Ali:
Hey Courtney, how are you?

Courtney Joyce:
I am good today. The weather is lovely in Northern California where I am.

Ali:
That's great. Today, you and I wanted to talk about influence as a topic. Yeah. So when we talk about influence, what is it that we're talking about?

Courtney Joyce:
Yeah, so influence is really kind of the ability to guide thinking, decisions, actions, without having any formal authority. Because if you have the authority, then it's just commanding. So typically, influence is without authority, which is just an interesting point.

And influence is really built through trust. So credibility, reliability, and vulnerability. Not just your expertise, but by really building trust. And it's kind of about creating a shared meaning or a shared goal. And it's not as much about like commanding compliance. Like I said, that's more, you know, that's more just using your positional power.

It's a little bit like building a bridge. You have to connect ideas and people to move things forward. And if you were to build a bridge, you would need a lot of people and a lot of different ideas and connect. You would need to connect them all to get that big. I think of it as like building a bridge.

So instead of maybe like, you know, just pushing a boulder, if you were going to build a bridge, you would need to connect ideas and people to move that forward.

Ali:
Yeah, what, you just wrote a piece about this that we posted a bit ago and there was a, it had come up for you in a few instances with clients and I'm curious what some of those situations were.

Courtney Joyce:
I actually feel like it comes up quite frequently in my coaching work at all levels of the organization, and it started…When I first started coaching, I was coaching mostly in the Google PM and PMM program. So product marketing, product marketing manager programs. And these were new grads, fresh out of school, first jobs and they were often tasked with really big projects, but they had little to no authority. And they had to really figure out how to navigate that at Google, which is a very large organization, as you can imagine. So it started there. And I would say that in my coaching work there, was a very high percentage of the coaching work I did. And..

But I still see it now, like I see it with leaders and executives trying to work with other groups. I think I see it maybe one of the places I see it the most is with the product leaders that I coach. Product is one of those, I mean, I guess all areas require others to do their work, but this one, especially product requires it. So you need designers. You need engineers, you need research, data, marketing. There's so many people that you actually have to rely on to get your work done, but that aren't in your little siloed group. So I feel like I see it a lot with that category of work and just everybody. see it. I see a lot of it.

I would like to just acknowledge that influence is much harder for those who are navigating power dynamics, particularly those in underrepresented groups. research shows that women and people of color often will face additional barriers to influence.

And Allison Fregale, who wrote a book called *Likeable Badass*, she's an organizational psychologist. And she really says that for these groups, there's two key pieces for them to really lean into the influence piece. We can go into that more later, but the two pieces are assertiveness and warmth.

And I guess that sort of makes sense because when I think of some of the most influential women that I know, they do have those two things. They're both confident, persistent, so assertive, and also are warm, open, approachable. And it can be a delicate thing to balance those two things because they do seem a little bit in opposition to each other. But

And then also Sally Helgeson, is in the article that referenced in the article that I wrote, she wrote a book called *How Women Rise,* and she talks about ways that women will often make themselves smaller, which will diminish their influence. And these are just things we've learned over time. Like we don't claim our achievements. We will be very self-deprecating. We offer qualifiers when we speak, like. “I'm not sure if I'm right” or “I may be off base” or things like that.

They will build relationships but not leverage them when they need them. They are often perfectionists and set unreasonably high standards for themselves. also, women tend to ruminate more and we have more people pleasing tendencies. Now, of course, this doesn't apply to everybody. This is not every woman but these are things that show up more for us just based on ways that we've had to kind of fit in over time. And so I just want to acknowledge that before we start talking about influence, that influence is harder for underrepresented groups.

Ali:
Yeah, I think there's a lot in the room with power dynamics and underrepresented groups. mean, there's the ways in which, you know, patriarchy is stacked against them. And I think another really interesting piece that Sally Helgesen highlights in her book, *How Women Rise,* is the ways in which women become that one person in the organization that you can always count on to get all the things done and they take on more and more work, sometimes hoping and wishing that someone will see that they're doing that much and then get rewarded for it and yet that's not how you rise, that's not how you advance.

So I think there, yes, there are these like, cultured ways in which genders or even anyone on the spectrum of gender, I don't know, just grow up and learn. This is what it means to be a woman. This is what it means to be a man. And how each of those relates to power or not and the ways in which each gives that away in some regard in their relationships and in their work.

Courtney Joyce:
Yeah, that piece about we almost over-rely on our getting the work done or our expertise and thinking that'll just speak for itself. And it doesn't always.

Ali:
Yeah. So I'm kind of linking back to what you were talking about as influence as a bridge. But like, as I was listening to that, I was like, so we're building a bridge to what?

Is it about just getting stuff done? Is it about furthering understanding of something? Is it to get our ideas into the brains and hearts and minds and bodies of the folks that we're working with, without sounding like a dictator or command and control or whatever is happening as a leader? What is it?

Courtney Joyce:
Yeah, I think the first thing that popped into my head was the “getting things done.” At its most basic, I do think it is about that. But I think underneath it, it's about connection is how I see it, which I guess the bridge is a good metaphor for that, because I feel like it's connecting us to others in some way, basically. Like we learn to align to get things done.

So I do think it's about connection, and I think probably somewhere in there, under that, is feeling a little more fulfilled because we're connected to others and feeling aligned.

Ali:
I kind of like that as a reframe actually, because it pulls influence back into am I feeling connected to this person or this group that I am in collaboration and working with, like in togetherness with versus I think another...

The thing that can, I guess, come to mind when, I guess when I hear younger clients say, I want influence, I want to be able to change things. It's coming from a place of, I have ideas, I want to make a difference. I want to bring them forth, I want to make a difference. Whether it's to the higher-ups or to this project or whatever the situation might be.

Courtney Joyce:
Yeah, having an impact. They've found that in research, these are the things that often intrinsically motivate us the most. It's not as much about our title, our stature. It's actually the impact we're able to have on the organization is one of the key pieces of intrinsic motivation that we feel like the work we do matters.

Ali:
And so if we kind of look at influence, and what it is and what it isn't, like how would we, what would those two lists be?

Courtney Joyce:
Yeah. So, David Maester came up with a trust equation in his book, *The Trusted Advisor*, and it basically says that to build trust, you have to have credibility, reliability, and vulnerability. And I do think those things are at the core of influence. Trust is at the core, but it's really those things below it is the credibility, reliability, vulnerability.

Like I said, it's it's building genuine connections and connections where the other people feel understood. Influence is understanding the culture of where you are and aligning your ideas with the organizational goals.

It is sharing credit, celebrating others, and communicating with clarity. What it's not is dominance, intimidation, using positional power to force outcomes, manipulating others, focusing solely on yourself, or being the loudest and most dominant voice in the room.

Now, there's a caveat to that one because I do feel like there are some cultures where being a loud voice is part of the way to get influence. But in my experience and in watching clients over time, that typically isn't the long-term solution to influence is being the loud voice. But it typically does not mean being the most dominant voice in the room.

Ali:
Yeah, I think I would add that it's probably not a healthy culture if being the loudest voice in the room is how you get influence. So we'll put the healthy culture versus less healthy culture or dysfunctional culture kind of framing around that.

Courtney Joyce:
Right. And so where I see this come up for folks, I mean, like I said before, I really see it with all my clients, no matter the level, even at the CEO level, they think about influence too, because they have a board of directors often, and or they need to go get fundraising, they need a lot of influence when it comes to that. So I really see it at all levels. But if I could break it up into three categories:

For early career professionals, what I see is they rely, over-rely on some of what you were talking about earlier about what women do is relying on our work and our expertise to speak for itself, right? It's like, if I just get things done, I'll have influence, but often that is not enough. And so, what early career professionals could be leaning into a little more is really figuring out what are those unwritten rules in the organization that are present that maybe people aren't even speaking about.

So how do decisions get made? Who really influences the decisions? And this could be related to an org chart, but it also might not be related to the org chart. It's not just as simple as sometimes saying, right? Like, this is how decisions flow.

What are the other currencies of the organization? How does the organization respond to risk, data, consensus, speed? Do they want to break things and move fast? Do they want high perfection? It's really different for every place.

And I will also say, sometimes you can learn this in the onboarding mission, vision, values document, and sometimes you can't because there's something else kind of under the surface.

Paying attention to how people communicate. Are decisions made in meetings or offline? Do people love Slack? Do people hate Slack?

Which people have been successful? Who are the heroes? What were they able to accomplish and maybe why?

And then what's maybe off limits too? Like what not to talk about, what not to do. These things are all important to think about if you want to influence within the organization. And I actually recommend that my clients write these things down in their own sort of company manual.

Because if they're writing it down, then typically they'll be paying a little more attention to it. So if something gets pushed through, if there's a successful or a failure, pay attention to what happened to get there. And you will often find some of those unwritten rules.

And then the other thing for early professionals to really think about is what were you actually hired for? What is your job description and does it align with what the organization needs? What does success look like in this role? And are you kind of pushing for something that the role isn't really designed to support? There isn't maybe alignment with organizational goals with your the way you're pushing.

And so maybe your ambitions would be better served pushing somewhere else. This does not mean if there if…If maybe the structure of the organization is set up that you can't have a lot of influence, it's really hard to have a lot of influence. It doesn't mean that you should stop focusing on how to be more influential, because generally the things you would do to be influential are just good business practices.

Ali:
Yeah, I think that point about making sure that your job description, you're clear about it and you know really what your zone of influence is, so to speak, right? Like this is my lane, this is my job, this is where my voice is really called for here. I think that's really important. I find in a lot of younger clients, whether it's their first job or they're early in their careers, that they want to kind of jump lanes or say more about a big project or a big initiative or what the leaders are doing

and it's just kind not quite within the scope of their role.

So I think that clarification can make a big difference for people in terms of their own sense of clarity around what's here for me, what's mine, and what isn't mine. And where can I explore within, you know, the known realm of my role, and how might this information inform maybe a deeper longing or a change that I might want to make?

Courtney Joyce:
Yeah, that's a really good point. And you can admire the desire to want more and to want more influence or to want something bigger. But there is also the reality of what is there at the organization at that time.

Ali:
Yeah, like this is the job you've been hired for, you know? Yes, yeah.

Courtney Joyce:
And then for mid-level leaders, I would say it's everything I talked about for early professionals as well. It's figuring out the unwritten rules, making sure your job descriptions clear, building relationships. And I would say the relationship piece becomes more important at that mid-level. It's cross-functional dynamics. It's really deeper relationship building with others on whom you depend to get work done. So that's where I feel like the relationship piece becomes bigger and it's really good to lean into that.

And then for senior leaders who might be on an executive team, all of the same check boxes apply, but also really importantly, getting alignment with the CEO. If you're on a leadership team, I can think of lot of examples where I've coached very smart, very capable leaders who were, I think, good at their jobs, but did not have alignment with the CEO. And I hate to say it, but typically that does not, that's not a recipe for a long-term stay at the company typically. And so, you know, it's really thinking about what is the CEO expecting of you and are you, are you fully aligned with that?

Ali:
So, how can we, or how can the listeners, show up in their roles and have more influence? What's it really about?

Courtney Joyce:
Yeah, so I think I talked about how a lot comes down to trust. So it's that credibility, reliability, vulnerability. And I'm gonna go into some more specifics around those so it isn't just those three words that I keep saying over and over.

So the credibility piece, it's being really clear with your commitments and following through and getting your work done, basically. And I think this is something that most people feel pretty connected to. They do understand that one of the pieces of trust is getting their stuff done.

Reliability, it's like you do what you're gonna say you're gonna do when you're gonna do it.

Vulnerability, now this is the one that I think is a little more interesting. And I had a client say to me the other day that, coaching back in the 80s and 90s was all about power and control, and that coaching has turned a lot more of their focus on vulnerability with leaders. And I think that's true. And I think that's good. But it's counterintuitive to some people who have been in the working world for a while.

So let's talk about the role that vulnerability can play and influence. I think some people, like I said, think that to be influential, you must appear strong and polished or in control. But some of the most impactful leaders that I can think of that I've worked with are those who embrace vulnerability and lean into it as a connection to build trust and relationships with others. So sharing your real thoughts, your uncertainties, your challenges.

Now there's some dynamics around how you do that so that you're not just dumping everything on your team, but the more people experience you as real, it creates a deep bond of trust and influence. People want to follow people who they think are real.

And so some of the ways that you can do this and cultivate this are to just really own your own experiences. Share the lessons you've learned from your successes and failures. People really appreciate honesty more than perfection, typically. And then it gives them permission to

Courtney Joyce:
share those same things. If you lead with that, then people feel like, I don't have to be perfect all the time. That's such a relief.

Leading with intention, expressing your values, your motivations. Those of my clients who might be listening to this will say, wow, yeah, she stresses this all the time. We think we're being really explicit when we talk, but we're not always. And so the more we can lead with...what I mean by what I'm saying and what I'm hoping to get out of what I'm saying, people will understand you better and that will also deepen the connection.

And be transparent about what you know and what you don't do. Like I'm sure that people listening have worked with one of those kind of know it all people. They're typically not people who you trust. And so own what you do and don't know. This invites others in and allows people to also do the same.

And then the other is to really lead with empathy. acknowledge others' experiences, and that helps create psychological safety, which would increase your ability to influence. So that's a big piece of it, the vulnerability. Also just the relationship piece that I kept talking about with the different levels of, you know, early career, mid-level leadership. It really is a lot about relationships.

So Dale Carnegie wrote that book, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, and he, did you know that he wrote this book in 1936? In doing my research for the article that I wrote, I learned that. And I was quite shocked by that. So it's 90 years old, this book. Now, if you look at the reviews of the book, you'll see that people feel some of his ideas are a little bit out of touch or maybe manipulative. But if you really look at the core tenet of the book, it's really about making others feel important and connecting with them. And that tenet still feels relevant and powerful today. So it's less about getting people to like you and it's really about learning to like others, if that makes sense.

Ali:
Yeah, it reminds me of, I think like the like a deeper layer here and you really spoke to this at the outset, which is that connection or the bridge from human to human. Like you have to be able to build that bridge and that requires a lot of work for it to be done in a way that's genuine and authentic, right? I have this lovely quote from Dewey Freeman who was one of the first therapists in Colorado when he runs one of the Gestalt Institutes here. He's kind of a legend in his field and...He had this post right around the time you had put this piece out and I thought it was just really timely so I was clearly filtering for this but I'm glad I found it and he says, “being influenced isn't about weakness, it's about deep presence. And to be influenced means to listen, to see, to take in every piece of information possible.”

Kind of goes back to the Dale Carnegie thing, right? Of like making people feel important, making them feel heard, making them feel seen. And Dewey continues and he says, “influence is to let it, let that information move through us, not just in our mind, but in our gut,” right? So we're internalizing all of this. And he continues and he says, “and here's the paradox. The moment we allow ourselves to be influenced, we also become influential. Because real connection isn't about control, it's about relationship. And when someone feels that we are truly present with them, they naturally become more open, more trusting, and more willing to shift.”

So he posits this question: Are you controlling or are you influencing? Which I think is a great question for any human in any relationship at work or otherwise in their life.

Courtney Joyce:
Yeah, there's an openness there that I think is important, right, to think about. Like if you get influenced by being, you can influence by being open to influence. I think it also just speaks to general openness, which again, when I was saying like, the practices of influencing are just good, just general practices in life. And one of those is openness, right? And showing interest in others. And I do think that is a part of it is like it's in likeable badass, right? The assertiveness and the warmth, that warmth piece, the openness, the approachability, that is a part of being influential.

And I do think that might flip a little bit of some people's view of influence because maybe we see it as control and power and manipulation, I think it's we're learning that it's more about being open and connecting with others.

When I first learned to teach presentation skills in the training, they would say, okay, you're about to get up and present in front of a room. Like what's the most important thing to you? And typically the answer that most people give is, what do I want to say? But it actually isn't. It's who's your audience and what do they care about? What you want to say is also important, but the first thing to think about is who's your audience and what do they care about? And so I see that happen just in relationships generally. And I see it with influence a lot too. Who is this person that I want to influence and what's important to them? Rather than how can I craft my message to be the most influential? Right? It's just flipping it.

Ali:
Yeah. And what I love is that it's those hard-earned skills of becoming a mature human. Learning to listen, really hearing what people are saying, really seeing people for who they are and what they're being outside of your projections of them and letting those skills really anchor your ability to be present and you know, be with someone in a way that is so radically different than probably most any other relationship or interaction that that person has been in so that...you know, change can happen. You're taking them in in a different way with what they're saying and what they're really speaking to, and you're able to speak to that, meet them there and speak to that. And that's just really great relating. That's also really great leadership. And it's healthy. It's like a healthier dynamic than letting our.. more immature parts just kind of rule the room, so to speak.

Courtney Joyce:
Yeah, you talked, think you mentioned questions in there. I think I might've heard questions, but asking questions is a real, is a sub bullet under the building relationships piece of like, how can we get better at influence? Building relationships and a sub bullet of that is asking questions. So it's less about having all the right answers and more about having the right questions that uncover shared priorities.

I once had a client who was in her mid twenties and was asked to be on a board and everyone on the board was in their 50s or 60s and she just was freaking out like how in the world am I gonna provide value or have any influence over this group of people? And as we talked about it more, we really centered on actually one of maybe her roles is to just ask questions where she's not sure because it can help clarify their thinking and it can help illuminate something that maybe they haven't thought of.

And I like this because it really takes a little bit of the pressure off to know everything, right? And for my super introverted clients who struggle a little bit with relationships, this is a big thing too, is to learn that you don't have to go and tell them every single thing you did on your weekend to get to know that person. You can actually just get really good at asking questions, open questions, and follow-up questions, and that can be the most effective way to develop a relationship. You'll still probably need to share something about yourself as well. But what I like about that is that it takes some of the pressure off.

And I think that's the same concept applies for influence, right? We don't have to like get up in front of everybody and do the best dance or whatever, right? Like it's really not about that actually. It's about focusing on what's happening over there and paying attention to it and getting more intentional about it. So building relationships, asking questions, that's part of it.

Then I would also say providing some value, that is a part of influence. So that is getting your work done, being a source of expertise, offer to help somebody maybe if you can and don't expect anything in return. Just say, if this is something I can do and I have the ability to help and try, we'll do it.

The next thing is to get visibility, make yourself visible somehow, showcase your work. And for my clients who start to shudder when they go, I don't wanna just tell everyone how great I am all the time, it isn't so much about that, but usually when you do work, there's other people involved. And there were some things that happened along the way. Maybe you hit some roadblocks. Maybe you learned some things. Maybe it was success. Maybe it was kind of a failure. But to showcase that with some of that thinking attached and to highlight others whenever you can.

And that is one thing I always really stress. It's like if it's your team that's done the work, then you get to highlight them. And that's wonderful. So make yourself visible in some way and then communicate with clarity as much as you can. Tailor your message to your audience and try to make it resonant for them.

So those were my big points. Focus on the relationships, ask good questions, provide value, expertise, get visibility, and communicate with clarity.

And so I would say the common thread is that influence generally comes from how you make others feel. Respected, heard, valued, and the consistent actions that you do that demonstrate your reliability and judgment.

Ali:
Yeah, so much of that. I think that authenticity piece is also very real and I think presence really is behind that because when someone can be really present with you, they're not loud, they're not taking up a lot of space. You have a lot of space. You as the audience, right? You have a lot of space and they're holding it with you and for you.

And that, on a nervous system level, is so deeply felt by people that they will remember you differently or say more or open up more. I mean, that's really the magic of coaching in a coaching container. But we do so much with leaders around leaders coach, and that's really another big part of the magic.

Courtney Joyce:
Yeah.

Ali:
Sounds simple. It's harder in practice, right? And I feel like it really is one of those things like as we mature in ourselves and in our relating we're able to actually hold that space for people.

Courtney Joyce:
Yeah. And also, you know, just some patience because it can take time, right? Like it doesn't happen overnight that you become the most influential person in the room. But with some of these practices, you will see that it will come.

Ali:
Yeah. Well, thank you. This is a great topic to dive into.

Courtney Joyce:
Thank you for inviting me.