine curiosity, the ability to ask questions, and the ability to listen.

And by the way, the use of questions is one of the most under-utilized tools we have at our disposal in the work world. You'll often hear me in this podcast showing how the use of a question achieves so much more than the use of a statement. Questions are like a hidden superpower that you'll want to learn to cultivate.

So in this particular method, you're simply going to use a question as a means to get someone to open up and to better understand them. You're going to use a question to get the other person feeling seen and heard. But first, before we talk about how you do this, let's explore why this works to grow your influence. Why would making others feel seen and heard result in you having greater influence?

Here's the answer. When other people ask us a question with genuine curiosity, the research very strongly indicates that we experience that curiosity about who we are as a gift. Isn't that interesting? And it makes sense when you think about it. Who doesn't like to explain who they are and what's important to them when someone asks with genuine and respectful curiosity?

When that happens you feel appreciated, and you feel appreciative. You're quite likely to feel continuing goodwill toward the gift giver and a sense of reciprocity. Think about it, good will and a sense of reciprocity. That's a

pretty accurate description of what others feel about us when we have influence, right?

And there are additional benefits to asking questions as well. Depending on the type of question, you actually might be better seen and understood too. An unexpectedly deep question is often seen as evidence of a deep and thoughtful mind, for example. And the person who you're dealing with is suddenly able to perceive a dimension of you that they might have otherwise missed.

And the content of the answers can be helpful to you as well. When you start to more fully understand the other person and what motivates him or her, you're better equipped to choose good persuasion techniques down the road when you need to convince that person to support an idea that you have. So, you can see the benefits of making someone feel seen and heard. Now let's get you skillful and effective in using the technique.

So, first, for this technique to have a meaningful impact, it's absolutely essential that you use quality questions. So, what do I mean by that? You want questions that are unexpected, in a respectful way of course, and that cause the other person to stop and reflect a bit, if only for a moment. And because it's the work world, the questions normally should have some direct or tangential relationship to the world of work.

Here are a few examples of quality questions just to illustrate what I'm talking about. One could be, what attracted you to your profession, or your role, or this company? Or another type of question might be, who was your best mentor? Who was your best role model? Here's another question, what was the biggest challenge in your career and how did you deal with it? Or you might want to say to someone higher up in the food chain, what experiences have been the most important in shaping who you are as a leader?

Now, notice that these are all questions that require the other person to open up and reveal aspects of their origin, their identity, their values, and their beliefs. These are not questions about the business, the activities and people of the workplace. Those might feel like perfectly appropriate questions, but the reality is they don't do much to open people up and deepen relationships. To some extent, they just kind of kill time, so they frequently provide you with very little return on your investment.

Quality questions, on the other hand, are much more powerful, both for you and the other person. And remember what we discussed in episode 1 of this podcast about the Latin meaning of power, it's the force that generates things. It makes things happen. That's what we're intending when we use the power skills. We are looking to grow the power to make things happen.

Now, when I share this technique with my coaching clients, it's at this stage that some of them start to squirm and they tell me that it's awkward to ask such questions and that people would react poorly to it. And I get that feeling, I was a pretty shy introvert at the beginning of my career. Asking other people questions, particularly if they're more influential than you are or higher up on the food chain can make you feel pretty self-conscious.

But I came to learn this belief, well, it's just a myth. Other people genuinely like being asked questions. And you can ask quality questions of anyone so long as you pick the right time and have the right lead-in. So just to get your juices going, here are some examples of the lead-in's that I sometimes use. One is, I'm trying to decide what's the next action I should take to grow myself as a leader. What were some of the actions that you took that made a difference?

Or this one that sort of reflects who I am, I love asking questions about what shaped us into the people we are. I'm always learning the most interesting things. What was your biggest motivation in taking the career path you did? Or, you know that thing that just happened at work or in the news? It had me wondering about the lessons we learn from making mistakes. What was your favorite mistake and what did you learn from it?

So, notice something else about those examples that I just gave? I generally ask things like "what was the one thing" or "what was the worst thing" or

**“what was the best thing.” These are all ways of narrowing the question down so it’s more easy and more likely for the other person to respond to it. It also makes it more easy and more likely for you to come up with follow-up questions for that person.**

**Also, by narrowing your question in that way, you’re more likely to learn what’s most meaningful to the person versus just getting a canned answer. You’re making that person really stop and think about that one thing. Now of course, you don’t have to use any of the questions that I’ve told you about in this podcast. Feel free to come up with your own.**

**And if you need any inspiration, you’re going to be surprised at how many other lists of sample questions there are on the internet, as well as books with lists of questions on places like Amazon. So just use a search phrase like “reflective questions” or “meaningful questions,” and you’ll see a lot of resources out there.**

**And as you get more comfortable with this approach, you’ll start noticing good questions that other people are using in the workplace. You can start collecting those as well. I still am and I’ve been doing that for quite a few years.**

So, let's assume you've asked your questions. What you do next is also important. You'll want to listen with genuine curiosity to the answer. Really make the person feel heard and worthy of being heard.

Don't interrupt or respond by arguing or immediately telling your own story or beliefs. You might share that a little later in the conversation, but generally the less you say about yourself, the better. Instead draw the person out more by using phrases like, "Why do you feel or think that?" or "Tell me more about what you meant by that."

And also, take time to make the person feel validated in their beliefs and emotions. You can use phrases like, "That must have felt so challenging" or "I can see why you feel that way" or "That's a meaningful insight" or "What an important experience that was."

One way of powering up this technique and taking it to the next level is what I call reminding someone who they are. So our personal identity, the way in which we define ourselves, is often one of the things that we value the most in our life. But the interesting thing is we can sometimes actually kind of forget who we are.

The pressures of the workplace and of our personal life can sometimes make us drift and lose track of what makes us special and valuable. Or we might know what makes us special but are afraid that others don't see or

understand that. So in whatever answer you receive to the question you asked are signals. They're signals as to what that person cares about.

And you can use those signals as an opportunity to give that person another gift, the gift of explicitly acknowledging who they are. So for example, notice an admirable quality that is important to the person in the answer they give you. Maybe it's courage or loyalty or emotional maturity. Then you can say something like, I can see why people appreciate your loyalty.

Or I'm really struck by the courage it took to do that. Or I really respect people who have emotional maturity. It's a trait that I'd like to grow in myself. Or, wow, you really grew from that experience or, wow, you really made a difference there. And again, these are just a few examples. There are a lot of ways in which you can essentially say this thing, which is "I see you, I see this thing in you and I respect that."

And finally, here is one more way in which you can power up this technique to the next level. When you remind the person of who they are, use a trait that will also help you down the road.

For example, is this a person who can sometimes waffle on decisions and is very risk-averse? If there's something in their story that makes them look brave, you can comment favorably on their decisiveness or their willingness to take a risk when there's a good reason for it. And as a result, the next

time you need them to be decisive, they're more likely to be that way because you've reinforced that in their minds. They'll be motivated to live into the version of themselves that you complimented.

Or is this a person who always tends to be oppositional and resistant to your area of the company? You could comment favorably on their ability to challenge people to create better outcomes. Or mention that their commitment to high standards is something that you appreciate.

By doing that, you are subtly steering them to see you as the person who gets them, and therefore they're likely to see you as presenting them with ideas in the future that meet their standards.

I love how this approach of steering people combines integrity with strategy. You are being genuine in recognizing what they aspire to, and then you're also being playful in creating an aspiration in them, one that makes it more likely for them to give you a fair hearing when you need to pitch them an idea or something else.

So, there you have some of the most important elements of making others feel seen and heard. Now how do you put it to use? I recommend that you do two things. The first, pretty obvious, is to start building that file of good questions. You want to have something to refer to rather than have to decide on a question spur of the moment.

The second thing to do is every few weeks identify a person who you would like to build a relationship with. And then look at your file, pick an appropriate question or two that you might ask them, then wait for a good moment and ask them that question.

For example, when I was a junior executive in a global company, I'd occasionally run into the CEO in the elevator and I never knew what to say to him so I'd just stand there being quiet and kind of self-conscious and embarrassed. And I finally decided to ask him a question that was bugging me.

He was a first time CEO, he had stepped into the position recently, and I was curious about what was the best thing and what was the worst thing about making the transition from being a member of the management team with a lot of rivals for the top role to actually being the CEO.

So, I thought, what the heck, the next time we're alone in the elevator with all that uncomfortable silence, I'll just ask the question. And I did. And when he talked, I used appreciative listening because I was, of course, genuinely interested in what he was saying. And I told him what I noticed and appreciated about what he said.

The conversation in the elevator ended up lasting so long that I ended up skipping my floor, getting off on the elevator with him at the executive suite level, walking down the hallway to his office and spending 10 more minutes chatting with him.

And I firmly believe that to this day that this single conversation I had was pivotal to my rise in the company over the next few years. A rise to the point where I was deemed to be one of the successors for that very CEO. Now, of course, I had to perform well and clearly show my value over those years. It wasn't as if there was any special favoritism that resulted from that interaction. But I had become a little more known and visible.

When I did something valuable, it was noticed, not just taken for granted. I had established an important bit of influence and credibility by having that interaction. I had given a gift by reflecting on his experience in a way that showed I understood what was important to him, and then I thanked him for the gift of sharing himself.

So, isn't that great? If you spend any time with me, you'll sometimes hear me talking about "two-fers" or "three-fers." What I mean by that is taking an action or making a decision that has multiple payoffs, not just one. And using this technique is such a great example of that because you're doing something really good for the other person, and you may also be evening the playing field for yourself.

**That other person is more likely to take you seriously when you have an idea or recommendation. And that's all we really want, right? Just give us a fair hearing and let our ideas get fair consideration.**

**So, there you have it, a simple and often gratifying way to build your influence simply by connecting a little deeper from time to time. What could be better or easier than doing that?**

**And if you have any questions or if you have some improvements on this approach, I'd love to hear those. I'd be happy to share them in a later podcast and give you a shout-out. Just send me an email at [info@significagroup.com](mailto:info@significagroup.com). You can find that email address in the show notes as well.**

**All right, my friends, here's to an awesome week ahead for you, and I'll see you in our next episode.**

**Hey there, would you like some personal guidance about how to use the power skills of influence, persuasion, or presence in a particular situation in your workplace? Well, if so, we've got your back. Just send us a note explaining your situation to [powerskills@significagroup.com](mailto:powerskills@significagroup.com). We'll drop that email address in the show notes. We'll feature your inquiry in an**

upcoming episode, keeping your identity anonymous, of course, and make sure you have some tips and strategies to help you navigate your particular situation skillfully.

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