

LEADING WITH INFLUENCE

BY JERILYN OLSON, CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER



*"Give me a firm place to stand,
and with a lever
I will move the earth."*
-Archimedes

Rethinking Influence: The Archimedean Approach

Imagine you've been tasked with a project, but it requires you to rely on the efforts of people over whom you have no authority. In a complex setting where you must influence but can't control, what will often not work (but is still tempting to do): just keep shouting louder, try to convince the "higher leader" to demand change, or try to do all the change yourself.

How can we think differently? Allow me to offer wisdom from philosopher (and scientist) Archimedes, who said, *"Give me a firm place to stand and a lever and I can move the earth."* When you want to move something that seems to outsize you, a lever and fulcrum can be quite powerful – literally and metaphorically.

We all seek more leverage to achieve our goals. While authority can be useful, overreliance on it diminishes its effectiveness. It is tempting to think that possessing greater authority would simplify accountability and execution. However, we must look for something else – a combo of a fulcrum and lever that will allow us to work with the laws of nature to do something that seems superhuman. This is the power of influence.

Influence without Authority: The ability to drive change and achieve great outcomes through people you cannot command. (*Hint: This is almost always the case.*)

The Nature of Influence

Influence and positional authority do not always go hand in hand. Consider individuals in your organization who hold immense influence without formal authority—those people everyone turns to when they need to get something done. Conversely, some individuals with high positional authority may struggle to command respect or action.

Influence stems from several sources beyond formal authority:

- Relational Influence: Who you know and your ability to connect with key individuals.
- Operational Influence: Control over critical processes that drive execution.
- Experiential Influence: Institutional knowledge and experience that guide decision-making.

Expanding and Leveraging Influence

To expand and leverage influence effectively, we turn again to the classical Greek framework of rhetoric—the art of persuasion. The three primary appeals in persuasion are ethos, pathos, and logos.

» ***Ethos* (Credibility and Trustworthiness)**

To persuade others, you must establish yourself as trustworthy and credible. Building this trust takes time but offers long-term dividends. Gaining trust means being able to leverage it for future initiatives, not just the current project. A key to credibility is self-awareness. Seek feedback actively and demonstrate improvement based on that feedback. Additionally, cultivate trust by consistently exhibiting honesty, integrity, transparency, loyalty, competence, accountability, and commitment. For deeper insights, consider Stephen Covey's *Speed of Trust*.

» ***Logos* (Logic and Competence)**

Your message and plan must be logical and well-founded. To establish logos, diagnose problems accurately and propose sound, feasible solutions. If you lack certain expertise, demonstrate a clear strategy for acquiring the necessary resources and skills to succeed. Ensure that your solution is not only logical but also executable.

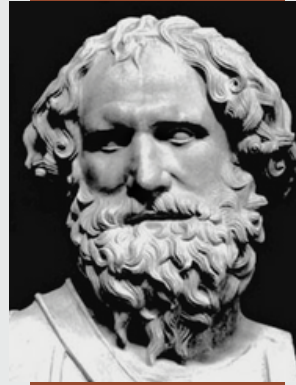
» ***Pathos* (Emotional Appeal and Empathy)**

To command pathos (an appeal to your stakeholder's emotional confidence), you must understand the minds and hearts of others. You must be able to look with their perspective and figure out what they care about and be willing to address their needs in the situation. You must appeal to what they love and reassure others that you hear their needs as part of the project.

Bonus: *Kairos* (Timeliness) and *Topos* (Context)

Finally, consider two more ideas (not always included in the traditional triangle of rhetorical appeals): *kairos* and *topos*.

- ***Kairos* (Timeliness):** Choosing the right action at the right moment.
- ***Topos* (Contextual Awareness):** Understanding the organizational landscape and identifying key influencers who can accelerate or hinder progress.



Archimedes
c. 287 – c. 212 BC

Questions and Challenges for Influential Leadership

So, the next time you have a big project and little authority, think through the following questions:

- *Ethos* – Am I credible to others in leading this project? Do people see me as trustworthy? What feedback do I get? Are there other trustworthy people I can engage to build trust?
- *Pathos* – Do I listen well to others? Do I understand the needs of others affected? Do people feel heard? What's the tone? What are some hidden desires people may have that I need to address?
- *Logos* – Do I have the expertise and competence needed to complete this project? If not, where is the expertise? Did I diagnose the problem correctly? What is the outcome that I want to see? Have I made that clear? Does it make sense to others?
- *Kairos* and *Topos* – Do I understand the organization/context where I am operating? Do I know what accelerators vs. detractors exist? Do I know where to find others who will influence the project? Is the organization or team ready for this change at this time?

Most importantly, I challenge you to check your intentions. To lead others well is to love others well. Leadership is not about what you can get done. Leadership is about inspiring others to do well. Are you considering what is the highest good for the organization, the situation, and those affected? Do you love the people more than you love the change you propose?

There is no secret formula for persuading everyone to support your vision. Rather, Archimedes offers an idea more powerful (and more difficult). If you want to move the earth, start with your own heart and mind. Find your firm place to stand, and from there, love and serve others well.

About the Author

Jerilyn Olson is the Chief People Officer of Great Hearts. Jerilyn's education began as a homeschooled student through the eighth grade, at which point she attended one of the first public charter schools in the nation with a classical curriculum. She then continued her education by attending Claremont McKenna College, a liberal arts college in Southern California, where she double-majored in Literature and Government. After helping found the second school in the Great Hearts network and teaching for 6 years, she began working to support the growing community of faculty. During her tenure, she has also completed a Master's degree in Humanities with a Classical Education Concentration through The University of Dallas. She and her husband live in the Phoenix area and delight in watching their three children thrive in a classical education environment.

