

# LEADERSHIP, INFLUENCE, AND THE F-WORD

**Lida Citroën**

# Ugh. It happened again.

While teaching a program on influence and leadership, someone asked the question I hate to be asked: “This sounds really hard. Is there a way to shortcut—or *fake*—influence before you have it?”

The question irks me because it reminds me of the expression, “If it was easy, everyone would do it.” No, there’s no way to fake leadership and influence. Let me explain why.

Leadership is a mindset and commitment, more than a job title or resume skill. When one describes themselves as a leader, we wonder, did they lead a project or lead people? Did they inspire, empower, and grow others around them, or were they tasked with being the most visible person on the project? To be a leader is a selfless commitment to ensuring those around you—in the team, company, community, or world—become better, more impactful, and produce better outcomes. It’s not old-school command-and-control management but a skill that requires finesse, humility, self-awareness, and a passion for service.

Leadership means (and looks like) empowering those around you, leading from a position of strength and humility, and setting a vision (goal) others want to follow and embrace. Contrast this with “management,” which tends to be more task-based and functional; leadership is more aspirational and qualitative while still meeting goals and objectives.

We see people lead in organizations, companies, communities, and countries because their hearts and souls direct them. We might initially believe what we see is self-serving (i.e., fake) because we're naturally skeptical, but as we learn about the "why" the leader operates from, we realize it is heartfelt and genuine.

## Leadership is a mindset and commitment, more than a job title or résumé skill.

Influence is trickier in some ways. There are, in fact, short-term ways one can fake what looks like influence.

My client, Andrea, did this profitably for a while. She set out to grow a following on social media and was dead set on being what she called "An Influencer." She posted constantly, sharing a beautiful collage of informative and helpful posts, volunteering some self-deprecating humor, offering up her thoughtful insights about the world around her, celebrating the success of others, and embedding a great CTA (call to action) for each post she shared. She was on a roll—her followership and engagement were off the charts!

But then her focus shifted. The "Influencer" part took over. Her content became less about sharing who she was and what she cared about and more about being a brand ambassador for products and companies that often had little to do with her brand.

She showed us her favorite lipstick (link in the comments!), described how amazing the experience was at an exotic hotel (“this is a paid endorsement”), and when she professed to be super excited about the oil filter her husband just installed in her Subaru. And the wheels started to (figuratively) fall off.

She wasn’t being true to herself. She used her platform to grow her business in ways that were inauthentic and separated her from her loyal followers. One even posted that she appeared “fake,” devastating her. Eventually, what she’d built became more of a marketing gig than an expression of how she envisioned serving others and building community.

While influence can be faked initially, over time, to create true followership, where your ideas, vision, and message are received and followed as intended, it can’t be fake. This is why true influence (for most people) remains more aspirational than attainable.

## **THE ART OF INFLUENCE**

I’ve worked in the field of influence, positioning, perception, and leadership for 25+ years, working with clients in 30 countries, and one thing is consistent: You can’t build influence, be a person of influence, or inspire influence in others if your heart and soul aren’t in it for the right reason.

Here’s an example I share from my new book, *The New Rules of Influence*:

I remember working with Alan (not his real name), a prominent scientist in the field of gene therapy. Alan was revered, awarded, celebrated, and fawned over wherever he went.

He was the Tom Brady of science, as he liked to refer to himself. If you follow football or sports, you know Brady. If you know science, you know Alan.

He also considered himself to be a very generous, service-focused individual. When I worked with him on his personal brand and influence strategy, he wanted to articulate and leverage his “servant leader” brand. I asked him to clarify what service meant to him. He explained, “it’s giving to someone else when they need help or advice. If I can offer it, I do. When someone needs me, it means I’ll be there.” Okay, I’m tracking with you, Alan.

Then came the hard part.

I asked him to share a few examples of times he’s been of service, who he served and what the conditions were. He first told me about a young research fellow who’d joined his team. This person reported to Alan and was nervous about being in his presence. This flattered Alan so he spent extra time explaining things and introducing him to others who can help his career. This was his service.

There was the community organization that asked him to come speak, was giving him an honorary award and in turn Alan waved his traditional speaking fee to show his support of their work. This was also his service.

The more we talked, the more I learned that while he intended to have a servant’s heart, he did so where it served him most. The young research fellow flattered Alan and thus received job perks. The organization honored Alan and in turn he gave a presentation. Is that how we define service?

I asked him if he'd consider doing those things anonymously or without attribution or credit. This did not sit well with him. "How am I building influence if I don't get credit?" To Alan, if the tree fell in the forest and no one was there to capture it for Instagram (tagging him, of course), it didn't fall.

And therein lies the issue: Service lives in your heart, not on your résumé.

Alan believed he could outsource his service and build influence by strategically aligning his name and presence where it benefitted him. He sought opportunities where the profit margins were highest (not the greatest value to beneficiaries), sought credit and recognition for what he gave ("is someone filming this?") and wasn't willing to put skin in the game and take the risks to serve. He couldn't imagine being laughed at, coming across as unknowing or exposing his vulnerabilities to learn and embrace what his audience needed from him.

In the end, Alan remained scripted, polished, rehearsed... and ineffective.

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Like leadership, influence is a mindset and a commitment to an unwavering belief in your mission, vision, and message. Whether you seek more confidence to speak up in a meeting, pursue a promotion or job, lead an initiative, or start a movement, building influence follows several key steps:

1. Understand why you want to have influence. Just because you can doesn't mean you should. Why do you want to speak up more, take the lead, be credible, and be seen? Do you feel being more influential will reinforce your purpose for being here? Get clear on your "why" before trying to assert yourself.
2. Identify who you want to influence. No, you don't get to say, "Everyone in the entire world." It's not feasible. Who are your people—the ones you care about and seek to serve, lift up, and empower? If you don't come from the community or team of people you want to influence, then learn all you can about their needs, goals, interests, and fears before trying to influence them.
3. Decide how you'll influence others. Through consistent actions, communications, and relationships, you will show those you want to influence that who you say you are truly is who you are. In the case of Andrea (above), she lost her influence when she shifted her actions to being someone inconsistent with who she'd told us she was.
4. Figure out where you'll build influence. This is a tricky one because to have influence, we need to see you. You can't hide in the back of the room—unknown and unseen—to influence the conversations you want to impact. Sit at the table, raise your hand, make yourself known, and take the chance that what you have to say is exactly what we (your team, community, world) need to hear right now.

## WOMEN STRUGGLE HERE

For women, this is challenging. Old-school influence techniques taught that executive presence was a key to having influence. Awesome. Except that the model for executive presence was typically a middle-aged white man in a black suit and red power tie (think *Mad Men*). So... what do we do if we're not middle-aged, a man, wear a suit, or fit that mold?

In speaking to women—and anyone who's felt marginalized or underrepresented—who want to speak up and speak out but don't fit the classic definition of "executive presence," I offer this explanation from my book:

***Many of us have been told [to] ... wear the right clothes; pause at the right moments; project stoicism; resisting displays of emotion ("don't cry at work"); ... and hit all the key talking points in perfectly timed choreography. Today, we've lost the humanity in our voice, the ability to connect with others; we've forgotten how to authentically build trust across communities (or even inside our own organization) to create truly sustainable influence where it matters. The old rules for executive presence don't work anymore.***

And, as we seek to be active parts of important conversations, the old rules of sitting back and waiting our turn are done. In *The New Rules of Influence*, I suggest:

***Let's reframe how we think about presence and use "influence" to describe a more inclusive, encompassing, and global goal. Don't we all want to be taken seriously, have our voices heard, be valued for who (and how) we are, and serve those around us in authentic and meaningful ways? The red tie is done.***



## THE POWER OF PERCEPTION

I believe you can appreciate and embrace what makes you, you, and what makes you special and use those attributes in positive ways to share a message that's important to you. Perception is a key factor here: It's human behavior to judge others by what we see and hear. Bias, stereotypes, options, and beliefs are part of how we (as humans) function and keep ourselves protected. Others judge us, and sometimes it's wholly unfair, yes, but it is happening.

In my experience, studying perception for several decades, other people's perceptions and beliefs about us can be wrong or based on incomplete information. This happens. What we can do to mitigate negative or erroneous perception is to drive perception and show up consistently as who we are (online and in person), surround ourselves with people who validate our values and value proposition, and engage in meaningful conversations around topics that reinforce why we believe we're here (our influence). Then, there's the context that can refute or dispel someone's mistaken perception of us and bring them around to see us as we want.

To create true followership, where your ideas, vision, and message are received and followed as intended, it can't be fake.

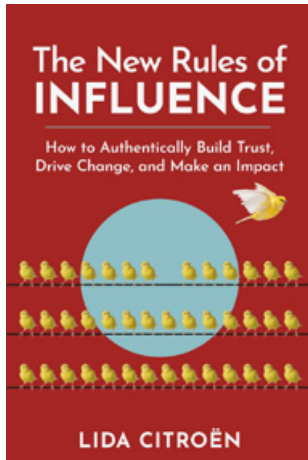
In a world of social media pressure to conform and adopt (click “Like”), I would encourage you to be brave enough to lean forward, to celebrate who you are (and how you are), and to embrace everything that makes you.

Today, we do see examples of individuals emerging into impactful roles of influence—leading key initiatives that serve populations, driving meaningful conversations around the boardroom, and launching projects that change the complexions of communities around the globe. These individuals understand that the old rules of influence don’t work. We see examples of voices from underrepresented groups rising in volume while not focusing on just being loud to get noticed.

All our voices matter. You can’t just slap on a red power tie and be respected. **And you certainly can’t fake it.** 📌



# Info



Ready to dig deeper into the book?  
Buy a copy of [The New Rules of Influence](#).

Want copies for your organization or for an event?  
We can help: [customerservice@porchlightbooks.com](mailto:customerservice@porchlightbooks.com)  
800-236-7323

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lida Citroën is a personal branding and reputation management expert. She is a keynote speaker, trainer, LinkedIn learning instructor, TEDx speaker and executive coach. She helps global influencers, CEOs, executives, entrepreneurs and military veterans amplify their presence, manage the impression they make with target audiences and increase their authentic and unique voice and value. She is a contributor to [military.com](http://military.com) and she is the author of six previous books.

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