



Q1 INFLUENCE: STEWARDSHIP

What Does it Mean to Influence?

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Quarterly



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Dave Gilmore reflects on stewardship and internal and external forces

What does it mean to influence? The ideas of changing and altering come to mind. When one influences another, the other's perspective is often altered, their mind changes or their way of behaving might be affected. Be it for better or worse, the other is changed.

The built environment industry is a significant long-term influencer of societies. The infrastructure, buildings, gathering places and dwellings it designs and constructs for humanity alter everything after they are realized.

To influence means "to flow into." When water flows into a space, it simultaneously fills and empties. It fills the emptiness and empties the space. It dislodges once-hardened attachments and dissolves solids, clarifying and magnifying what is to be seen. Influencing is a catalytic dynamic that triggers a chain of changes and alterations.

A few years ago, I was privileged to sit with the CEO of one of the world's largest companies. My firm was negotiating an acquisition his company was pursuing, and he wanted to meet face-to-face with the lead negotiator representing the seller. I was the guy.

I was keenly interested in how the target would change once acquired. How much would remain the same? How much would be altered? I was looking and thinking too myopically.

We enjoyed some coffee and afternoon snacks as we discussed the overall global economy, regional distinctions and speculative possibilities. Our conversation was relationally engaging and intellectually stimulating. Toward the end of the exchange, I asked my question regarding change.

My host smiled and crossed his legs while he rested his loosely-clasped hands in his lap. His response: “Dave, we are inclined to move very slowly. Our critics often liken us to glaciers, which move so slowly no one notices. But like a glacier, once we move, everything in our sphere is altered. We recreate markets by our intentional and planned influence.”

This genre of influence is from the outside-to-outside. Like waves splashing against shoreline stone, the influence reshapes the stone over time. Like a sculptor chiseling away at a piece of marble, the marble is newly shaped to resemble the image the artist envisioned from the beginning. One might label such influence as “forceful persistence” to achieve intended outcomes.

But there’s another, perhaps more powerful, manner of influence. It’s not always observable while it’s occurring, but it’s radically transformational because it moves from inside-to-outside.

Such influence begins when the thinking of the thinker alters. When this occurs, one’s entire point of view, and sometimes one’s worldview, changes to such a degree that those influenced are radically transformed. Such change manifests in external,

observable behaviors. This is a powerful influence type because it emanates from the core of the person.

At DesignIntelligence, we often say, “If we can convince you of something, we can most likely unconvince you of it. But if the convincing becomes conviction, rarely can we alter your perspective.” Convictions are formed by time and experience.

We see both genres of influence at work in the development of convictions. The passage of time serves as a persistent force altering just about everything. We observe it as an outside dynamic, though inside dimensions are equally altered.

Experiences also serve as powerful forces in altering views and forming convictions. Most humans have repeated experiences that have reinforced a point proffered into a conviction held. Many of us have experienced “defining moments” that deeply impacted us across multiple dimensions of being. These defining moments are usually sudden, unexpected and marked with awe. We are often speechless when they occur. Be it a deep sadness or an exhilarating gasp, we can be at a loss for words to express the depth of alteration we’re experiencing.

The combination of these two independent forces makes for an unexpected interdependent outcome. Time and experience do their work to form and fashion one’s deepest convictions and worldviews. They set the course for our observed and hidden behaviors.

As leaders whose lives lived set the course of influence for so many others, I wonder just how cognizant we might be of the power and stewardship of influence. Are we front-of-mind conscious how our decisions alter people’s lives? In some cases,

the outcomes of our decision-making are imperceptible, not noticed or not directly connected to change when they occur. In those instances, our initial decision can be lost in the extended string of causes and effects we experience.

In many cases, our decisions can be directly identified as the catalytic cause of deep wide influence. Again: I wonder just how cognizant we might be of the power and stewardship of influence?



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Stewardship connotes assigned responsibility to care for, protect, nurture, oversee, sustain and grow the object of the stewardship. As stewards of influence, leaders are assigned the responsibility to influence their organizations, clients and interfacing stakeholders with care. Leadership is called to seek win-win-win outcomes for those they influence.

Too often leaders aren't aware of their responsibility and act in absurd ways, generating wave after wave of negative destructive influence. Organizations are negatively impacted, clients are rightfully disappointed, all because leadership didn't understand the implications and ramifications of influence triggered through decision-making.

Another kind of influence results in even deeper damage than irresponsible decision-making: the negligence of indecision. Not deciding is making a decision with thoughtless, irresponsible consequences. For authentic leaders, this is a non-starter. For pretenders, this is common.

Delaying a decision to gather all the information necessary for an intended best outcome is important. But that's not the same as indecision. Indecision is usually rooted in fear, uncertainty and ignorance. Pretenders who haven't done the hard work of fact-gathering, applying intelligence and analyzing possible outcomes simply don't decide. They kick the can down the road. Most pretenders are people-pleasers and fear the displeasure of others that might expose them as pretenders.

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed many pretenders who were frozen in fear. Their power to positively influence their organizations, clients and important stakeholders was replaced

by indecisiveness that led to tremendous losses. We've been witness to much of these losses over the past two years.

Stewardship of influence begins with taking inventory of all the assets and responsibilities under your care. What are leaders charged with influencing? Most importantly, it's the people they are leading. It's the partners and suppliers empowering their go to market effectiveness. It's the clients they serve.

As a leader, what experiences are you creating and leveraging to positively influence the lives of others? What convictions are you optimistically expressing in the myriad places your presence is known and felt? What voice of influence are you using to speak into the think-spaces, workplaces and marketplaces in which you regularly interact?

As leaders of the most influential industry on earth, the built environment industry, how are you stewarding your role of the best for the most?

What kind of leader are you?

Dave Gilmore is president and CEO of DesignIntelligence