

PREFACE

Whether you lead at work, in your church, in a community organization, or within your own family, leadership often begins long before we feel ready for it. Some of us step into responsibility because we were asked. Others step in because we felt a desire to contribute to something bigger than ourselves. Either way, leadership has a way of exposing parts of us we didn't know needed attention.

For a long time, I believed leadership was about being firm, decisive, and strong enough to carry the weight on my own. I've lost opportunities, relationships, and trust by leading from a position rather than a connection. I've also been on the receiving end of leadership that relied more on authority than influence. My experiences have taught me that people comply with authority and grow under its influence.

This book is about earning that influence.

Over the next few pages, I'm inviting you to reflect on who you are when you speak and how your life experiences have shaped the way you communicate. You'll also explore the difference between authority that's given and influence that's earned.

Consider this book a space to slow down and study what's beneath your voice.

I pray that as you read, you gain language for experiences you've felt but never named. And that you grow into a way of leading that allows others to trust you, follow you, and grow alongside you.

SECTION 1: THE HEART OF YOU

“So let’s not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don’t give up.”

(Galatians 6:9, NLT)

CHAPTER 1

FOUNDATIONS OF INFLUENCE

Let's start from the top. I feel like you may know this already, but just in case you may not know, I'm going to share it: You can inherit authority, but you can not inherit influence. Influence is not something people hand you because you carry a title or because your name sits at the top of an organizational chart. Influence is earned. It is entwined, through the way you speak to people, the way you respond to challenges and changes, and the way you carry yourself when no one is applauding. For years, I believed influence started the day you became "the leader," and people finally saw you in your role. But real influence begins long before the opportunity ever arrives. It starts behind the scenes, in the unnoticed work, in the rooms where no one is evaluating you. It is that unseen preparation that shapes the kind of leader you will eventually become publicly.

If you were to trace the story of any respected leader, you would find the same pattern: a season of obscurity, strength building, and faithfulness—all occurring when it felt like no progress was happening at all. That season (the season most people overlook) is the foundation of earned influence. And if you're reading this book, chances are you're in one of those seasons right now. Maybe you're leading a team at work, organizing volunteers at your church, mentoring students, or juggling the expectations of a community committee. Or maybe you're the person everyone depends on, even though your title doesn't reflect the weight you carry. No matter what your leadership looks like today, I want you to know something important: Your influence is being shaped long before anyone recognizes it. Everything you've lived, served, survived, and learned has contributed to the leader you are becoming.

This truth is seen clearly in the story of David. When most people hear his name, they picture Goliath on the battlefield, the giant, the victory. But David's influence didn't begin with the slingshot moment. His foundation was built in the quiet, unnoticed work that nobody valued. David was the youngest of eight brothers, overlooked by his own family and assigned the least glamorous responsibility: tending sheep. He wasn't trained as a warrior, he wasn't old enough to fight, and he certainly wasn't positioned for leadership. Yet it was in those fields away from applause, titles, and the spotlight that David learned to lead, protect, listen, and fight for what mattered. And he learned to trust what he had been given.

While his brothers were positioned on the front lines of battle, David was positioned in an outdoor classroom of preparation. So when he finally stood before Saul and later before Goliath, David didn't draw confidence from theory or talent. He drew confidence from his track record with God. And when Saul questioned David, saying, "...There's no way you can fight this Philistine and possibly win! You're only a boy, and he's a man of war since his youth," (1 Samuel 17:33, NLT). David responded to Saul with evidence, saying: "The Lord who rescued me from the claws of the lion and the bear will rescue me from this Philistine!" What David was conveying to Saul was that he had earned his influence, which came from his unseen experience tending to sheep.

When it was time to go face the Philistine (who was over nine feet tall, Saul tried to dress David in Saul's own armor, suggesting that David's leadership had to look a certain way. David refused and proceeded to the battle with five stones, a staff, and a sling. I believe David's belief that he could defeat the giant outweighed the power of any tool he could use in the fight.

Your influence starting point kicks off the day you take responsibility for the assignment in front of you, no matter how small

it seems. The earning of influence is happening when no one is clapping, you're carrying expectations that feel heavy and at times unfair, you're making decisions that cause conflict and require courage, and you're modeling resilience in seasons of uncertainty. People follow leaders whose actions they trust behind their words. They watch how you handle pressure, how you treat others, how you respond to conflict, and how you grow. The more they watch, the more they decide whether or not to follow you.

Influence can not be demanded, but it can be demonstrated.

My first introduction to leadership began at sixteen years old in the television studio of my high school. I was appointed News Director for our high school's morning show, a role that required technical skills, quick decision-making, and constant communication. At sixteen, I believed leadership meant dominance and control, and I led from that mindset. I raised my voice when I was frustrated. I called people out publicly. At the time, I believed being firm and aggressive was how leaders earned respect. What I hadn't yet developed was emotional regulation, compassion, or the awareness that true influence is rooted in trust, not fear. Looking back, I realize the teenage version of me was doing her best with the tools she had. And many emerging leaders start in that exact place, trying to prove to themselves they are capable of leading, while unknowingly pushing people away. If that is where you find yourself today, this book is not here to shame you. It is here to help you see where your opportunities for growth truly lie.

After more than fifteen years leading in government, bi-vocational ministry, secondary education, higher education, interscholastic athletics, and hybrid-entrepreneurship, the greatest lesson I have learned is simple: **the most powerful form of leadership is rooted in how you speak to people, not the authority you hold over them.** People follow connection. They follow leaders who help them feel

seen, heard, and genuinely valued. They follow the leader who remembers their humanity. That is the heart of earned influence.

This book will teach you exactly how to cultivate that kind of leadership. As you continue reading, you will learn to communicate with confidence, and connection so people follow you voluntarily because they believe in you and feel honored to grow with you.

Leadership is an opportunity to do good. Influence is an opportunity to lift others. And your voice, your unique God-shaped voice, is one of the most powerful tools you have been given to do both.

“Therefore, whenever we have the opportunity, we should do good to everyone - especially to those in the family of faith.”

(Galatians 6:10, NLT)

CHAPTER 8

WHAT PEOPLE EXPERIENCE WHEN THEY SEE YOU

In 2023, I had an idea to host a public speaking class. The first thought that crossed my mind was, “Girl, who do you think you are? Oh, now you’re a teacher all of a sudden?” Whew. That inner critic that lives inside all of us really does not want you or me to win, at all!

Eventually, I faced my fear. I put together a curriculum, built a landing page, and decided to go for it. I priced my tickets at \$199 for early bird and \$249 for general admission. Seven people signed up. One person even reached out and asked if I had a VIP option, which I didn’t.

I remember asking Leonard, my boyfriend at the time, “Babe, what could I even offer for VIP?” He shrugged and said, “I don’t know, babe, but it sounds like she just wants extra time with you.” So that’s exactly what I gave her.

When I hosted that event, I was genuinely surprised. Half of the room was people I didn’t know. One person had even traveled from out of state to be there. I was beta-testing whether people would actually show up, whether they would trust me to teach something I loved, and whether I was even qualified to do this. And I proved to myself that I could.

Fast forward to today: I’ve worked with over 100 students through my virtual and in-person classes. And it’s always the same conversation. No matter where they’re from or what their background is, they all tell me some version of the same challenge:

“I want to sound more polished. I want to feel confident when I’m speaking. I want people to take me seriously. I want to avoid the

‘umms’ and ‘ahhs’. I want to command a room. I want to stop being so nervous.”

Almost every student can relate to at least four out of six of those statements. And it opened my eyes. So many people are using public speaking every single day, but they’re doing it fearfully, anxiously, and without confidence.

That’s what I wanted to change.

And if you’re reading this, I know you’re probably ready for me to finally start breaking down the how. But I need you to trust me on this: spending time understanding your “who” before jumping into the how is going to put you way ahead of where I was when I started.

Let’s jump into the art of communication and how you use it to earn your influence.

One of my private coaching students taught me something that completely reframed how I look at communication. He was a trumpet player in a competitive performing band. He told me his band director used to say, “People hear with their eyes,” when giving horn section directives about their body movement during performances. His band teacher was reminding the instrumentalists that how they sound is not the only area of their performance being evaluated. How they look matters too.

When you hear that, it almost feels unfair. But when you really sit with it, you realize how true it is. The moment you stand in front of an audience, whether that’s one person or a thousand, they’re not just listening to you. They’re watching you. They’re scanning everything: how you stand, how you move, how you are dressed, how you carry yourself, long before your words begin to leave your lips.

Studies show that people form impressions within milliseconds of seeing someone. Often, they decide whether they trust you based on your appearance, posture, and body language before a single word is spoken. In fact, researchers at Princeton found that it takes just a tenth of a second to make a judgment about someone's trustworthiness (Willis & Todorov, 2006).

People are deciding whether or not they trust you based on what they see before they even decide to process what you're saying. It's not always a fair game, but it's one I want you to be aware of. The sooner you become aware of it, the sooner you can take ownership of what you can control.

This is why I push students who take my classes and workshops; and clients who invest in my coaching programs, I push them to study themselves. To study *their* bodies. To study how they communicate physically, because your body will tell the truth even when your mouth wants to pretend. Your body reveals your confidence, your anxiety, your fatigue, your excitement, all of it.

When I work with clients, we break their visual competency into four specific areas to master:

Your Feet Tell the First Story.

Most nervous speakers, you'll find them pacing or rocking. They'll walk back and forth excessively. It's a clear sign of discomfort. Your body is trying to release tension through motion.

Are you a pacer? You won't know until you review a recording of yourself. Once you do, here's what to keep in mind: your feet should be planted and facing your audience. The direction of your feet often indicates the direction of your attention. If you tend to fidget or shift, consider wearing stable shoes. Avoid heels that are too high, narrow,

or slippery. Ladies, if your feet are sliding forward in your shoes, that discomfort will show up in your body language.

As a feminine woman, I wear heels when I speak, but I try to choose a platform heel or something with a soft arch that keeps me balanced.

Then Come Your Hands.

Hand gestures are powerful, but they need intention. Too much movement can be distracting. But intentional hand gestures that align with your words can help drive your message home. If you're unsure how your hands move when you speak, watch a recording and focus solely on that. Do your gestures match the meaning of your words? Are they helping or hurting your delivery?

Posture

Posture tells on you, too. Fatigue shows up in your shoulders first. When you're tired or unsure, your body leans in, slouches, or collapses inward. Try standing in front of a mirror and tell your body to stand tall. Focus on the placement of your back, shoulders, and chin. Feel that positioning. Store it in your body like your favorite driver's seat setting in the car. That's your posture baseline. When you're not in front of a mirror, recall how that felt and reset.

Eye Contact

This one is my favorite to coach on. I can always tell who the speaker feels safest with in the room because that's who they'll look at the most. But eye contact isn't just about comfort, it's about connection. Avoiding eye contact sends a signal to your audience that you're either nervous or not too confident in what you're saying. And if you wouldn't trust someone who couldn't look you in the eye, why should they trust you?

CHAPTER 10

BUILDING TRUST THROUGH YOUR WORDS

There is the difference between talking and communicating.

Talking is producing a sound from your lips that can be translated into words that are and heard by others. Others can hear the sound, they can process the sound.

Babies and toddlers can talk. Some animals can even “talk” with a few words.

Cashiers talk. Church ushers talk. Cruise staff talk. Movie Theater host talk. Security Officers talk. Talking provides an information transfer.

On the other hand, communicating is an intentional sound that connects the speaker to the listener.

Dog trainers communicate. Therapists communicate. Teachers communicate. Lawyers communicate. Receptionists communicate. Bank tellers communicate.

Communication provides a knowledge transfer. Great communicators are deeply revered for the impact of the words they share with those that they influence.

So, when I’m teaching the skill of verbal competency, I am overemphasizing the importance of what is being said.

Words are not merely information to be shared, they help to formulate HOW the information will be received. When words are intentionally chosen, they bring clarity, emotion, and imagery to the listener.

Let's look at these two sentences:

“For the next 90 days, I want us focused on improving our performance next quarter.”

“For the next 90 days, I want us focused on three things: serving customers faster, finishing projects under budget, and celebrating every small win.”

Both sentences talk about performance. Only one gives you something you can clearly picture and move toward.

As a leader, your words are not just sentences. Your words are instructions, invitations, affirmations, road maps, and sometimes, healing.

This makes verbal competency an integral part of building your influence.

What Verbal Competency Really Is

When I say, “verbal competency,” I’m talking about:

- The words you choose
- The phrases you repeat
- The pictures you paint in people’s minds
- The way those words land in someone’s body and spirit

Verbal competency answers questions like:

- Does what I’m saying make sense to the people listening?
- Does it sound like me or like I’m pretending to be someone I’m not?
- Do my words create clarity?
- Do people feel built up or torn down after I speak?

You already have a verbal style.

The question is: Is it helping you earn your influence?

Simplicity is a Superpower

Some of the most influential leaders I've worked with don't use the fanciest vocabulary. They're not trying to win a spelling bee. They're trying to win hearts, shift culture, and move people toward action. That's why one of the first shifts I ask my students to make is this:

Trade an impressive speech for a speech that can be immediately understood.

Instead of saying:

- “We need to strategically optimize our approach to maximize engagement.”

Try:

- “Let's figure out one better way to connect with people this week.”

Instead of:

- “Per my last email...”

Try:

- “Circling back on this, what do you need from me to move forward?”

SECTION 3: THE START OF YOU

This is my command—be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.” (Joshua 1:9, NLT)

CHAPTER 12

TRUST EROSION

We often think trust is broken only in big, critical moments, like when something said in confidence is shared publicly, or when a promise is made and never fulfilled. Those are trust breaches, and they sting deeply. But in leadership, trust is not always eroded in one moment. More often, it shows up in small, consistent ways.

It happens when we overpromise and underdeliver. When we commit to a meeting and show up late. When we forget to send the materials, we said we would. When we tell a team member, we'll advocate for them and then get too busy to follow through. These small breaks, left unaddressed, slowly erode credibility.

And without trust, there is no influence.

Here are some subtle, less obvious ways we as leaders breed mistrust—ways that seem small in the moment but create big cracks over time.

1. Setting Standards We Don't Model

One of the fastest ways to break trust with your team is to set a standard that you yourself cannot meet.

If you expect your team to always have a positive attitude, do you bring that same energy when you walk into a meeting after a stressful day? If your standard is direct communication, do you address issues with honesty, or do you avoid them and hope they fix themselves? If you tell people to prioritize their family, do you model that in your

family by honoring family commitments that come at the expense of disappointing others?

Your behavior needs to consistently match your message.

2. Living in Fragments

Another way trust weakens is through fragmentation. This happens when we show up as different versions of ourselves depending on where we are.

We have a “work version” of ourselves, a “family version,” and a “social version.” Each one adapts to its environment, and while that may seem like flexibility, what it often creates is disconnection.

When you live fragmented, your development becomes fragmented too.

Instead of compounding your growth—building on the same principles and core values across all areas of life, you start over in each environment. Every version of you needs development. Every version of you needs healing. Every version of you needs to learn communication, conflict resolution, and self-advocacy.

When you choose to be one version of yourself everywhere, your growth is continuous, it compounds and matures.

Let the calm, self-aware version of you that leads meetings also lead your family. Let the thoughtful version of you that encourages your friends also engage your coworkers. Let the compassionate version of you that prays for others also show up for the people who challenge you.

When you do this, there’s no confusion about who you are.

When there is a disconnect between who you are at work and who you are at home, that is your yellow flag signaling misalignment.

Whenever you are misaligned, you are more likely to experience exhaustion and carry a weight you are not designed to carry. What you are designed to carry, you will be graced for (giving you provision to carry out your role with divine power, strength, wisdom, etc.).

3. Sometimey Integrity

Integrity is not location-based. It's not something we put on like a blazer before a meeting and take off once we get home. Integrity is consistent alignment of your actions, character, and words across every environment.

Some people believe that what happens outside of work doesn't matter as long as you're effective inside the workplace. I disagree. The person you are when no one is watching is the same person that people will eventually meet when pressure is high.

If you lack integrity in your personal life, it will show up in your professional relationships. If you're inconsistent in your commitments outside of work, it will eventually bleed into your leadership style.

When you are the same person in every space - honest and accountable, it builds a deep sense of safety for those who follow you. They know what to expect from you. There's no guessing which version of you will show up today.

That kind of consistency creates psychological safety. It builds loyalty. And it invites others to bring their whole selves to the table too.

“If people are proud, they will soon become ashamed. But if people are humble, they become wise.” (Proverbs 11:2, EASY)

CHAPTER 14

EARN YOUR INFLUENCE

Influence is about what your team believes about your *heart*. Do they believe you're for them? Do they feel safe bringing you the hard things? Do they trust that you care more about their growth than your image?

That's not something you can demand. That's something you have to earn.

Earning your influence is not a one-time achievement. It's a lifestyle. Most of your influence is earned when nobody's clapping and nobody's posting about it.

- Influence is built when you return the phone call you said you would.
- Influence is built when you apologize without adding excuses.
- Influence is built when you keep someone's secret instead of turning their vulnerability into casual conversation.
- Influence is built when you show up prepared because you value people's time.

Those moments don't seem glamorous. No one is handing you an award for following through on a Tuesday email. But every time you do what you said you would do, you make a small deposit into someone's trust account.

Think of your influence like a bank.

Every act of integrity, consistency, and care is a deposit. Every broken promise, dismissive comment, or careless action is a withdrawal.

You cannot withdraw what you have not been consistently depositing.

When a crisis hits, when you have to make a tough call, when you need to ask more of your team than usual that's when the balance in that trust account really shows. If you've been making deposits over time, people will lean in, even if they don't love the decision, because they trust your heart. If you haven't, you may technically "win" the moment with authority, but you'll lose something deeper in the process.

Earning your influence means deciding that the small, quiet choices matter just as much as the big, public ones.

Consistency Over Charisma

We live in a world that celebrates charisma. The loudest voice, the flashiest presentation, the most confident personality, those are often the people we're told are "natural leaders."

Charisma says, "Look at me."

Consistency says, "You can count on me."

People might initially be drawn to you because of your gifting your speaking, your strategy, your creativity, your ability to get things done. But they stay because of your patterns.

You earn influence by being the same person on and off the stage. By showing up with the same values in meetings, group chats, one-on-ones, and family dinners. By letting people see that the version of you they admire publicly is the same version they encounter privately.