

Influencer: The Power to Change Anything

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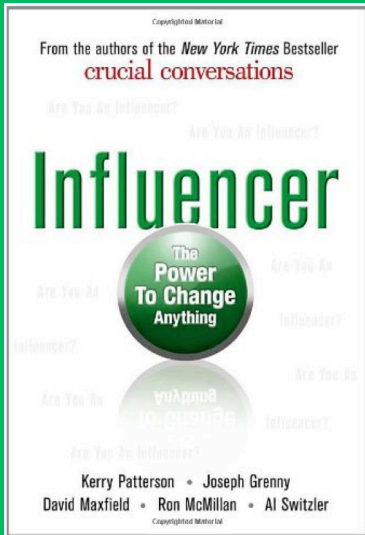
A Brief Summary....

Influencer is a motivational non-fiction book that provides the foundations for individuals to change lives. The book uses a multi-step approach that claims, if used effectively, it can help people influence anything from their own eating habits to eradicating diseases in developing countries. In Part I of the book, the authors explain that people often spend more time coping with their problems instead of trying to solve them (i.e. coping with the HIV/AIDS epidemic instead of stopping the spread of it all together). This part of the book goes on to describe how behaviours need to be identified. Part II of the book explains how to be an influencer based on personal, social, and structural aspects.

About the Authors....

Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, David Maxfield, Ron McMillan, and Al Switzler are the leaders of VitalSmarts, an innovator in best practices training products and services that has taught over two million people and worked with more than 300 of the Fortune 500 companies.

VitalSmarts is an innovator in corporate training and organizational performance. VitalSmarts has helped many Fortune 500 companies realize significant results using a proven method for driving rapid, sustainable and measurable change in behaviors.



“The promise of this book is that almost all the profound, pervasive, and persistent problems we face in our lives, our companies, and our world can be solved”
(pg. 4).

Inside this issue....

A Brief Summary.....	1
About the Authors.....	1
Part I.....	2
Part II (Model).....	3
Part II Cont'd.....	4
Questions.....	5
Critical Evaluation.....	5

Part I

The Power to Change Anything

Main Concepts (Chapters 1 – 3)

1. The Serenity Trap

“Instead of owning up to our responsibility of becoming effective agents of change (...) we grumble, threaten, ridicule, and more often than not, we cope” (pg. 8).

2. Search for Behaviors

“[Influencers] don’t develop an influence strategy until they’ve carefully identified the specific behaviors they want to change” (pg. 26).

3. Vicarious Experiences

“Vicarious modeling is one of the most accessible influence tools a parent, coach, community leader, or executive can employ” (pg. 53).

Chapter 1: You’re an Influencer

This chapter does a great job of setting the reader up for the rest of the book. It captures interest by introducing examples that will be used throughout the rest of the book. These examples range from a man who wants to change his eating habits, to a team who wants to eradicate a parasite epidemic in Africa and Asia, and everything in between.

Chapter 1 also describes what the authors call the “serenity trap”. In short, the serenity trap is humanity’s tendency to cope with their problems instead of solving them (i.e. conferences on HIV/AIDS focusing on coping with the epidemic instead of stopping it all together). The authors explain that we need to realize this on-going phenomenon in our lives and change it.



Chapter 2: Find Vital Behaviors

In Chapter 2, the authors explain that influencers always identify what behaviour(s) are causing the problem, and can only be successful if this is done. The book criticizes other motivational conferences, books, etc. for focusing on outcomes instead of behaviours. In other words, these other information facets tell where you should be (in a delightful motivational way) but do not tell you how to get there.

Perhaps the most informative concept of this chapter was “positive deviance” (pg. 35). Positive deviance can be described as finding a behaviour that has overcome a problem when others have failed. The authors describe an example where a non-profit company finds an African village that has been able to maintain very low infection rates of a water-borne parasite compared to the surrounding villages that use the same water source and have epidemic rates of the infection. So what behaviors are allowing them to keep the parasite away? This is an example of positive deviation. The authors also go on to describe how this can be applied to other lives as well.

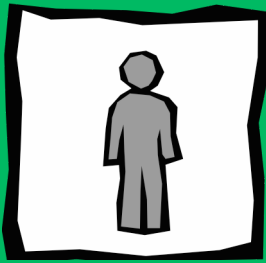
Chapter 3: Change the Way You Change Minds

Though there is a lot said in Chapter 3, the authors basically explain that people can change their minds through living vicariously through someone else or a story. They use the example of radio shows in developing countries. An example that is used in the novel centers on the problem of illiteracy in Mexico. Most residents in Mexico City have a radio. An influencer used this means by creating a day-time radio soap opera that focused on a young man that wanted to learn how to read. Soon thousands of Mexican citizens were going to literacy classes.

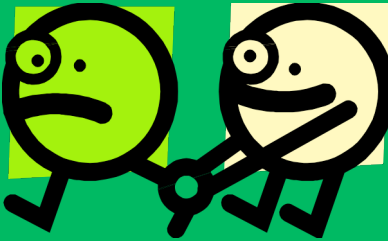
Part II

*Make Change
Inevitable*

Personal



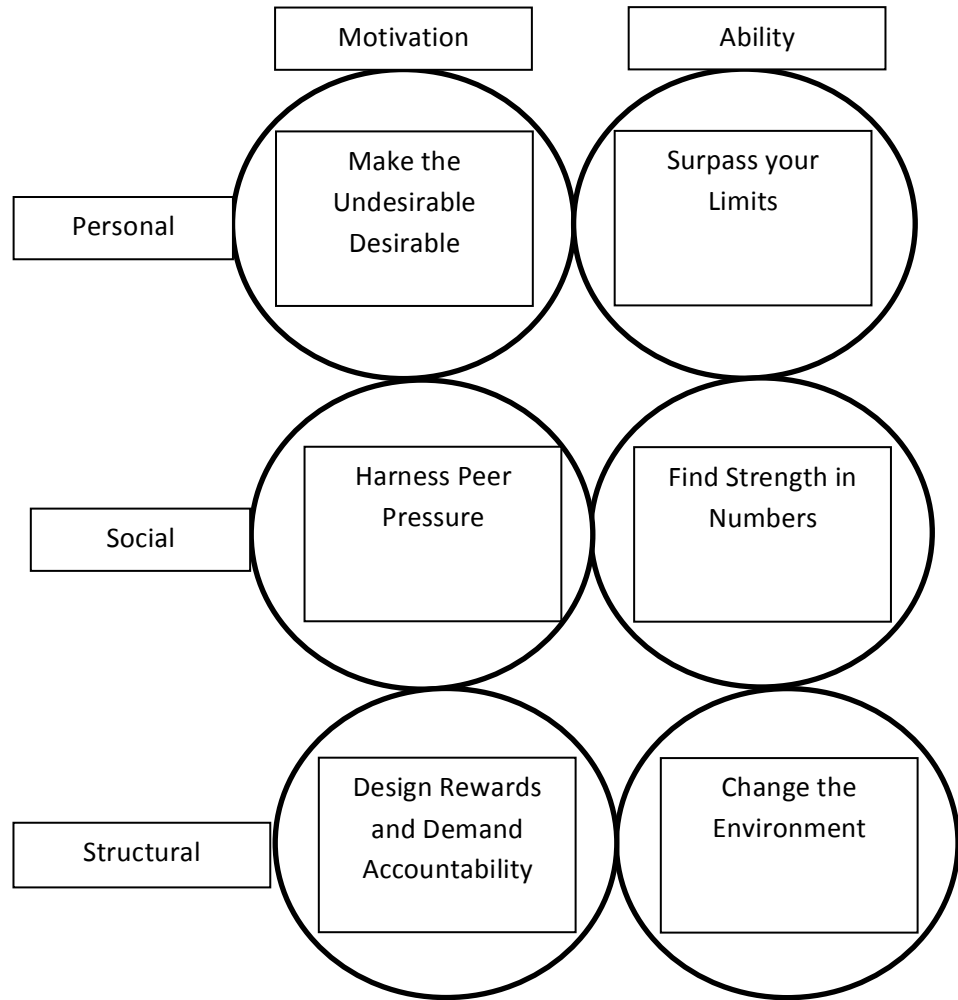
Social



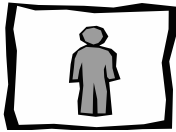
Structural



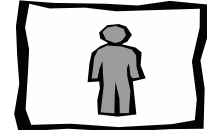
Part II of the book centers around the following model for influencing:



“With this model at the ready, influence geniuses know exactly which forces to bring into play in order to over determine their chances of success” (pg. 78).



Personal



- First you must get people to try the activity. If it is trying to get criminals to begin a positive lifestyle, they have to be immersed in it. If it is an individual trying to lose weight, they must experience a regimented work out.
- Moral thinking is a strong influence on people's decision making. Humanizing people is the best way to make moral decisions. Do not look at people as simply numbers or statistics.
- People are more likely to respond to ideas or change when they are not being talked at or lectured, but rather asked about what they want and how they view their current behaviour.
- It is important to devote your time to clear, attainable, and specific behaviours. When strong emotions take over, take time to think before reacting.



Social



- Smart influencers spend a disproportionate amount of time with formal leaders to ensure that the leaders are using their social influence to encourage vital behaviours.
- It is important that if you are taking on a personal behaviour change yourself that you enlist the help of a social support network.
- Discuss changing norms and discuss the undiscussable. Often norms are taboo to discuss, however you can change this by using vicarious experiences talked about earlier in the issue.
- Social capital or power in numbers is one of the best ways to ensure success. If there is a large support network, people will feel more confident in changing their behaviour.
- “Turn a me problem into a we problem” (pg. 181). Build social capital in order to resolve persistent and resistant behaviours.
- Group solidarity is extremely important in preventing or influencing change on behaviour. If one person breaks this solidarity, the whole change process is put into question.



Structural



- Do not reward people for engaging in positive behaviour that is already satisfying as it will cause them to lose their intrinsic motivation if the reward is taken away.
- Ensure that rewards, if given, come soon, are gratifying, and are clearly linked to the vital behaviour.
- Do not wait for amazing results. It is important to award small improvements in vital behaviour.
- Although punishment should be avoided, it is sometimes necessary. Make sure that fair warning is given before punishing.
- Sometimes it is necessary to change the environment. Often people will feel more emotionally far apart the more physically far apart they are. The authors call this concept “propinquity”.

*Some
Questions I
thought of
while
reading...*

How many problems do I cope with instead of trying to solve?

Who are the people in my life that I think influence my behaviours?

Does my social peer group support positive behaviour?

What are some attainable goals that I can set that would help me become an influencer instead of coping with my problems?

Personal Critical Evaluation

This book was inspirational and thought-provoking cover to cover. Through its many and diverse examples, I was able to picture some problems in my own life that I would like to have influence over. I did not realize how much we as a society cope with problems instead of simply overcoming them.

As someone who is skeptical about self-help books like ones such as *Influencer*, I felt as though I could follow along easily and wanted to read a good portion each time I sat down with the book. There was not a moment in my read where I thought the authors were lacking authenticity. The advice it gives is understandable and I always felt as if it was something that I could achieve. The multiple examples given help to explain each concept in full, and also provided a way to look at the advice in many ways (i.e. rehabilitating criminals in the mass to helping employee moral).

I also was impressed by the diversity of examples. There were multiple examples of women influencers, developing world influencers, and low socio-economic influencers. This was a pleasant surprise for me as I had assumed the book would focus mainly on executive (and presumably male) influencers.

With that said however, one of my critiques of the book is that it has too many examples. Sometimes I felt bombarded with examples, and wished that it would focus on only a few. I understand the point the book was trying to make that virtually anyone, anywhere can become an influencer, but at some points in the book I found myself questioning why they were not using examples mentioned before. Perhaps this could be that they were using the convenience of examples fitting for that specific advice.

Overall I would suggest this book to anyone who feels like they are swimming in problems. It gives both perspective and direction as to ways to overcome this and become an agent of change. This book is definitely an inspirational read that I would say can appeal to any audience that is willing to listen.