

Influencing Without Authority

And other lessons from a nearly 20-year career

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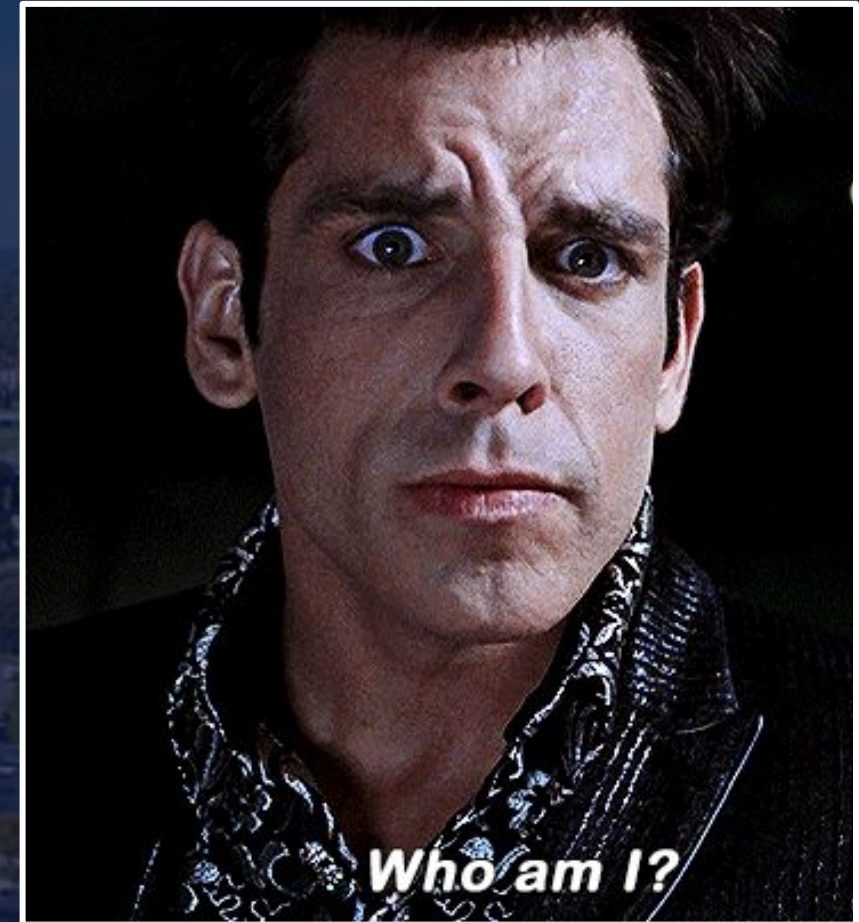
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About Me

- Public sector since 2007 in roles from intern to director. City Director level since 2016.
- Fundraising, project management, events, communications, supervisory, and more.
- Nerd - games (all types), books, tennis, birds, travel, kitchen experimentation



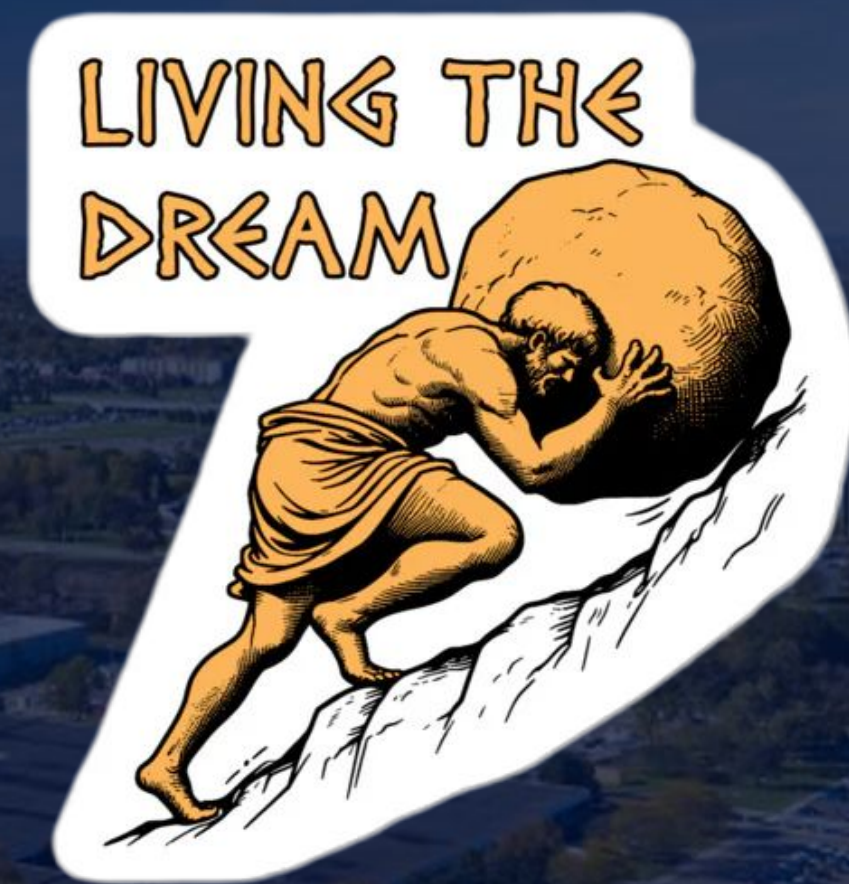
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What is the point of influencing?

Our work inherently depends on others.



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What about good, old-fashioned accuracy and expertise?



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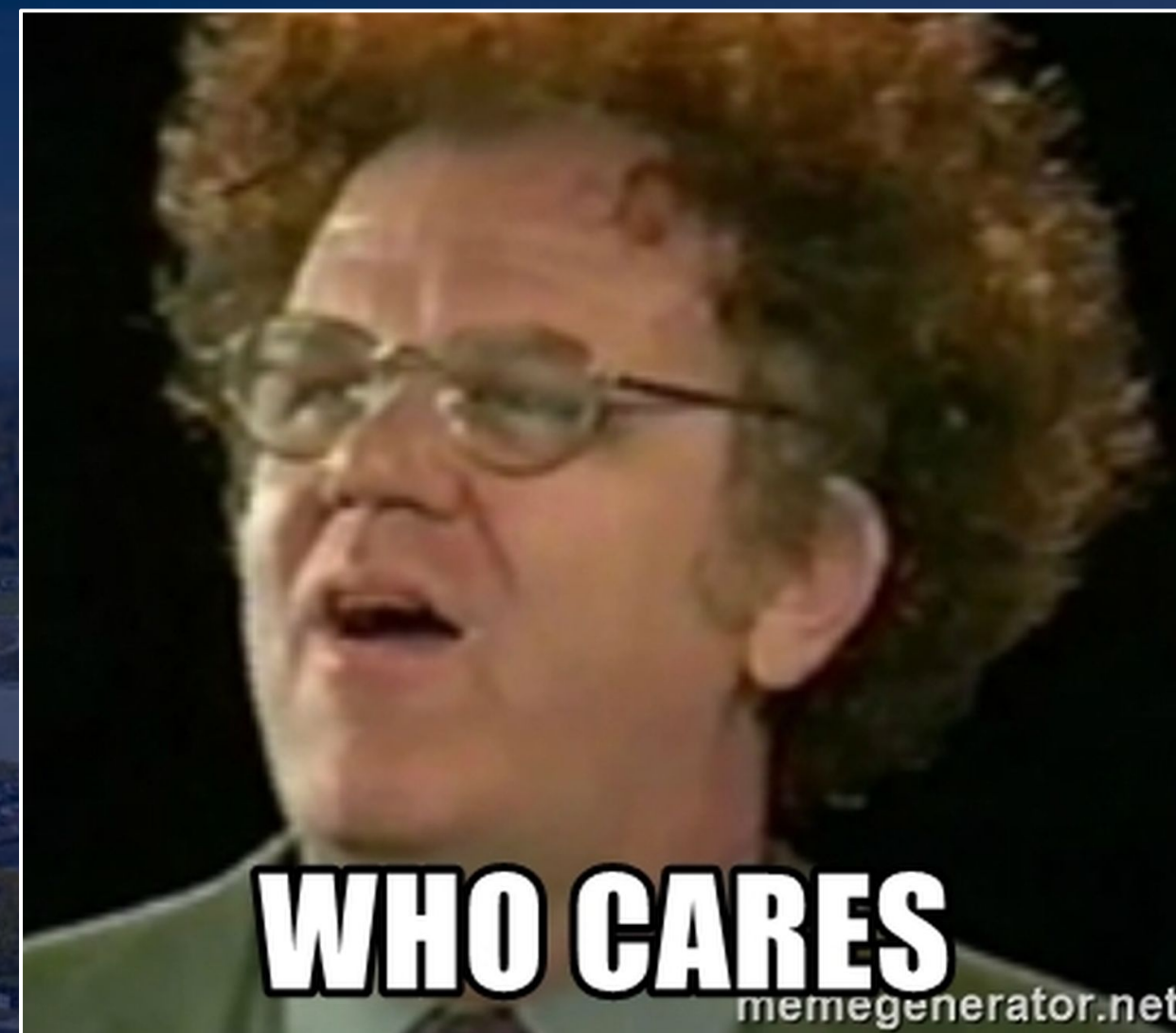


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Being right, and even being
“in charge” **don't matter**
if no one listens.



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A notion so simple its power is easily overlooked:

- All organizations have some level of bureaucratic processes & rules.
- These processes are overseen, interpreted, and managed by people.
- These people have their own needs, wants, challenges, and priorities.
- How well you understand and navigate this landscape, and your relationships with people, will deeply affect your experience.



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My ingredients for influencing without authority

- **Strategy:** assess my needs and opportunities to bolster my case.
- **Approach:** prepare, align, engage intentionally, manage attitude
- **Reputation:** be the teammate I would want; deliver results; hold myself accountable.



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Strategy



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Understand the world you seek to influence

- What is your goal? Why?
- What do you bring to the table?
- Who/what does this affect?
- Historical context?



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With no authority, what can you leverage?

- Reliability; ability to deliver solutions and outcomes
- Empathy & Respect
- Relationships & Trust
- Alignment with authority
- Resources
- Process inertia



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Alignment with authority

- explicit priority
- direct assignment
- budgeted project

Resources

- your work capacity
- skills/contributions unique to your team
- stakeholders in your orbit

Process inertia

- number & nature of steps
- time to plan, or do
- who already agreed



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Example: You want to invest in a facade program

Alignment with authority

“The Mayor is fully behind the facade program and wants the first projects done this year.”

Resources

- your team has a contract with a solid architect
- your team knows all the businesses in the target area.

Process inertia

- funding is available in the CDBG action plan
 - the corridor improvement authority has wanted this for years.



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There's one more thing you can leverage...



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There's one more thing you can leverage... YOU!

- You bring a unique perspective, talent set, and personality to the work, use it!
- Lean into your greatest strengths (*hint - what are you asked for help with, or for your opinion on*) as a source of credibility.



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Approach

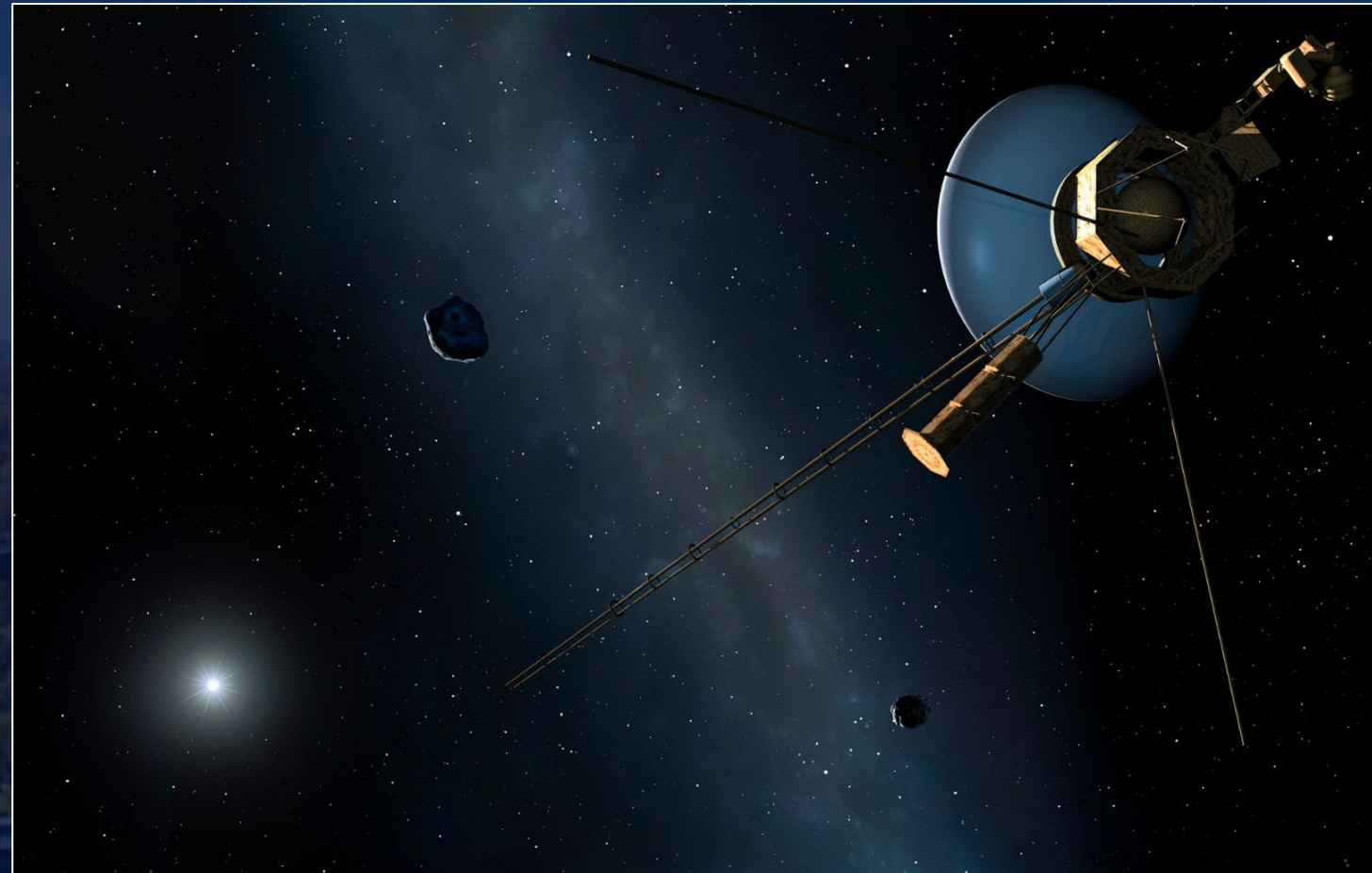


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Preparation & Alignment



How does your goal acknowledge and advance the goals of the people and processes its success depends on?



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Messaging & Engagement:

How would you respond to...

“Whoever ran this project did a terrible job and we have to clean up their mess.”



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People do this all the time! Don't poison the well.



“Whoever ran this project did a terrible job and we have to clean up their mess.”



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Try this:

We can build on the work done to-date, but based on direction from leadership now, we need to pivot.



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The Lesson: You can be “direct” without being a



We can build on the work done to-date, but based on direction from leadership now, we need to pivot.



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Messaging & Engagement:

How would you respond to...



“I need you to drop whatever you’re doing because this needs to be on the Council agenda **tomorrow** or we lose the grant!”



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Never let your failure to plan be the source of an emergency.



“I need you to drop whatever you’re doing because this needs to be on the Council agenda **tomorrow** or we lose the grant!”



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Try this:

We have a deadline for this grant in 3 months; can you find some time to connect next week so we can prepare for bringing this to Council in advance?



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The Lesson: Think ahead & include others. Don't create emergencies - and friction - by failing to plan.

We have a deadline for this grant in 3 months; can you find some time to connect next week so we can prepare for bringing this to Council in advance?



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Laying the groundwork for decisions

The meetings before the meeting



*informal, candid; map it all out;
assume everyone does it*

The meeting itself



*formalize pre-work; advance, table, or
die; have boundaries, respect theirs*



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Reputation



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Self-evaluation:

- How quickly do people respond to your requests for help?
- How often do people, especially leaders, come to *you* for help?
- Are you a problem announcer, or problem solver?
- How much do you try/explore before seeking help?
- Do you use Chat GPT as an aide, or as a substitute, for thinking?



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Influence & Impact are fueled by reliability, respect, & results.



Caring only when you need something; “not my job, not my problem”



Manages self before managing others; offers solutions; shows respect for needs of others



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Why reputation matters

- If you are a PITA, you will have no lasting influence!
- Complaints don't solve issues; people do.
- If you want to be trusted, you need to be trustworthy.
- We all make mistakes; having your intent understood and believed makes a big difference in what happens.



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What contributes to reputation?

- Your ability to deliver outcomes
- How you treat others
- Effort you put in before asking others
- Your attitude
- How and when you ask for help

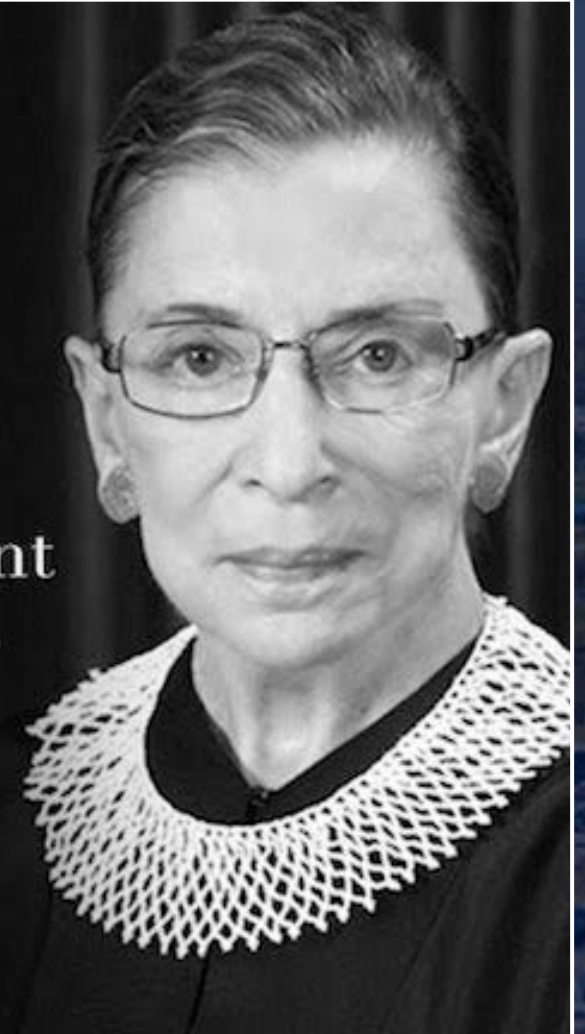
These earn you influence via:

- Relationships, Trust, Credibility

“

I would like to be remembered as someone who used whatever talent she had to do her work to the very best of her ability.

Ruth Bader Ginsburg



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The world is small, but consistency trumps gossip.



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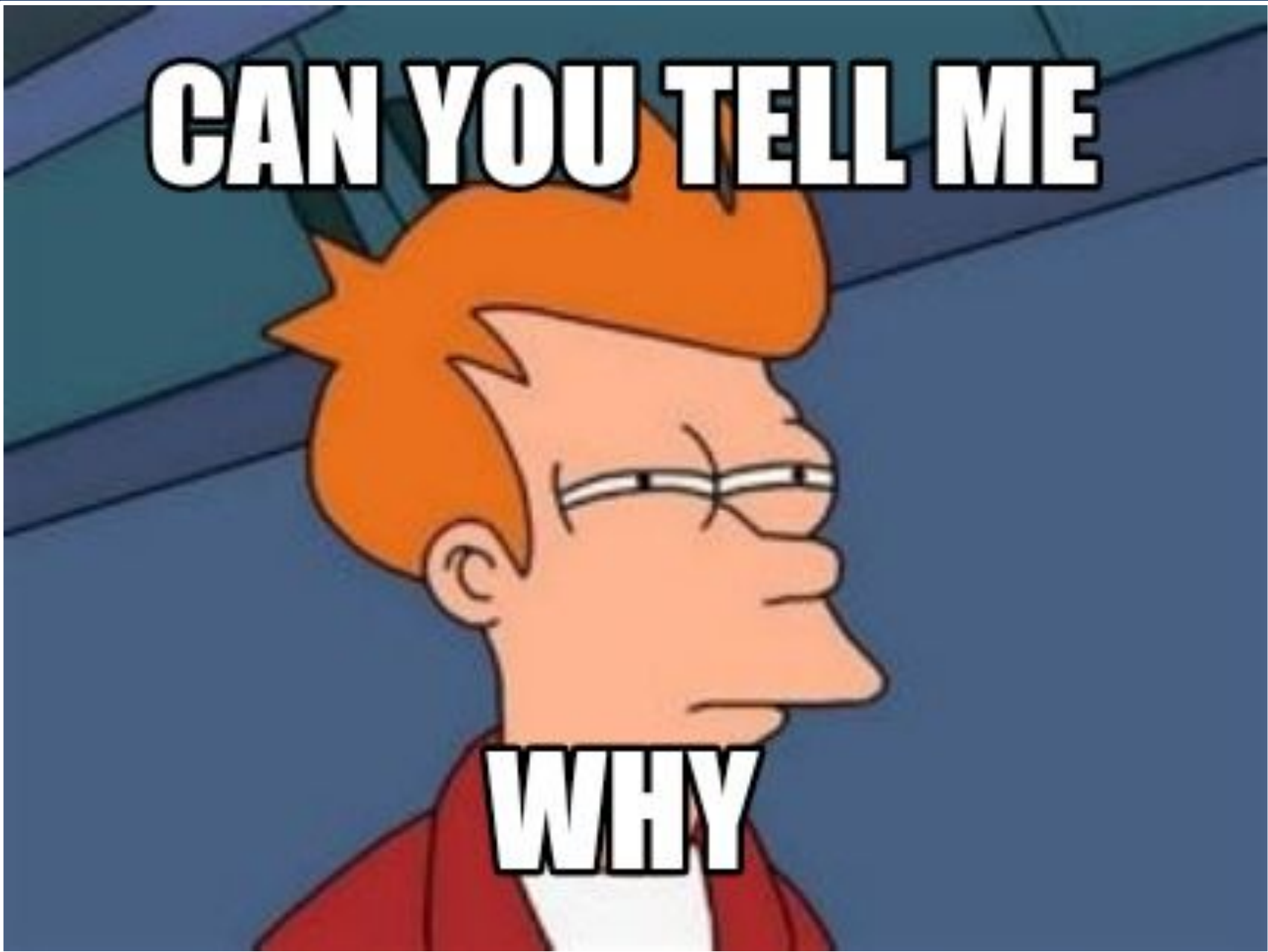
Influencing others is great, but....



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A note on career development: Know your “why”



- Why are you in this field? What do you believe?
- Can you do the things you want to do outside of work? Do you know what those things are?
- What's next? How does now get you there?

Pursue work that aligns w/your why; growth will call you.



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Final Thoughts for aspiring (Econ Dev) influencers

- The right support at the right time wins out.
- A problem solver is rare and valued.
- Deliver results & your influence will grow.
- A good team makes a good job.
- When the pressure is on remember your “why”.



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Q&A



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