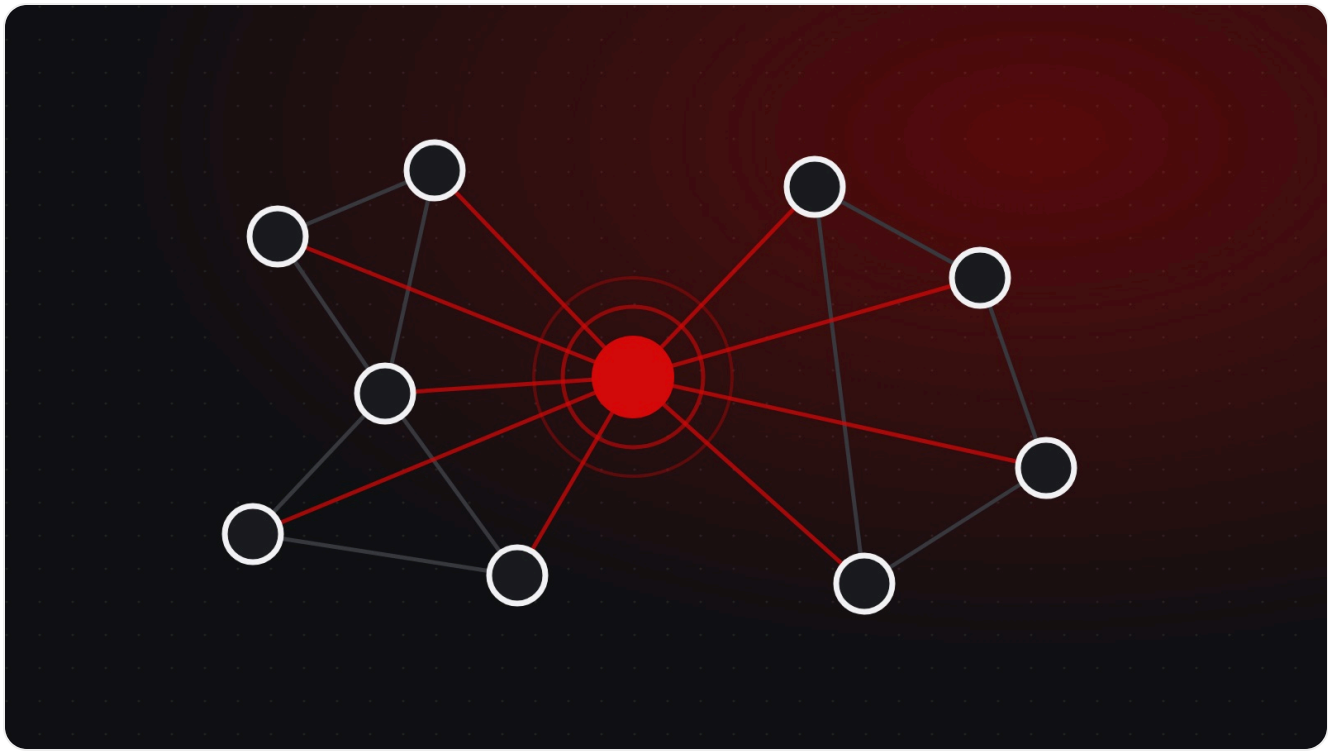
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How to Move People When You Cannot Boss Them Around.



By Tommy Lee



Quick note up front. This blog is based on a Harvard Business Review article by Pamela Meyer called "5 Ways to Wield Influence When You Lack Authority". I read it recently, and it is one of my favorite pieces I have gone through in a while. What you are about to read is not a summary of her article. It is my own take, with my own stories, on the five paths she names. If you want the research and the data behind it, go read the original. If you want how this actually plays out in a church, a nonprofit, or a team, stay with me.

Sooner or later, every leader runs into the same problem. You have got the title. You have got the track record. And then you land in a spot where you have to get something done through people who do not report to you. They are not on your payroll. You have no say over their budget. You cannot make them do a single thing. So now what?

I run into this constantly. Think about a pastor, or anybody running a nonprofit. Half of what needs to happen gets done by volunteers, and you cannot boss a volunteer around. If they do not want to be there, they walk out the door. So you have to figure out how to move people who owe you nothing. And honestly, that is most of leadership now. The old “I pay you, so you do what I say” days are over. People want their opinion to matter. They want to feel like they belong to something and that the work means something. If they do not get that from you, they will go earn the same paycheck somewhere else and feel valued there instead. Or they will find a place as a volunteer where they feel like they are valued.

The article by Pamela Meyer names five kinds of people who are good at moving others without any authority. Here is how I have watched each one show up in real life.



The influence spotter

This is the person who can walk into a room and tell you who runs it and who has the most presence in the room. Not who has the title. But who has the pull. There is the official leader up front with the title, and then there is the quiet guy over in the corner, and the second a real decision comes up, everybody's eyes drift over to him or her. Whatever they say has a heavy influence in the room and on the team. That is the person you have to find. And here is the part people miss. Sometimes the most influential person is not even in the room. It is somebody's old boss, or their mentor, the person they call on the drive home to ask what they should do. If you cannot spot who is really steering the thing, you will burn all your energy convincing the wrong person. One warning though. Insecure leaders hate this. The minute you point at the real influencer, they get defensive and resistant. They have the title and feel that they deserve to be heard and listened to. No no no, I am the one in charge here. Okay. But the room already knows who they are actually listening to.

The back channeler

This is my favorite one. The back channeler is the person who quietly works two people back together behind the scenes. Say you and I are on the same team and we cannot stand each other. We avoid each other, and nothing gets done. A good back channeler is someone we both trust who goes to each of us on the side. Tell me what is driving you crazy about him or her. Okay, now tell me one thing you actually respect about them. And little by little they walk the two of you back toward each other until you can work together again. But warning: this only works if the back channeler is someone you can trust. Get the wrong person in that seat and you have a mess. A back channeler with their own agenda will say one thing to you and something else to the other person, and you end up worse off than when you started. So yes, use back channels. Just be really careful who you hand that job to. Pick wrong and you open up a whole can of worms.

The precision mover

This one is all about timing. The precision mover knows when to make a move, and just as much, when to sit on it. They do not push an idea into a room that is anxious, or defensive, or fired up. They wait for the right moment. Here is how I have watched it work. Say you bring me a great idea. It's genuinely good and may work out. But it's a little out there. And that same week word comes down that earnings are off, the stock dropped, and layoffs might be coming. I am going to tell you, I love it, it is a good idea, hold on to it. Not now. Then next quarter things turn around,

and I tell you, okay, now go present it. Same exact idea, completely different outcome, and the only thing that changed was the timing. A precision mover feels that in the room. They know a great idea at the wrong moment gets a no, and the same idea three months later gets a yes. Timing is everything, and they know when to push through certain things.

The connector

Connectors introduce you to the one person who can actually help, and it changes everything. But there are two kinds of connectors, and you can feel the difference once I tell you. The first kind knows everyone and connects you to everyone. This person, that person, this person, that person. But they are always trying to identify the most important person in the room and how they can use that person for their own agenda. You can always tell this when they are talking to you, but their eyes are also scanning the room to see if there is someone more important they need to be talking to. They collect people in order to move their own agenda. This feels very much like a used car salesman. And don't get me wrong. Some of these guys are very effective and they are extremely personable and can easily connect you to people and get things done. But it's just not who I resonate with.

The second kind actually sits down and gets to know you. What are you working on? What do you need? Who can I put you in touch with that would help? How can I serve you? Your goals are important. How can I accomplish your goals? You walk away feeling you are the most important person in the room. Their eyes are focused, and they don't seem distracted when talking to you. And because they helped you with nothing in it for them, you want to turn right around and help them back. That is the connector you trust. The other one you can smell from across the room. Loudest voice in the place, hey so and so, hey so and so, already looking past you for the biggest fish to go shake hands with. They LOVE to drop names (be careful of people who are constantly dropping names). One kind can fill a room with contacts. The other kind can actually move a room, because people trust them as they have proved this over time.

The pulse reader

The pulse reader hears what nobody is saying out loud. They catch where the energy drops, where the attention goes, when a silence is actually a no. Here is the situation every one of us has been in. The leader lays out a decision and says, any concerns? Silence. Great, sounds like we are all on board. And you are sitting there thinking, we are absolutely not on board. Look at their faces. Nobody said a word, but nobody agreed either. The person leading the meeting DOES NOT know how to read the room. A pulse reader catches that. They read the faces, they feel the

temperature of the room, and they know the difference between real agreement and a room that just went quiet. If you cannot read that, you will walk out thinking everyone is with you when all you really have is a group of people who checked out five minutes ago.

Why this matters now

Work is faster and more scattered than it was even a few years ago. You cannot own the whole thing yourself anymore. You have to collaborate. You must hand pieces off to people you do not control. And the only way that works is if they actually choose to be in it with you. Power is not the title on your door. Power is whether people want to move when you ask them to. You have to motivate them and give them purpose. You have to help them see why they need to follow you. And in order to do that, you need to be a secure leader.

So learn to spot who is really steering the room. Learn to work people back together quietly. Learn when to move and when to wait. Be the connector who actually helps. And learn to hear the room even when nobody is saying the quiet part out loud. None of that needs a title. It just needs people who want to follow you.

Tommy

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tommy Lee is the founder and president of Resource Global, a network that teaches, mentors, and connects emerging Christian marketplace leaders in cities around the world. He writes about faith, leadership, work, and AI at tommyplee.ai.

Read more issues at tommyplee.ai