

# A case study: employee behavior

[Business](#), [Employee](#)



The MBA Toolbox defines influencing as, “ changing another person’s attitudes without using force or authority” (p. 1). When force or authority is used the implication is that the influence is unethical. Influence is achieved ethically by engendering trust. For managers and executives influencing behavior should be thought of as an ongoing, two-way, process. Jeanne Lewis of Staples, Inc. was able to ethically influence her organization by adapting her own style and by listening to and learning from her employees at all levels of the organization.

It is impossible to institute effective change within an organization without being well-connected to the organization itself. The Harvard case study about the career of Jeanne Lewis shows that it is possible to change a corporation through interpersonal relationships, dialogue and patience. The Company Despite the ill-fated merger with Office Depot in 1997, Staples Inc. was a company that exhibited a track record of consistent growth by the time Jeanne Lewis was hired into the marketing department. Strong leadership from the top had characterized Staples rise to prominence.

Despite Staples’ track record of success, Jeanne Lewis sensed the need for change within the organization. As she moved through various positions in the company she only became more convinced of this. If Staples was going to meet its’ aggressive goals a more integrative organizational approach was needed. But how could she put her ideas forward? Upon Todd Krasnow’s exit, Lewis would be the new leader. Krasnow was universally respected, and any change from his philosophy could meet with resistance. Promoting Change

Ethical and effective change within an organization is a function of trust. Jeanne Lewis understood this. She also saw influencing change as a process.

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Gaining influence by dishonest means could have been done in an instant, but Lewis knew this would benefit no one in the long run. Lewis influenced people first by being open and honest, and second by putting herself in the shoes of her employees. When the time for change came, they were ready to go along with her because they trusted her commitment to them and the company.

Jeanne Lewis did not try to propose significant organizational change as soon as she had the idea. She paved the way for change over a number of years. She learned every detail she could about the operation of the company, and became well liked and respected. One co-worker in Suesse's case study Jeanne Lewis at Staples, Inc. , describes Lewis this way: Jeanne's charm could be disarming. She worked really hard and her personality motivated you. She tended to manage tightly at first then loosened the reins. She challenged us a lot and invited us to

challenge each other. (p. 4) Jeanne's personality and open nature engendered trust among those who worked with her. But it was also clear to everyone that she knew the business, and could succeed in any position within it. This feeling was not earned overnight. Lewis had strived to learn the details others might not have. Another co-worker describes her this way: I think she was able to influence people and get respect because she had great insight, and she combined it with a great natural personality. (Suesse, p.

5) Conclusions The MBA toolbox defines influence in practical terms this way: ...to influence you have to prove to other people that accepting your proposal helps them to solve their problems or achieve their objectives. (p.

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1) This simple definition masks a complex, and very human, process. Influence can be achieved in ethical or unethical, honest or dishonest, ways. The ramifications of unethical influence can extend far beyond what is expected. The recent corporate scandals show the destruction that can take place.

The ethical and financial downfall likely started as the result of one person exerting influence, unethically, over another. The case study of Jeanne Lewis shows the value of trust within an organization. Trust comes from ethical behavior. Gregory Perry in *An exploration of Factors Influencing Ethical and Unethical Behavior in Negotiations*, highlights this factor: Trust between parties is viewed as an integral- if not central feature of the effective and productive work relationships... Highly ethical behavior can build relationships and reduce

transaction costs between parties. (p. 2) Influencing an organization by ethical means takes more time than doing it unethically. It is a process of gaining trust similar to that in any relationship. Jeanne Lewis influenced her organization ethically by gaining the knowledge to know how her changes would affect others, remaining open to suggestion and gaining trust. Comparing the experience of Jeanne Lewis at Staples to other companies rife with unethical behavior, however, shows that the effort is well worth it for everyone involved.

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