



### Unintended Influence

No matter your age or experience, there are people in your life who have made a significant impact **on you** or **you on them**. Our parents and grandparents are typically those who provide the most, in the beginning, since we spend a significant amount of time with them in the early years. Once we start school, our teachers are with us for seven to eight hours a day and that can be more time than we spend as parents! This highlights the importance of the short amount of time we do have alone with our children (ie. while they are awake and not at school, practice or playing with friends). However, we do not need deep, intense, personal relationships to have or use our leadership, our influence. We do so countless ways, every day, in hundreds of interactions, both intentional and not.

If you are a coach, teacher, manager, director or parent, you are influencing someone merely by your positional authority – good or bad, we might add. But what about those influences which



aren't as obvious? Do you go to Starbucks (or Dunkin Donuts) every day? I do and I talk (and know) all the baristas there. Knowing their names is important to me. I make it a habit because I know that that little personal touch, goes a long way with them. They've all gone out of their way to learn my name and take care of me every time I come in or go through the drive through. However, you don't have to know someone's name to have an influence on them. Non-verbal body language could be just as influential on someone. Our short daily interactions can and will influence people, but our long term relationships will even more so.

My husband left for his pre- deployment training when our youngest was five days old and our oldest was three years old. I had saved three weeks of leave to take in addition to the six weeks of maternity leave I was entitled to, by the Navy. Therefore, with a nine-week-old newborn, a busy three-year-old and a husband deployed, I headed back to work as an active duty Navy pilot. I hired a nanny and told my husband that when he returned from deployment, the nanny would stay until we were done deploying. I survived those sleepless nights and long days thanks to Jenna, Maressa, Haley, Nadia, Sarah and Meredith. They were entrusted with those most important to me: my children. They were all hard- working, ambitious and loving young women who became a part of our family. For almost ten years, those women were an *intentional influence* in the lives of our children and our family. We considered them part of our family.

They did more than just take my kids back and forth from daycare and school. They flew the girls across the country while my husband drove our car and I was deployed. They comforted my kids while mom or dad was deployed. They were a constant in their lives when a parent was gone. When I was on my last tour and working at an ROTC unit, they were at my house by 4:30am so that I could get to work. They went to field days and on field trips. They took kids to the doctor and dentist. They even had to follow my rules and weren't allowed to use their cell phones at the dinner table. When I say they were a part of our family, I mean it. They were included in our yearly family picture sessions. They joined us on family vacations.

At the time, I never thought about my influence on one of them. In some ways, I looked at them as my eldest child – I certainly loved them that much. They also saw me at my worst; when I was tired, solo parenting while my husband was deployed and challenged as I balanced a career and raising little kids. Yet it was then that I was being watched the most. A year ago, Meredith told me she had been accepted into the Army's Officer Candidate School and explained that she had been influenced *by me* to serve. While I was certainly proud and humbled, it wasn't until her commissioning ceremony last month that it really hit me. She asked me to pin her 2nd Lieutenant bars on her uniform. As I held the gold bars, I realized that they were my gold bars from 20+ years earlier when I was commissioned an Ensign.



I will never forget pinning those gold bars on Meredith. All that time, I was focused on the positive influence she had on my children and our family...yet, now more than ever, I'm aware of the influence I [you] can have on someone, especially those *unintended influences*.

How are you using your own? We must stay aware of the impact we have in all our relationships, both with members of our family and the baristas at our local Starbucks.

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