

Paula J. Caproni
Cindy A. Schipani

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Ruth Bader Ginsburg: Using Influence Strategies to Promote Gender Equality

The late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg (often referred to as “RBG”) strategically used influence to argue and win one of the earliest gender discrimination cases in the United States—*Moritz v. Commissioner of Internal Revenue*.¹ *Moritz* took place early in RBG’s career when she was an attorney and law professor, prior to when she became a Supreme Court Justice. The details of the case reflected the social and legal landscape of the late 1960s and early 1970s, as well as RBG’s place in this context. It was against this social and legal backdrop that RBG began a lifelong mission to advocate for equal protection under the law for all United States citizens, with a particular focus on gender equality.

Understanding the influence strategies RBG used in *Moritz* provides lessons for today’s life situations and work, particularly in how to change others’ beliefs and behaviors in order to gain their support. Such an understanding involves two questions: What influence strategies did RBG use to persuade the judges to unanimously issue a decision that could topple years of laws that supported gender discrimination and change the outcomes of similar cases in the future? How could her influence strategies be applied to other work contexts and applications?

Ruth Bader Ginsburg’s Early Career: Social and Legal Context

RBG grew up, attended college and law school, and began her career at a time when overt discrimination on the basis of gender was prevalent and legal in the United States. Banks could require women to have their husbands and fathers co-sign their applications for a credit card.² Birth control was available to married women only.³ It was legal to publicly deny women admission to Ivy League colleges, to advertise separate jobs for men and women, and to deny jobs to women even if they had equal or better qualifications than the men who applied.⁴ Women could be fired if they were pregnant or—as in the case of airlines—considered to be too old or not attractive enough for the job.⁵ Jury duty was required for men as a duty of citizenship but optional for women, making it harder for women accused of crimes to have their case decided by a jury of their peers.⁶

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