

Proven Strategies of Influence

Over 18 months, we interviewed experts on how change happens—how decisions are made, conflicts resolved, elections won, and movements built.

From those insights we developed four strategies:

- 01 **Frame**
- 02 **Model**
- 03 **Incentivize**
- 04 **Organize**

Let's go through them one by one, and we can see how together they create the engine of influence. (See *Building Your Influence Engine*. [Page 35](#))

01

Frame

Framing is often the place to start, as it shifts how people think and talk about an idea. To be clear: It's not persuasion. It's creating the conditions for agreement by connecting to values, emotions, and meaning.

When people decide whether to support something, they don't run a cost/benefit calculation in their heads—they ask, or rather intuit instinctively: Why does this matter? Do I feel moved? Do I get this right away?

If the answer is yes, you've given them an them a path toward becoming your ally.



BOTTOM LINE

Framing is about offering a compelling perspective—helping people hear things in new ways so they can believe new things.

Your Framing Plays

FIRST PLAY

Focus on Values over Logic



Social psychologist Jonathan Haidt uses the metaphor of an elephant and rider to describe how our rational mind tries to steer us with logic and facts. The rider is our intellect. The elephant represents our emotions and values—much bigger, much stronger, and it will go where it wants. We like to think the rider is in charge, but in truth the elephant usually decides. Influence begins by recognizing that values and emotion, not logic, will be your power source. Locate the shared values and desires in your workplace and you multiply your potential allies tenfold.

SECOND PLAY

Make Information Beautiful



Facts matter. But how you share them matters more. When we're insecure, we often rely on numbers to prove our point. But data alone rarely moves people. Take this question: How big is Apple? A bar graph comparing Apple to its peers? Impressive, but flat. Now check out this famous animation showing Apple's value equal to a hundred entire companies. Same data, radically different impact. When you want people to feel the scale or urgency of an issue, make information not just clear, but unforgettable.

THIRD PLAY

Tell a Story



Storytelling is the oldest and most powerful framing strategy because it makes meaning out of information. Stories signal empathy. They make abstract issues personal. When you tell a story—about a colleague, a customer, or even yourself—you're building a bridge between what matters to you and what matters to others. A 2023 Harvard Business School study found that memory of a story fades by 1/3 after a day, while the memory of a statistic fades by 3/4. Facts inform, but stories endure.

YOUR MISSION: Frame with Shared Values (Page 44) ♦ **VIGNETTE:** Chelsie's Story (Page 54)



ASK YOURSELF

What values lie beneath the change you want to make?

Can you think of ways to present evidence or data in a visual format? Do you know a graphic designer who might help?

What story can you think of that illustrates what you're trying to get across? A story of success? A failure? One about you or someone else?

“Not the ones speaking the same language, but the ones sharing the same feeling understand each other.”

— Rumi



02

Model

Do you ever have the feeling that you've got people nodding yes, and they're even poised to act, but you're still sensing hesitation?

That hesitation is about not being able to picture this new future. Or worse, doubting that it will work. They need to see what you're saying ... and they need to believe that others have done it successfully. At some point, in order for people to envision the desired future that your influence is intending to create, **you'll need to show, not tell.**

Modeling shows people there exist workable alternatives to their present state.



BOTTOM LINE

Modeling makes the future tangible by showing people what it looks like in practice, proving it's real, safe, and possible.

Your Modeling Plays

FIRST PLAY

Shift Our Associations



Implicit bias forms early and is reinforced constantly through images we consume. Photographer Kate Parker set out to disrupt that. In her book *Strong Is the New Pretty*, she captured girls demonstrating athleticism, toughness, and courage. These images dismantled gender stereotypes and planted new associations in the minds of both girls and adults. Modeling, in this case, was as simple and as powerful as changing what people see every day.

SECOND PLAY

Use the Power of the Herd



Most people don't want to take risks alone, especially in workplaces where short-term performance metrics dominate. That's why social proof is so powerful. If people see others like them doing something new and succeeding, they're more willing to follow. For this reason, pilots and early adopters matter. Show that "others just like you" have done it and suddenly the change feels possible, even safe.

THIRD PLAY

Lead by Example



Culture doesn't shift by decree—it shifts by observation. People mirror what they see more than what they're told; multiple studies on the phenomenon known as "social contagion" show that witnessing a single peer take visible action increases the likelihood of others following by a huge percentage. That's the power of modeling. You don't need a title to lead—just the willingness to embody the behavior or risk what you want normalized. Every act you model becomes social proof that "this is how we do things here." Over time, those visible examples compound into norms, and norms are what define culture. Influence begins the moment you act.

YOUR MISSION: Find Images that Challenge Assumptions (Page 45) ♦ **VIGNETTE:** Jasmine's Story (Page 55)



ASK YOURSELF

What hidden or unconscious assumptions shape how people see the change you're pushing for—and what images can you use to change those associations?

Who's already proving that your idea can work, and how can you point to those people or places?

Think about how the change you're proposing requires you to behave or present yourself differently ... and start doing that now!

**“Example is not the main
thing in influencing others.
It is the only thing.”**

— Albert Schweitzer



03

Incentivize

Incentives answer the question: Why should I care? They **shift the balance of costs and rewards** so people feel that adopting a change is in their own interest. Incentives can be structural, social, or emotional.

Sometimes it means dismantling bad incentives—ones that lead people to do the very things you're trying to change.

Sometimes it means making participation prestigious.

And sometimes it means making saying “yes” so easy that saying “no” feels too hard.



BOTTOM LINE

Incentivizing works by tipping the scales—it makes change easier, more rewarding, and more compelling than staying put.

Your Incentivizing Plays

FIRST PLAY

Dismantle Faulty Reward Systems



In 2014, General Motors faced a crisis over faulty ignition switches linked to 124 deaths and a billion-dollar fine. The company had known about the defect for years but delayed a recall—because it prized speed over safety. Organizations often sabotage themselves by rewarding the wrong behaviors. Leaders say they want collaboration but reward individual performance; they claim to value teaching, but promotions hinge on research output. People do what’s rewarded, not what’s preached. If you want to change a culture, align incentives with the outcomes you actually want—then no one has to choose between what gets praised and what gets paid.

SECOND PLAY

Create a Special Club



In its second year, the TED Conference deliberately set about to create an aura of exclusivity. Attendance shifted from a first-come-first-served format to a highly curated “club.” TED attendees, now called “Tedizens,” scored swag, insider access, and social clout. The result? TED became not just a conference, but a signal of special status. The effect was culture-shifting. Status and belonging are powerful levers for change. Want more men to mentor women? Create a Champions Club, induct someone everyone admires, and elevate mentoring to an act of prestige.

THIRD PLAY

Make Them Opt-Out



In the US, organ donation has long been an opt-in choice—you check a box on your driver’s license if you want to donate. As a result, participation stays low. (Who says yes when asked to picture their own death?) When countries switch to an opt-out system, donation rates soar. (Who wants to feel stingy by unchecking a box they can always change later?) In Austria, where it’s opt-out, nearly everyone is registered; in Germany, where it’s opt-in, very few are. Studies show that changing the default can raise participation by up to 78%. People follow the path of least resistance, which means influence often comes down to making “yes” easier than “no.”

YOUR MISSION: Form the Special “Club” (Page 46) ♦ **VIGNETTE:** Shelley’s Story (Page 56)



ASK YOURSELF

If someone looked only at your organization’s rewards, what would they assume you really value?

Is there any status advantage to being part of the change you want to make happen?

Are you making it too easy for people to say no to your idea?

**“If you would persuade,
you must appeal to interest
rather than intellect.”**

— Benjamin Franklin



Organize

Agreement isn't action.

People can be nodding yes, but sitting on the sidelines.

Organizing creates the frameworks, processes, and venues for people to act.

This is the mobilization moment.

Your job is to give people the means and methods to get things done.



BOTTOM LINE

Organizing turns ideas into action by giving people spaces to connect, methods and frameworks to act, and a collective voice that registers with those who hold power. When those three align, change takes hold.

Your Organizing Plays

FIRST PLAY

Create Free and Brave Spaces



When your stakeholders include people with vastly different roles and perspectives, you need places where they can meet, online or offline. That means more than “safe spaces,” where conflict is avoided. It means “brave spaces,” where disagreements surface and real progress happens. Free spaces—physical or online—become incubators of alignment and action. For example, in the 1970s, women gathered in living rooms and church basements to talk honestly about their lives. These were places where hard truths surfaced and new ideas were tested. Out of those messy, candid conversations came some of the most powerful collective insights of the women’s movement: that the personal was political, and that issues like workplace harassment weren’t individual struggles but systemic problems.

SECOND PLAY

Build a Shared Toolkit



Organizing isn’t just about bringing people together, it’s about giving them a common framework to act on. Vision Zero, a global initiative to eliminate pedestrian deaths, shows how this works. In New York City, agencies that usually operate in silos—transportation, police, public health, and planning—began to align around a single toolkit: shared metrics, coordinated strategies, and regular convenings. That toolkit transformed scattered intent into a unified, citywide movement.

THIRD PLAY

Create a Chorus



Collective instruments like surveys and online channels are powerful ways of demonstrating popular demand for change. For example, one of the world’s largest tech companies launched an anonymous Slack channel where employees flag bureaucratic hurdles. Leaders now refer to the channel as a real-time barometer on their progress. Wrenly and Abot are both anonymous Slack tools that can be used to surface latent pain points, building collective power behind needed change.

YOUR MISSION: Design a Survey (Page 47) ♦ **VIGNETTE:** Naomi’s Story (Page 57)



ASK YOURSELF

As you start to grow your conversation around the change you want to see, think about what venue (online or offline) you can dedicate to this discussion. Spaces become sacred.

Are there rules—or a manifesto—you could develop that serve as basic principles to outline the change you want?

If you were to create an online channel where people could chime in, what single focus would that channel have?

“Every moment is an organizing opportunity, every person a potential activist, every minute a chance to change the world.”

— Dolores Huerta