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SPOTLIGHT ON TALENT MANAGEMENT



# THE SOURCE

## "Influence With Impact: Gaining Commitment and Buy-In"

*An Interview with Rick Lepsinger*



Rick Lepsinger is President of [OnPoint Consulting](#), a [TalentQuest](#) strategic partner. He has consulted on leadership and organizational development for over 25 years and has authored [three leadership books](#). Over the last 20 years, he has worked with Dr. Gary Yukl to understand how the best leaders use influence to gain support for their ideas and initiatives. We recently sat down with Rick to discuss the role of [influence](#) in effective leadership and ways individuals can increase their ability to influence others.

***TQ: What is the role of influence in today's global organizations?***

RL: Today's global organizations need to do more with less. This puts more emphasis on the importance of being able to build consensus among many different audiences and gain the support of many different people who often have competing priorities or conflicting goals. Influence skills are the primary tool leaders have to create alignment and build consensus across a broad constituency.

***TQ: What have been the key findings of your influence research?***

RL: We found that among the eleven proactive influence tactics used by the most effective leaders, four core tactics are most closely aligned with gaining commitment. They are rational persuasion, inspirational appeals, consultation and collaboration.

Another key finding is that when people receive feedback *and* attend an influence skill training program there is a significantly greater improvement in the leader's use of the core influence behaviors than if they just receive the feedback report to review on their own. The most effective approach to enhance influence skills is to provide the [influence 360 feedback](#), engage the employee in skill-based training, and follow up with one-on-one [coaching](#).

***TQ: What advice do you have for leaders and managers who want to enhance their ability to influence others to achieve results?***

RL: The most effective influencers understand what is important to the other person from an organizational perspective--goals, business challenges, and what they are trying to accomplish--and at a personal level--values, beliefs and style. This knowledge can help you better

position your proposal or idea with the other person or group.

I'd also remind people that influencing is not a single-point event. If you wait until the moment you need to influence someone to establish credibility or build a relationship, you are too late. Developing personal relationships, establishing credibility, and building trust are the foundation for gaining buy-in when the time comes. Everything you do each day lays the groundwork for being able to influence a colleague, boss or direct report when the time comes.

***TQ: What should leaders be cautioned against?***

RL: Avoid using influence in a manipulative manner. Influencing can too easily slip into manipulation if you withhold information the other person needs to make an informed choice or if you focus on achieving personal gain versus an organizational benefit.

Also, people tend to move to the 'pressure tactics' too quickly in an effort to save time or keep things moving. This usually has the opposite effect and generally does not save time. Tactics like pressure can be appropriate but only after you've tried everything else without success and the stakes are perceived to be high.

***TQ: What is the greatest misconception about influence?***

RL: I think it would be that you have to be the most senior person in the room to exert influence and get people to do what needs to be done. It's important to understand that the ability to influence is not just based on organizational hierarchy. Our extensive research has identified the behaviors that are used by leaders who are most effective at influencing others and the behaviors that are aligned with gaining commitment. These are tactics that leaders at all levels can use to improve their ability to influence. As much as hierarchy, it's the quality of your relationships and the extent to which people trust you, your track record, and your ability to relate the benefits of your proposal to others' needs that affect the ability to gain the support and commitment of others.

***TQ: What are the biggest organizational challenges when it comes to effectiveness and collaboration?***

RL: Getting things done in a complex matrix structure with fewer resources. Many, if not most, organizations have reduced headcount over the last 12 to 18 months, either via attrition or layoffs. As such, people are being asked to take on more and more responsibilities and new challenges and to work effectively with colleagues and multiple managers across organizational boundaries. These conditions mean leaders must build consensus among many different audiences and gain the support of many different people. Employees have competing priorities and conflicting goals; so leaders won't be effective simply taking an authoritative stance and saying "this (singular direction, project, etc.) is what we are doing and how we are going to do it." Effective leaders will need to influence others to ensure goal alignment, clear coordination, and collaboration.

***TQ: Has the importance of influence changed with current economic challenges?***

RL: The importance of influence, to a great extent, has not changed. Influence has been and will always be a key competence for great leadership. In our current environment, it is especially important to rebuild employees' trust and gain their commitment to critical initiatives. The effective use of influence is an important component of building and supporting a high trust environment.

***TQ: What's ahead for influential leadership and how can organizations stay ahead of the curve?***

RL: In global organizations, working with a geographically dispersed team will mean influencing people from a distance. In order to be able to work together to achieve team goals and objectives, building trust and credibility will be critical with these remote populations. It will be the leaders of these ['virtual' teams](#) that learn how to influence from a distance who will undoubtedly be the winners going forward.

## ***TQ In The News...***

### **TalentQuest Offers High-Impact 360 Feedback with OnPoint Strategic Alliance**

#### ***360 Surveys Enhance Influence and Leadership Abilities for Managers at All Levels***

**ATLANTA / June 24, 2009** - TalentQuest, a human capital management and software solutions firm, has formed a new partnership with OnPoint Consulting, a consulting firm that delivers practical, research-based solutions to improve leader and organizational effectiveness. The firms have joined forces to extend their scope of high-impact leadership services to respective clients.

TalentQuest and OnPoint recognized they shared a common objective: to help leaders clarify strengths, recognize opportunities, and devise plans to enhance performance effectiveness. OnPoint has developed a host of multi-rater questionnaires tailored for each managerial level: from first-line managers to senior leadership. These 360 surveys address the specific managerial practices and influence tactics that differentiate top and bottom performers, including executing plans, leading others, innovating, and working across organizational boundaries. TalentQuest will offer the [Influence With Impact, Flexible Leader, and Virtual Team Leader 360 surveys](#) to clients, along with feedback reporting and follow-up coaching.

"We have always believed in the power of the 360 report as a leadership effectiveness tool, and OnPoint's surveys take that evaluation capability to the next level," said Kevin Sessions, President of TalentQuest. "These carefully crafted, research-based surveys cause positive changes in leadership behaviors, and we look forward to offering clients that benefit."

TalentQuest will provide OnPoint with their web-based [performance management system](#), helping clients automate and simplify their performance review processes and produce more effective evaluations. OnPoint will extend TalentQuest's Competency Management, Objectives Management and Performance Management modules to clients, to ensure individual goals are aligned with organizational goals.

"TalentQuest's proven performance management platform is going to add immediate value to our clients, both enhancing their user experience and providing real-time reporting," explained Rick Lepsinger, President of OnPoint Consulting. "Now our clients can integrate the results of these critical 360 surveys with a comprehensive performance management system, impacting their entire organization."

### **TalentQuest Supports Local Youth as Upcoming '21<sup>st</sup> Century Leaders'**

#### ***'G5 at Goizueta' Gives High School Leaders Solid Curriculum for Enhancing and Expanding Skills***

**ATLANTA / June 1, 2009** - TalentQuest, a human capital management and software solutions firm, is partnering 21<sup>st</sup> Century Leaders and other Georgia organizations to roll out a leadership development program targeting inner-city high school students. The program, entitled "G5 at Goizueta" enlightens participants with the core fundamentals of living a life of leadership.

The program was conceived by 21<sup>st</sup> Century Leaders, an organization committed to expanding the number and diversity of future leaders through leadership programs, and members of Atlanta's "Forty under Forty" group, an annual distinction of 40 local leaders recognized by the Atlanta Business Chronicle for their business and community contributions. The week-long program is intended to equip budding leaders with personalized leadership application, techniques and positive reinforcement.

The participants were nominated by their teachers and underwent a selection process for program acceptance. Fifty students are enrolled in the 2009 program, which kicked off yesterday at Goizueta.

"We could not be more pleased with the way the program has shaped up and what is in store for these dynamic leaders," said Kevin Sessions, President of TalentQuest. "It is very rewarding to be part of a team whose sole vision is to enrich these young persons' lives and equip them with tangible tools for the future."

The program offers five components: Gain: Learning to Lead; Grow: Building Yourself and Helping Others to do the Same; Green: How Business is Meeting the Environmental Challenge; Give: Leadership and Service; and Goals: Putting it all Together. Participants will also complete a TalentQuest assessment, displaying their current skills versus those of a typical manager and/or executive, strengths, and opportunities for enhancement. The students will graduate from the program equipped with a tailored TQ Individual Development Plan and a personal coach, to continue to mentor and guide them after the program's completion.

"Our hope is that this program becomes a lasting foundation to identify and build Georgia leadership talent," explained Bob Watson, Executive Director, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Leaders. "We welcomed our students yesterday and look forward to offering them a solid week of memorable and meaningful learning."

"This initiative is especially meaningful to TalentQuest because of its emphasis on community enrichment, one of our TQ core values, and also because of the unique opportunity it offers our invaluable future leaders," Sessions added.

### What positive effects has the recession had on your job?

According to a recent USA Today poll, 77% of workers said the recession has had at least one positive effect on their job. Top effects:

**New projects: 53%**

**More responsibility: 52%**

**More challenging work: 52%**

**More interactions with Management: 44%**

Note: Multiple responses allowed  
Source: Accountemps poll of 457 workers 18 and older  
By Jae Yang and Sam Ward, USA Today

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