

Why INFLUENCE Is the 2023 Word of the Year for the Business Sector

Influence is Robert L. Dilenschneider's choice for the business version of Word of the Year. Here, he explains why.

NEW YORK, NY, USA, December 21, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- As 2023 draws to a close, everyone is releasing their word of the year. The Associated Press chose AI. Oxford chose rizz (short for charisma). Merriam-Webster chose authentic. Now, Robert L. Dilenschneider has put his own twist on the annual tradition: He's zeroed in on a word that captures the zeitgeist of today's business world—and not just for 2023, but for the foreseeable future.

Influence.

"The ability to influence is the number-one skill in business," asserts Dilenschneider, author of Wall Street Journal and USA TODAY bestseller *The Ultimate Guide to Power & Influence: Everything You Need to Know* (Matt Holt Books, July 2023, ISBN: 978-1-6377429-3-8, \$28.00). "It's the piece that makes the rest possible.

"You can devote huge amounts of time, energy, and resources to creating strategies and pursuing deals, but if you can't influence others to execute on them, it's all wasted," he adds. "This has always been true, but in times of chaos and uncertainty, the stakes are too high to fail."

There are lots of misconceptions about influence. It's not about being pushy or manipulative or convincing resisters to change their minds. And the rise of social media "influencers" (with their short-term focus on getting "likes" and orchestrating superficial trends) hasn't helped.

The good news is, the less-than-influential can grow their skill set. A few tips for getting started:

Think in terms of helping others. Counterintuitive as it may sound, real influence comes from the ability to help people and shape the world into a better place. This is what makes one person want to follow another and is what will ultimately drives success.

"The more helpful you can be to coworkers, clients, and your employer, the more they will like you and the more they will come to count on you," advises Dilenschneider. "When you use your skills and talents to help others succeed, not only will you draw others to you, you'll become a

better person and experience a real sense of fulfillment.”

Prioritize real-world relationships. They still mean something. A story from Dilenschneider’s experience: “A client was fixated on leveraging social media for a significant project,” he recalls. “I told him, ‘You have seven key people you need to influence. Forget the hashtags; have real conversations with them.’ He did, and it worked.”

Taking time to identify the real decision-makers in one’s network, the people who actually move the needle, and genuinely connecting with them makes an impact.

Look at networking as an ongoing process, not a “one-and-done” activity. People tend to think the purpose of their network is to grow their business, make sales, recruit, or be recruited. But the truth is that it’s about building relationships. Networking is not about showing up, hat in hand, seeking a job. That may come eventually, but don’t be so desperate to make it happen. Life unfolds in its own time.

Make a list of influential people (in appropriate fields, the media, politics, and other realms). Research their backgrounds, such as where they went to school, what boards they serve on, their charitable causes. Then, find ways to regularly connect with them.

“I know a fellow who wanted to reach three key people,” says Dilenschneider. “He put their names in his electronic Rolodex, and when something would come up in the news related to their interests, he would contact them with the information. It was an enormous help in making connections. Don’t overdo it, of course. You want to be helpful, not pesky.”

Authenticity matters even more in the Algorithmic Age. Look for ways to provide the personal touch. Amid the deluge of impersonal pixels and machine-generated content, a genuine human interaction is like a breath of fresh air.

“Think about it: When was the last time you received a handwritten thank-you note?” says Dilenschneider. “What about a holiday gift that wasn’t a generic fruit basket but rather an original autographed copy of your favorite book? These gestures can be time-consuming, but consider the lasting impression they leave.”

Don’t underestimate the power of gratitude. When times are stressful it’s easy to forget the importance of gratitude, the value of that often brief but vital connection that comes with a smile and a “thank you.” People benefit from saying it as much as the one listening appreciates hearing it. Vast emotional distances may be overcome in a moment by a “thank you” that conveys that someone’s presence and work is valued.

Remember the importance of reputation. Protect it. The more power and influence one accumulates, the greater the efforts of others to take them away—or at least take them down a few notches. People should assume their life is an open book. Social media has forever blurred

the lines between “personal” and “professional,” so it’s crucial to think before posting anything inflammatory, controversial, or politically sensitive. Doing so can come back to bite people, many years later.

Use the strong language of success. For example, avoid clichés. Not only do they make the message unclear—after all, what does “Get the ball rolling” or “Think outside the box” really mean?—they suggest laziness. Be original. Always use the active voice, never the passive. Make sentences energetic, not flabby.

“When speaking, as in writing, use active, muscular verbs,” advises Dilenschneider. “And please, avoid the temptation to ‘-ize’ a word. Don’t promise to ‘prioritize’; say that you will ‘set priorities.’ Use the strong language of success.”

Seek to be a problem solver and conflict neutralizer. Dilenschneider quotes Dr. Zoe Chance, an author, researcher, and professor at the Yale School of Management, on the question that she claims can “transform conversational dynamics”: What would it take for us to resolve this?¹

“The key is to get people to focus on a problem that is clearly and succinctly stated (and usually you’ll have to be the one to do the clarifying and the stating),” says Dilenschneider. “Then, you find out why the issue is so emotionally important to the people involved; finally, you offer a solution that satisfies all the parties needed to make the solution work.”

Own mistakes. Mistakes are bound to happen, particularly when people do new and innovative things. Never try to hide from them or shift blame to others. Take responsibility, learn from mistakes, and find a constructive way to move forward. Don’t wallow in failure. Do continue to take risks.

Building influence isn’t something that happens overnight, and it isn’t easy. But Dilenschneider says it’s a skill set everyone needs these days.

“When all paradigms are being disrupted, our ability to influence becomes incredibly important,” he says. “It’s what allows us to find the opportunity hidden in the uncertainty. It’s what allows us to thrive in virtually any field and any job. It’s what gives us staying power.”

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1. Kwame Christian, “The Secret to Influence: Ask the Magic Question,” Forbes, June 13, 2022, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kwamechristian/2022/06/13/the-secret-to-influence-ask-the-magic-question/?sh=60ae0fa63c1f>.

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About the Author:

Robert L. Dilenschneider, author of Wall Street Journal and USA TODAY bestseller *The Ultimate Guide to Power & Influence: Everything You Need to Know*, formed The Dilenschneider Group in October 1991. Headquartered in New York, Miami, and Chicago, the firm provides strategic advice and counsel to Fortune 500 companies and leading families and individuals around the world, with experience in fields ranging from mergers and acquisitions and crisis communications to marketing, government affairs, and international media.

Prior to forming his own firm, Dilenschneider served as president and chief executive officer of Hill and Knowlton, Inc., from 1986 to 1991, tripling that firm's revenues to nearly \$200 million and delivering more than \$30 million in profit.

Dilenschneider was with that organization for nearly 25 years. Dilenschneider started in public relations in 1967 in New York, shortly after receiving an MA in journalism from Ohio State University and a BA from the University of Notre Dame.

He has authored 18 books, including *A Briefing for Leaders*, *The Public Relations Handbook*, *Decisions*, and *Nailing It*.

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About the Book:

The Ultimate Guide to Power & Influence: Everything You Need to Know (Matt Holt Books, July 2023, ISBN: 978-1-6377429-3-8, \$28.00) is available at bookstores nationwide and from major online booksellers.

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