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Quarter 3 / 2026
Lead From Any Seat



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- Are you attending an event in the upcoming months? [Let us know](#) and we will share in upcoming newsletters.
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Influence Without Authority

Claire McNaught | Senior Interior Designer | MiEN Environments



Admittedly, I saw the topic of this article and questioned my own ability to write about this. "How do I have influence among customers and colleagues? I don't have authority." Then, I realized: 1. We influence more than we think. 2. Influence doesn't always have to be dressed in a power suit.

Influence comes down to trust. The thing that makes us increasingly successful in establishing trust is the practice of listening first, and I mean truly listen. Not listening with our own agenda but seeking to hear the customer's goals and intentions. These are the times when I have been able to influence without formal authority. An educator describes

their space and needs to which I respond with "Well, it sounds like what you're needing is X."

There's an element of learning to trust yourself in these situations as well. Trust that you have knowledge and experience to bring to the table. A recent example of this is a project I worked on at an elementary media center renovation. There were many parties involved in the conversation from the superintendent, contractor, to the A&D firm. I realized during the meetings that the superintendent simply wanted to be heard. He needed me to meet his vision and propose recommendations on how to achieve it. My next step was to use patience in when to introduce my perspective. It was extremely beneficial to remember that the superintendent was looking for me to understand his needs as much as he was looking for my expertise. There's so much to be said about the balance of when to speak; ensuring that my message is to contribute to the conversation, not to boost myself.

I also find that credibility is built fast when I put myself in others' shoes. I try to think about what their next question or concern is going to be. This could be applied to a formal presentation or a personal conversation. We've all been in that situation where we're explaining a new concept and the person on the receiving end is a little hesitant.

Striking a balance between confident listening and building trust can be as challenging as it is rewarding. Go to your next meeting with patience and confidence!

Earn Your Seat + Own Your Voice

EDmarket Q&A with [Kelsey Jordan](#) | Associate Director of PreK-12 | Legat Architects



When have you successfully influenced a decision without formal authority?

Informal authority isn't about having all the answers. Instead, it's about driving clarity through presence, curiosity, and action. Early in a career, youth and relative inexperience are often viewed as limitations, but they can be a distinct strategic advantage if leveraged correctly.

When you are newer or younger, expectations of you are different. People don't expect you to have every answer, but they do expect honesty and thoughtful questions. By being present, staying observant, and asking informed questions to the right decision-makers, you can gently challenge assumptions and guide the direction of a conversation without needing formal command.

There's also the phase "you must do the job before you get the title." In practice, this means taking ownership of your continuous learning and actively operating at the next level. When you consistently show up with solutions, engage meaningfully, and drive momentum from where you stand, formal authority naturally follows.

How do you build credibility quickly with senior stakeholders (district leaders, architects, dealers)?

Credibility and trust cannot be artificially fast-tracked — they are earned incrementally through consistent, high-accountability behaviors. It starts by leading with curiosity rather than unearned assertion with questions like, "Can you help me understand why this is important?" This helps to uncover context and build collaborative alignment.

Credibility is also built through ownership by admitting mistakes while demonstrating ego-free commitment to outcomes. Paired with the courage to address hard conversations head-on with calm objectivity, this mindset proves you can navigate complex friction.

Ultimately, trust is gained by being consistently responsive, accountable, and dependable.

What's harder: getting a seat at the table or using your voice once you're there?

If you lack an advocate already at the table, then securing an invitation is hard. If you struggle to grant yourself the authority to speak up, then using your voice is hard.

When you don't have an advocate opening doors for you, self-advocacy becomes essential. You need to communicate your desire to be in the room and, most importantly, articulate your why. If you cannot clearly explain the value you bring to the discussion or organization, others won't innately understand why you should be included. Once you earn that spot, own it physically and mentally by sitting at the primary table and being an active participant.

Remember, feeling nervous when stepping into a new room or asking for a seat at the table is completely natural. It's a reaction to the unfamiliar. Navigating this hurdle ultimately requires recognizing that advocacy can be cultivated over time and by grounding yourself in the conviction that your presence at the table was earned for a reason.

Suggested Resource: [How to Start a Movement - TED Talk](#)

2026 EDspaces NexGen Events

October 28-30, 2026 / Kansas City, MO

- Oct. 27, 8:30-10:00 pm - NexGen Meet and Mingle - Loews Hotel Bar
- Oct. 28, 9:15 am - Recognition at Opening Plenary
- Oct. 28, 3:30 pm - Mix and Mingle - EDmarket in-booth happy hour

2026 Virtual Events

Sept. 17, 3:00pm ET - NexGen Q3 Session
(see calendar invite for link)



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