CHAPTER I

An Extra Dose of Vitamin I

Expanding Your Personal Influence

The entire ocean is affected by a single pebble.

—Blaise Pascal

NOT LONG AGO, I WAS INVITED TO A PARTY unlike any I had ever attended. Intrigued, I accepted the invitation and made my way to the site of the festivities on the designated date.

A number of other men and I had been summoned to a local eatery with a menu featuring big steaks for big men and a decor that could best be described as Modern Testosterone. We were there to celebrate a young man's thirteenth birthday. I was quite certain a thirteen-year-old's birthday party had never been held here before, but that's precisely why this venue was chosen. It wasn't a kids' pizza joint; it was a man's place.

After we completed the steak dinner, the sense of fun and laughter began to shift toward solemnity. Anticipating what lay ahead in the evening's activities, all the men at the table grew a little nervous. None of us had ever been part of an event quite like this, and we all were curious to see how it would come together and how each part would fit in.

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Austin, the young guest of honor, sat at the end of the table, looking anxious and a little awkward as the center of so much attention. But he was also eager to know what was coming. Everyone at the table was somehow connected to him. There were coaches, teachers, friends, fathers of friends, friends of his father's, relatives, and other men who had played an important role in the boy's life.

One by one, each guest addressed Austin. They told stories from his past and shared snapshots of his character—the way he befriended and protected kids who had a hard time fitting in at school, his encouragement of his basketball teammates, his humility when he succeeded academically, his quick and easy sense of humor, his courage, and his faith. They also offered advice about how Austin could further cultivate those qualities and become a man of integrity and strength.

At the end of the evening, despite the manly atmosphere, you would have had a hard time finding an eye that wasn't sparkling with tears. It was a fun and yet moving evening for all of us. It's also a safe assumption that the night will be indelibly etched in Austin's memory until his old age. At least that was the intention.

The mastermind of this event was my friend John, Austin's father. He had asked every man who shared a positive relationship with Austin to communicate something meaningful that would serve his son well as he entered adulthood. Together we built a rite of passage for Austin, a bridge for him to cross into manhood.

It was a powerful experience that will stay with me for a long time. It's also a great illustration of a subject we've been thinking about for quite some time: the idea of personal influence.

As a father, John was deliberately and intentionally trying to influence his son and affect the direction of the boy's life. The event required forethought, planning, and ingenuity, and John went to great lengths in an attempt to bring about a certain outcome: the dream that his son would grow up to be a certain kind of man.

Are there any guarantees that John will see his dreams for his son realized? Absolutely not. Although he has done and will continue to do everything within his power to influence Austin to make wise decisions and walk down certain paths, he cannot force things to happen the way he wants them to. As parents, we can point our children in the right direction, but they have to walk the journey. Other people, events, circumstances, and choices will affect Austin's life, and over

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them John has no control. Some may cause him grief; others may exceed his wildest expectations.

Influence, by definition, can shape, but it cannot guarantee.

The same week as Austin's birthday and manhood celebration, another friend, Mark, called and asked to talk. Over a Coke, he relayed a heartbreaking story. He had just returned from a trip to Georgia to bury his father. Mark's dad had divorced a long time ago and never remarried. At the end of his life, he was sick and living alone—truly alone. No friends or family nearby, no interaction with neighbors, no community at all. Fighting for control but with his voice breaking, Mark told me that no one had come to his father's funeral—not even a minister. Think about that for a minute. It was a funeral where not one friend came to say thanks, or that you did a good job with your life. A funeral where not one family member came to pay last respects. Not one official came out of a sense of obligation. The elderly gentleman, whether by choice or circumstance, had spent his final years, months, days, and minutes without the comforting presence of someone who truly cared. Mark was enveloped in grief.

I struggled to come up with a way to comfort my friend, but my own heart was aching. As we sat there with our forgotten drinks, I was struck by the brutal reality that life often doesn't end as we hope it will. Many of our early dreams are unrealized at best, and shattered at worst. All the maneuvering and planning we can muster cannot guarantee the outcomes we so desperately desire.

Vitamin I

We hear a lot these days about the importance of good nutrition. Vitamins and supplements nearly tumble off the grocery store and pharmacy shelf. Newspapers and magazines are jammed with articles about recent studies promising that vitamin X will help our hearts, ease our pain, vanquish disease-causing molecules, trim our waistlines, regrow our hair, repel summer mosquitoes, reduce stress, or—well, you can fill in the blank. Many of us are beefing up our intake of vitamins A, B, C, E, and so on, down the alphabet in the hope that it will pay off with good health and a high-quality life.

Vitamins are unquestionably important for the well being of our body. But do we focus as much on the less tangible aspects of our lives—

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our character, our spirit, our soul—as we do on our physical health? Are we doing anything to evaluate and enhance our impact on the world around us?

What if a new product hit the shelves tomorrow at the local supermarket—a supplement that would increase not our physical well-being but our ability to *influence*? This product would be called vitamin I, and it would enable us to deliver a greater impact on people, events, and outcomes in any job or relationship. Would it sell out? You bet it would. There might not be a more universal appetite than that for influence. What mom doesn't want to have more effective influence on her daughter? What coach doesn't want to shape his players, win more games, and graduate better kids? No matter our walk of life, most of us desire to leave a positive footprint of influence. A mayor hopes to influence her town. A pastor hopes to influence his flock. A teacher hopes to influence his students. A physician hopes to influence her patients. A consultant hopes to influence his clients. A boss hopes to influence her employees. The list goes on and on.

We believe that most people have the potential to achieve a greater level of personal influence. What we offer in this book is not a pill or a magic bullet that suddenly expands your influence to new heights without any effort. Growth in any area requires calories. What this book does contain is our analysis, observations, and insights about influence, filtered against the best historical wisdom, contemporary thinking, and real-life examples that we could find. That's what we present to you; that's our vitamin I.

Defining Influence Correctly

Influence is a powerful force in our society; whole industries have developed around it. The lobbying industry tries to influence the government according to the best interests of those they represent. Advertisers try to persuade consumers to spend their money on certain products or services. Sales and marketing teams spend enormous resources trying to make the business deal that will benefit their company. Politicians wield nationwide telemarketing campaigns hoping to sway last-minute voters. Parents are invited to an evening seminar promising better results with their children. Everywhere we look, we can see influence at work.

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I saw it just the other night when the doorbell rang as we were finishing dinner. It was an unusual evening because all the family members were present and accounted for at the table. At the front door was a good-looking high school sophomore proudly wearing a new football jersey. Our entire family crowded around the front door, which pushed my two teenage daughters slightly out of their comfort zone (translation: they were ready to die from embarrassment). The football player was selling a coupon packet to benefit the athletic booster club. I arrived halfway through the pitch. This kid definitely had a future in sales. For about three minutes, I listened to a persuasive case as to why I should transfer a ten-dollar bill from my wallet to his in exchange for a coupon book. It worked. Effective influence usually does, even at an elementary level.

Unfortunately, most of us don't give influence much thought until an element of personal gain is at stake, or something or someone has fallen in the ditch. Then we scour bookstores and search the Web for insider tips to close the deal, make the friend, achieve the promotion, get the advantage, fix the broken relationship, or improve the circumstance. When we're on the hunt for fast-acting vitamin I so we can become influential quickly, the process is often self-motivated and self-interested.

Our approach in this book is different. We believe influence is much bigger—and purer—than a tool to wield against the world to get things for ourselves. We define influence as *a person's ability to shape people and mold outcomes.* This is influence in the raw. The process may not happen immediately, or even within the influencer's lifetime, but at some point things turn out differently than they would have because one person brought himself to bear on the situation.

Clout Versus Influence

The title of this book is *Clout: Tapping Spiritual Wisdom to Become a Person of Influence.* We want to spend some time thinking about these terms.

First of all, the dictionary defines *clout* as "a blow with the fist," "a long, powerful hit in baseball," "power or muscle," and "influence or pull." Obviously, we're primarily concerned here with that final definition. But the others are significant as well. Wrapped up in the idea

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of clout is something very strong, muscular, direct, and intentional. It's a short word that packs a lot of punch—literally, since one of the definitions is synonymous with a left front hook.

Looking at how the term is used in the media reveals further insights:

- Clout involves status, prestige, authority, and power.
- With clout, there's often an element of intimidation or pulling strings.
- People are often forced to defer to someone with clout, even if they don't want to.
- Many people prefer clout over effective performance.
- One writer referred to people with clout as having "the keys to the bulldozer," such that they can roll over barriers.
- Clout is related to experience and "persuasive muscle."

You may be noticing some rather ugly connotations associated with the idea of clout; if you're not sold on the concept yet, bear with us a moment. First let's look at the word *influence,* and then we'll come back to clout.

Dictionary definitions for *influence* include "a power indirectly or intangibly affecting a person or course of events," and "to cause a change in the character, thought, or action of; to have an effect upon." A less common meaning is "an occult ethereal fluid believed to flow from the stars and to affect the fate of men." This may be somewhat startling and sound rather bizarre, but it reflects the fact that influence is a mysterious, intangible, almost mystical process that doesn't depend on status or prestige but rather on character, careful decision making, and—quite often—circumstances beyond our control. The word comes from the Latin verb *influere,* meaning to flow in, and this is exactly what happens in the influence process: one person "flows in" to a set of circumstances or the life of another individual.

So, where does that leave us? The word *clout* is related to hitting someone on the head or flexing muscle. The word *influence* involves an intangible, even ethereal process of producing change. Someone with influence flows; someone with clout bulldozes. Are the two ideas mutually exclusive?

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Not at all. We think that clout and influence are two sides of the same coin. Part of being influential is having clout: the direct, authoritative, cut-through-the-red-tape attitude and position necessary to produce results. Part of it is more shadowy and indirect, less clearly understood. Proper understanding of influence involves acceptance of both ideas. True, there are negative connotations on both sides: intimidation and hunger for power with clout, sneakiness and manipulation with influence. But part of our goal is to reshape some of these preconceptions for the better and to merge the appropriate and worthy elements of both ideas into a new, healthy outlook on personal influence. In this book, we package the terms *clout* and *influence* together for one central message. Stay with us as we develop the idea.

Influence *and* Leadership

By now you might have a question in mind: What's the difference between leadership and influence? Is this just another book about leadership disguised in different terminology?

It's a legitimate question, and the short answer is no. Leadership and influence are certainly related and do often overlap—great leaders can wield tremendous influence, and people of influence often occupy a leadership position. But by nature they are two separate entities.

To start with, leadership is tangible and contained. It is usually a conscious mind-set, a prescribed and clearly defined role limited to a certain situation that a person accepts for a period of time or season of life. Leadership is most often carried out in public and is openly discussed among followers and observers. There is usually a cause-and-effect relationship between a leader's words and actions and the events that immediately follow (though the results may or may not be long-term). Leaders act on people.

Influence is a much bigger picture, one that is harder to draw. If leadership is the part of the iceberg we see floating above the surface, influence is the giant mass lurking below, out of sight. It is often unconscious; a person may exert influence without being aware of it, just as one may be influenced without knowing it. Influence is subtle, hidden, and shadowy. It is mysterious; it often takes place behind the scenes. Influence does not depend on a person's education, position,

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or financial situation, and it crosses lines of culture and ethnicity. A person's influence may not be directly felt or cause immediate results, but when it does find a target, the effect is usually broad and widespread. Influencers act on people *and* outcomes.

Leadership lends itself to formulaic duplication; influence is much more difficult to identify and analyze. A leader says, "I lead the charge"; an influencer says, "I shape the outcome." Our culture is captivated by leadership but driven by influence.

Karl Marx, for example, was not a leader during his lifetime, even though he wrote the *Communist Manifesto* and other works. He was an obscure, poor German whose ideas about religion, capitalism, injustice, and suffering made barely a ripple on world consciousness. When he died on March 17, 1883, only eleven people attended his funeral. At the time, Frederic Engels, a contemporary who shared many of his political ideas, said Marx's name and work would endure through the ages; it seemed an unlikely boast at the time. But with the upheaval and unrest produced by the Industrial Revolution, Marx's influence rolled out in waves that ultimately toppled governments and shook societies. Looking back at the twentieth century, with the spread of communism and its effects on the globe, Engels's remarks seem like an understatement.

The former CEO of GE, Jack Welch, was a leader; Federal Reserve Bank Chairman Alan Greenspan is an influencer. Leadership is the surface; influence is the current.

Here's a summary of some of the differences between leadership and influence:

- Leadership is visible; influence is out of sight.
- Leadership is usually conscious; influence is often unconscious.
- Leadership is contained; influence crosses boundaries.
- Leadership is immediate; influence is long-term.
- Leadership is public; influence is often behind-the-scenes.
- Leadership is formulaic; influence is mysterious.
- Leadership captivates culture; influence drives culture.

In presenting these differences, we don't want to falsely elevate influence over leadership, but we do want to make the case that influence

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is bigger, deeper, and a more difficult skill to cultivate than leadership. If we had to choose between whether we wanted to exert leadership or influence, we would choose influence.

Kinds *of* People

When it comes to influence, people generally fall into one of eight categories.

1. People who have less clout than they think they do

We all know individuals who think they're more powerful, important, and interesting than they really are. You may have found yourself talking to someone like this at a social occasion and begun looking for a way to escape the conversation. Often these people gravitate toward the spotlight and look for any chance to sound off about themselves. But in the end, they're just a lot of noise and flash, and they rarely make a substantial impact on anyone or any situation. They are, in the words of a Texas buddy of mine, "all hat, no cattle."

2. People who have more clout than they think they do

Most people fall into this category because they are barely tapping the influence potential they possess. It's as if they're perched within reach of the peak of a mountain, and a small push would allow them to crest the summit and fly down the other side, gaining more momentum and speed in their influence ability than they ever thought possible. But even though these individuals are capable of having a greater impact than they already do, they are still exerting enormous influence in their normal pattern of life and in a natural way. They just don't know it.

3. People who are underapplying their clout

Some people deliberately avoid being influential. These individuals are often enormously and obviously talented, but for some reason (lack of confidence, laziness, rebellion) they refuse to live up to what is expected of them. They might possess great physical or mental ability. They might be gifted socially or spiritually. They might have wealth, title, or personality. Whatever it is, we expect them to cast a greater shadow of influence than they do. Perhaps Jesus had these

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people in mind when He warned, "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked" (Luke 12:48; all biblical citations are from the *New International Version*).

4. People who are wrongly applying their clout

We don't need to be told about the dark side of influence. History is full of notorious characters—Adolf Hitler, Idi Amin, Jim Jones—who used their considerable persuasive abilities for the destruction of humanity. Many of us have witnessed influence gone bad firsthand. It's ugly when it happens, and it often produces more ugliness. A current example is the ever-growing rap sheet of corporate executives who have inflated earnings to line their own coffers, usually at the expense of shareholders and employee retirement funds. The scandal that started with Enron has spiraled outward to include as many as twenty companies at last count, and it is still growing. This epidemic is a testament to the temptation to abuse power and influence for personal gain.

5. People who have clout in one area but feel powerless in another

It's not uncommon for someone to have a certain part of life in great shape but to feel like a total failure in another. This discrepancy often occurs between public and private life. A woman may be highly respected and extremely capable at work, but her kids are out of control, her husband has filed for divorce, and she doesn't know how to fix the shambles of her home life. Although this scenario is common, the reverse can also be true. A man may be a great husband and father, but at the office doubt, insecurity, and a sense of incompetence plague him. Too often, these people can't seem to transfer the principles of influence that work so well in one arena of life to another set of circumstances and relationships with a successful result.

6. People who are reflecting on the transfer and sustainability of their clout

In our consulting practice, we have worked with many executives who are reaching the end of their career and anticipating a transition or succession of some kind. One such leader was the first-generation founder of his company. He had built it into a $200 million business,

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and it was time for him to get off the horse and let someone else ride it through the next season of growth. He knew it was time, the board knew it, his executive team knew it—even key customers knew he needed to pass the reins. He wasn't running the business into the ground by any means, but he was growing short on energy and entering a new season of life, which meant a different role in the company.

We developed several plans, but whenever it came time to pull the trigger, this gentleman couldn't go through with the transition. As we continued to work with him, we realized that he was gripped by fear regarding the sustainability of his influence. The question of how he would be remembered, whether his twenty-five-year legacy would crumble or continue, absolutely paralyzed him. Once we realized what was driving his fear, we were able to coach this CEO and president through a transition that helped ensure the continuation of key elements of his influence in the direction of the company.

7. People at the sunrise of their life or career who are building their clout

Recently I spoke to a gathering of young up-and-comers in the Silicon Valley area. There were about three hundred young men and women in attendance, with dazzling professional pedigrees. After my thirty-minute presentation, I spent another hour and a half talking to these folks individually and in small groups. I realized that the common muscle being flexed that evening was the clout muscle. Almost every single attendee wanted to take his or her influence to the next level. Early in their professional lives, they were hungry for greater influence; they wanted to make deposits into their clout bank account. What I emphasized with them, and what we want to stress here, is that there are appropriate and inappropriate ways to achieve clout. A desire for influence can sometimes cloud our judgment, and if we stoop to a strategy that compromises our integrity, we risk losing the esteem of others and our own self-respect.

8. People who question whether a dirty word like clout can be linked with pure spiritual matters

We acknowledge that the concepts of clout and influence have a dark side hinting at corruption, manipulation, and intimidation.

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Because of this dark side, many people who are trying to build a good and pure life assume that they shouldn't strive in this area, that influence is not an appropriate tool for spiritual edification. Obviously, we don't think this is true, and we hope to clear up the misconception in the next section (and throughout this book).

Each category deserves some attention and gets it in the following chapters. But one thing is certain: the topic of influence applies to everyone, regardless of personality, circumstance, age, or role in life. The call to be influential in a positive way is an inherent part of what it means to be human.

Wouldn't you agree that there's something inside all of us that periodically brings us up short such that we ask, "Why was I put here on this earth? What am I doing? Will my life make a difference? Am I really using my resources in a significant way?" We may ignore or even run from these questions for a time, even for years, but eventually they catch up with us and force us to confront them. The search for meaning and significance sets us apart from animals; we believe it is indicative of having been created in God's image. The day-to-day routine involving work, family, and play is not enough to satisfy these deeper impulses.

For example, Bill Gates is the richest man in the world and has clearly succeeded in many ways, financially, intellectually, and historically. Why did he create a charity that spends millions of dollars in the hope of making people's lives better? We believe it's because a conscious effort to be a positive influence is part of the bigger picture of our lives. It's what helps us make a difference.

We believe that nothing can fully satisfy us apart from a personal relationship with God. But at the same time, He created all human beings, whether they acknowledge it or not, to derive meaning from having some type of impact on the people, events, and circumstances with which they're surrounded throughout life. To live a life that matters: that's influence. To influence in a good way is to live a life that matters. Therefore we invite you to hear and consider any advice that has the ring of truth and practicality.

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Key Points

- Most people have the potential to achieve a greater level of personal influence.
- Influence is a person's ability to shape people and mold outcomes.
- Influence is a combination of clout—something strong, muscular, direct, and intentional—and an intangible, almost mysterious, process.
- The word influence comes from the Latin verb *influere,* meaning to flow in, illustrating what happens in the influence process: one person's life flows into the life and circumstances of another individual.
- We can influence, but we cannot guarantee the outcomes and results.
- Leadership is the part of the iceberg that we see above the surface of the water; influence is the giant mass lurking below and out of sight. Here is how it might be summarized:

  Leadership is visible; influence is out of sight.

  Leadership is usually conscious; influence is often unconscious.

  Leadership is contained; influence crosses boundaries.

  Leadership is immediate; influence is long-term.

  Leadership is public; influence is often behind-the-scenes.

  Leadership is formulaic; influence is mysterious.

  Leadership captivates culture; influence drives culture.
- People generally fall into eight categories regarding their own influence:

  Those who have less clout than they think they do

  Those who have more clout than they think they do

  Those who underapply their clout

  Those who wrongly apply their clout

  Those who have clout in one area but feel powerless in another

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Those in the twilight of their career who are reflecting on the transferability and sustainability of their clout

Those in the sunrise of their career who are building their clout

Those who question whether a dirty word like clout can be linked with pure spiritual matters