

# LEADERSHIP IS INFLUENCE, AND INFLUENCE HAS A DARK SIDE



By Lana Potgieter, Lighthouse Leadership Coaching & Development

You can have the title, the tenure, and the expertise... and still watch your team:

- miss deadlines,
- wait for permission,
- tell you what's safe instead of what's true,
- perform in front of you and stall when you leave.

That's not an intelligence issue. It's an influence issue. **Leadership is influence.** And influence doesn't travel through job descriptions. It travels through *daily interactions* — what people experience when they work with you.

## Influence has a bright side and a dark side

Most leaders hear "influence" and think motivation, inspiration, buy-in.

But influence can also look like:

- fear-based compliance,
- silence disguised as agreement,
- people managing your mood instead of managing the work,
- politics, favoritism, or walking on eggshells.

So, here's the uncomfortable truth: **you're always influencing.** The real question is whether your influence creates **ownership** or **avoidance**.

## A 60-second self-audit

Ask yourself:

1. When I walk into a room, what changes — energy, openness, caution, speed, silence?

2. Do people bring issues early... or only when they're urgent?

3. Do I get the truth... or the version that feels safest to share?

4. How often do I rely on authority, rather than trust to get compliance?

5. If I lost my positional authority tomorrow, who would still choose to follow my lead — and why?

These questions aren't to flatter or shame you. They reveal the operating system behind your influence.

**Three conditions that ensure influence creates ownership.**

**Credibility:** "Will you do what you said? Will they change their mind again?"

Credibility isn't charisma. It's consistency. People move faster when they can predict you — your standards, your decisions, and your follow-through.

**Certainty:** "Do I know exactly what they expect of me? Do priorities change quickly?"

Certainty doesn't mean comfort. It means clarity. When priorities and decision rights are unclear, people conserve energy and wait. When clarity is high, problems surface earlier, and decisions happen closer to the work.

**Belonging:** "Do I matter here? Do I have a say? Is my opinion trusted?"

Belonging isn't "be nice." It's treating people like capable adults. People contribute more when they're invited into the thinking, not just handed tasks.

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## LEADERSHIP IS INFLUENCE

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### The hidden business cost of weak influence

When trust is thin, influence becomes expensive:

- You repeat messages—and they still get translated differently.
- People comply in public and resist in private.
- The team waits for instructions instead of thinking.
- You become the bottleneck because decisions funnel back to you.
- You spend emotional bandwidth managing reactions instead of driving outcomes.

That cost shows up as slow execution, rework, churn, and “mysterious” under-performance.

### A practical shift: from “in charge” to building ownership

Under pressure, many leaders tighten their grip: decide faster, speak more firmly, correct more quickly, and control more. Sometimes that’s necessary in a true crisis. The danger is when it becomes the default.

Over time, it trains your team to defer rather than own — and you end up with the workload you were trying to delegate.

The shift isn’t to become softer. It’s to become more connected and more clear:

- Stay firm on outcomes and standards,
- Pull people into trade-offs early,
- Ask better questions sooner: *What are you seeing that I’m not? What’s the risk? What decision can you make without me next time?*
- Make decision rights explicit — so ownership has somewhere to land.

**That’s influence you can scale: not “because I said so,” but because people choose to commit. You scale a sustainable business, you don’t scale the chaos.**

**About the Author:** Lana Potgieter is the founder of Lighthouse Leadership Coaching & Development and a Strategic Clarity Partner to growth-minded leaders who want to turn complexity into focused execution. She partners with business owners and leadership teams to strengthen influence, alignment, and performance through practical leadership systems.

### Call to Action

If you want to increase influence without becoming the bottleneck, book a short clarity conversation by texting your name to **484.347.0515**. We can identify where the opportunity for greater influence is within your business and look at “how to execute” to get the bottom line results you desire — because your people lean in, step up, and move with you.

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Led by award-winning leadership developer, Lana Potgieter, Lighthouse Leadership Coaching & Development (LLCD) has successfully helped countless business owners and mid-sized executives reach leadership excellence, align their teams, and drive sustainable growth to thrive in today’s competitive landscape. Call **484-347-0515** today for a private consultation.

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