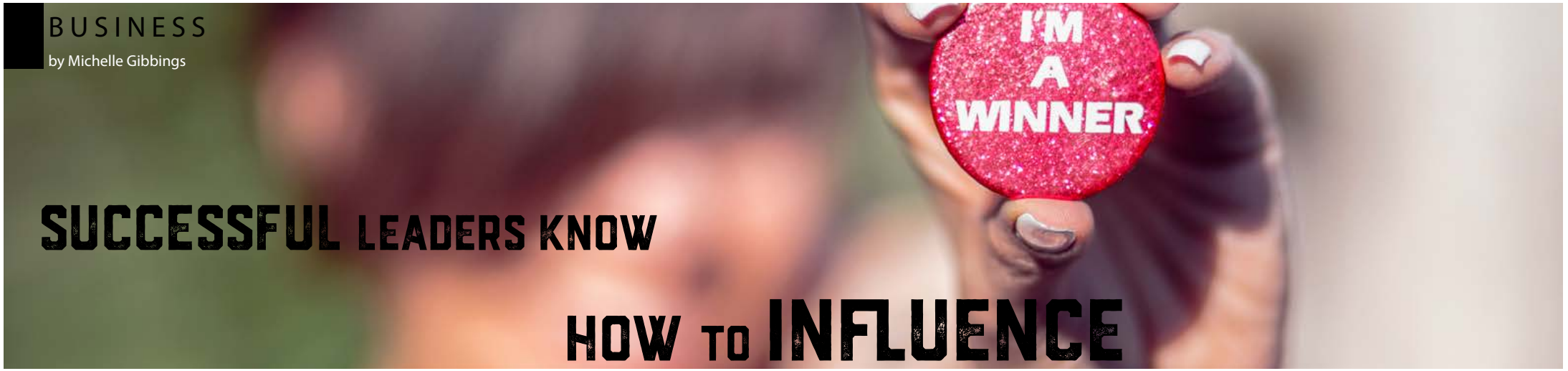
by Michelle Gibbings



SUCCESSFUL LEADERS KNOW HOW TO INFLUENCE

Despite advances in technology, organisations today are more, not less complex. Leaders are expected to deliver more results, in a faster timeframe and with less resources. At the same time, organisations know they need to constantly evolve, and so there is a relentless churn and multiple changes happening. The end result is a working environment which is more complex and bureaucratic. There's endless meetings, countless stakeholders to consult and shifting goal posts. This creates the inevitable sense of busy-ness, often with little progress to show.

Why? Because it's hard to get things done. It's hard to make change happen. It's hard to navigate the complexity. The antidote to this dilemma – being able to influence. This is not self-serving influence, but influence which is focused on ensuring balanced outcomes, considering the needs of all stakeholders. To do that, the leader needs the optimal mix of technical and behavioural skills. Being technically brilliant is one thing, but it's not the foundation on which to build a platform for influence.

Successful leaders - in business, society and politics - know how to influence.

Successful leaders - in business, society and politics - know how to influence. They know how to get things done through other people and are aware of the environment in which they are operating. They know how to use their personal power to secure outcomes.

Influential leaders are able to cut through the noise, get traction, lead change and make change happen. They successfully collaborate, encourage, and positively impact those around them.

In contrast, those who can't influence find themselves exiled from the decision makers in the organisation. They become 'out of the loop' on issues that matter. Uninvolved in critical decisions. Their voice goes unheard. All of which makes it harder for them to get things done. And leaders who can't deliver results, don't progress. This impacts their career, but also impacts those around them. A 2010 Harvard study found that a lack of progress is one of the biggest de-motivators in the workplace. People want to feel they are making progress on work that matters, and that their manager 'has their back'. If their manager is powerless to influence outcomes, this impacts the team's morale.

A 2013 Towers Watson study reinforced what other studies have shown – that the majority of change efforts fail in organisations. A lack of leadership is often the prime culprit. Leaders are expected to successfully lead people through change. But leading is almost impossible, if they can't influence. Leaders can't rely on traditional hierarchies to get things done. The organisational dynamics are different. It's important to understand who influences whom, how decisions are made and what avenues exist to make progress and influence outcomes.

This is about understanding the influencing factors operating in the 'organisational system' and having the nous to find the 'the back door' and leverage the informal networks though which decisions are often made.

Leaders who can influence, know themselves and what motivates their behavior, just as much as they understand others. They're able to manage their own behavioural responses. They're also equipped with the skills to motivate behaviour change; build awesome stakeholder relationships; create coalitions of support for change; communicate in an authentic and compelling manner, and negotiate important decisions.

In doing this, they take ownership of their personal power. This is power that is derived from within, and is consciously acquired. When a person has the right behavioural skill-set they can be more confident to hold their own with their peers and more senior stakeholders. This creates personal power, and in turn, generates influence. If leaders want to step up and progress in today's complex and changing world they need to be able to influence.

Michelle Gibbings

Michelle Gibbings is the author of Step Up: How to Build Your Influence at Work.

michelle@changemeridian.com.au

michellegibbings.com