

SETTING UP FOR SUCCESS: A STORY OF INFLUENCE

Unique Speaker Bureau's theme for January focuses on "Setting up for Success" below we received contributions from the renowned Mentalist Gilan Gork. He has presented to audiences in over 20 countries since publishing his best-selling book 'Persuasion Games' and his astonishing mentalist feats have been written about and extensively broadcast by leading media platforms.

There I was, a struggling entertainer, living at home with my parents with barely enough money to be able to leave home and support my own basic needs...

Since I was 5 years old I had the dream to be a famous performer on stage, and when I discovered I had the talent to be a mentalist, I followed my passion. I nearly failed high school because I was so distracted by my passion of being on stage.

After school I wanted to make enough money to be able to support myself, my long-term girlfriend and, one day, a family. I also had my heart set on my childhood dream to perform around the world, moving audiences with my unique skills as a mentalist.

My external, obvious struggle was that I was not making much money, and I was in a long-term relationship with a girl who wanted to settle down. While I knew our relationship wasn't dependant on my income, I felt a sense of failure as a partner, barely able to provide for myself, never mind providing for the life we both imagined and deserved.

I had an internal, not-so-obvious struggle too, which I've only recently had the courage to acknowledge...

Being on stage, captivating an audience, and hearing people gasp at my mentalist feats was like a form of self-medicating to treat my sense of low self-worth. When I was on stage I felt empowered and valuable but off stage, when I'd mingle with people, especially others who I deemed high status, I had a constant feeling of inadequacy – as I played the let-me-compare-our-lives game constantly in my head – and always seemed to fall short.

Cue 2008 and the great global recession hit. The first thing companies cut were luxuries such as event... And if they *did* have an event it was run on a 'shoestring budget' without much spent on entertainment. It was an extremely tough market to build a business as a freelancer.

One day something amazing happened that changed the course of my life. A friend of mine handed me an audio CD of leadership guru John C. Maxwell. What stood out for me was John's reminder that "Everything rises and falls with our ability to positively influence others".

I suddenly realised that the only thing holding my success back was my level of *influence*. See, I'd always thought that once I was famous enough I would have all the influence I needed to be successful. However I had the epiphany that it was the other way around: I needed to create influence *first*, to allow success to naturally follow. I see this same mistake being made in traditional business all the time when employees think they need a fancy title to be influential. Again, it's the other way around: when you *first* create influence with others, then the position *becomes* available. The only thing a position or title gives you is a little *time*, either to increase your influence or undermine it.

What I needed was an *Influence Breakthrough* for my business. That is, I needed to better influence clients to book me, journalists to feature me and a team to dedicate themselves to an audacious goal.

Influence was something I was already passionate about because I used influence techniques on stage for my mentalist feats. My plan was to analyse and dissect the influence psychology I use on stage – establish

universal principles of influence – and then apply those same principles to leadership, sales and marketing to grow my business.

As I applied these principles my profile grew. I appeared in prominent media – featured as an expert in program like Carte Blanche – and I had clients offering to pay excellent fees for me to appear at their events.

The problem is that the entertainment industry is limited, especially in South Africa.

One day, after having breakfast with Robbie Brozen, founder of Nandos, he suggested I start sharing my expertise by presenting talks for companies. I followed this route, but it didn't take long for me to realise that entering the 'expert industry' as an entertainer meant facing an uphill battle... After all, how would executives take an entertainer seriously? I was a small fish in a huge ocean, competing against people with prolific stories and track records.

I was in a catch-22 situation in which I wanted to teach companies about influence, however I needed to already *have* influence to be booked to do that! If I was to create any type of influence breakthrough then I needed to practice what I wanted to preach, and create influence for myself first.

I applied every proven influence principle I could, and my results started to speak for itself. I was able to influence a team around me that would help accomplish in months what would take most people years. I held sold-out public events. My book was published within months, resulting in international bookings in over 20 countries across Africa, Asia, Europe and America.

Thanks to the influence breakthroughs in my career, I've been able to design the life that I have imagined. I'm fulfilling my childhood dream of performing on stages around the world. I'm able to provide to be able to give my loved ones anything they need or want, including precious time.

Lastly, as someone who used to doubt my self-worth, feeling inadequate off stage, I now enjoy magnificent relationships with the same people I used to compare myself to. I smile every time I think of my friend, John Maxwell, and the fond memory I have of attending a cocktail party at his house a few years ago.

If I could go back a few years to speak to that younger version of myself, I would say "Gilan... If you want to set yourself up for success then understand early that 'Everything Rises and Falls on Influence'. Wherever you are in life and whatever you want to achieve... You're just *one influence breakthrough* away..."

Learn more about Gilan here: www.uniquespeakerbureau.com / www.gilangork.com

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