

Command Attention with Power and Authority

Great persuaders know and understand how to use different forms of power, but if you're like most people, you just cringed at the word "power." Is power something we're really allowed to talk about? Is it good or bad? Can we have power over our audience?

The answers to these questions depend on what form of power it is, how it is used, and what the user's intentions are. We all possess different forms of power in different situations. It is human nature to respect and follow power and expertise, and power certainly has legitimate, ethical, and necessary uses. Of course, we know that power can also be used unethically to manipulate and control. When your audience trusts your power, you will be very persuasive in moving them to action. What causes them to trust your power or authority? What causes them to trust your expertise? They trust your expertise and authority when you can help them access something they need or desire. This could be a product or service, rewards, freedom, or information.

Power is different from force. It is all about your intent. Power creates trust, it strengthens, and it empowers. Force must always be maintained, enforced, and warranted. Force sucks the energy and life out of people. True power encourages, revitalizes, and creates unity and synergy. Power causes us to listen and obey. Force causes us to be skeptical and run. David R. Hawkins said it best: "Power gives life and energy—force takes these away. We notice that power is associated with compassion and makes us feel positively about ourselves. Force is associated with judgment and makes us feel poorly about ourselves.

Note that power or force does not have to be exerted to be effective. A bank robber holds power as he stands menacingly with a gun, yet he doesn't have to actually shoot anyone to exert this power. A police officer wields power just sitting in her car, even if she's not following you with her siren and lights on. The same is true for a doctor wearing a white coat. We also see it with the knowledge of a college professor. Knowing your boss can fire you, even if she hasn't made any threats, still gives her a position of power over you. Similarly, when you know more about whatever it is your audience

needs or wants, it automatically places you in the position of greater power, expertise, or authority.

It is a natural human tendency to seek power. The whole world runs on the concept of power. There would be no order without it. The legal system has the right and the power to interpret laws. The military and police have the power to enforce laws. A manager has the power to fire a dishonest employee. Parents have the power to discipline children. Power is ingrained in our psyches, our culture, and our society. Dr. Floyd Allport, a social psychologist, talks about this instinctive characteristic in his book *Social Psychology*. He believes that deep inside each person there is a desire to incite reactions in others. He further asserts that as we age, these desires grow more strongly into a yearning for control.

Why is power so seductive? When we possess power and control over our environment, we feel strong, invincible, and often exhilarated. As Abraham Lincoln said, "Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power."

The question remains then: What makes the exercise of power good or bad? Power tends to make us nervous—and with good reason. We have all seen great abuses of power—tragic, deadly abuses. We also feel that power inhibits our personal freedoms and our ability to control our own lives. We have all been forced to do things against our will, and we have all experienced someone who threw his power around in the wrong way. These past experiences are why the pursuit of power makes us feel uncertain. Many people think that power is all about using dominance, coercion, force, strength, or even control. Sure, these actions can be used as power, but not for genuine, long-term persuasion. Great persuaders don't get stuck on power trips or feel the need to exert themselves on others. They understand that the proper and ethical use of power opens their audience to persuasion. Most average persuaders use power in the wrong way—too much, too soon, and too obvious.

Do not remove a fly from your friend's forehead with a hatchet.

—CHINESE PROVERB

The truth is that power is a neutral force. It can be used for great good—to inspire and to uplift—as well as for coercion. The good or bad quality comes from the person who is exercising it. If a police officer uses his power to stop a murderer, he is bringing good to the world. However, he could use that same power to help drug dealers. The power is the same, but the intentions of the person behind it are different. If you know you will use good judgment and wield your power to benefit, serve, and protect others, the pursuit of power shouldn't intimidate you.

Using Power to Persuade

The ability to use power is like having a turbo charger on your car. It increases your speed by enhancing your power. Your ability to harness these forms of power will enhance your ability to persuade and influence. Great persuaders understand and appropriately use different forms of power to gain huge persuasion advantages. Remember that power is neutral—it can be used for good or for bad—so use it wisely. If you want genuine, long-term persuasion, you will always use power to benefit and motivate others for good.

The Shepherd's Boy: A Fable

There was once a young shepherd boy who tended his sheep at the foot of a large mountain near a forest. It was very lonely for him all day long, so he devised a way in which he could get a little company and some excitement. He ran down toward the village calling out "Wolf, wolf!" and the villagers came out to help him. Some of them even talked with him for a significant amount of time. This attention pleased the boy so much that a few days later he tried the same trick, and again the villagers came to his aid. But the next week, a wolf actually did come out from the forest and began to attack the sheep. The boy of course cried out "Wolf, wolf!" louder than before, but this time nobody

came. That's because the villagers had been fooled twice before and thought the boy was deceiving them yet again. As a result, the wolf made a good meal of the boy's flock.

Meaning: When power (position of authority as the flock's guardian) is abused, it will lose the ability to persuade and influence.

What is the dark side of power? What are the underhanded, manipulative and condescending things some people might try on you? Do you want to know the top ten dark tactics of unethical people? Warning: These are not for you to use. There are for your understanding and preparation only. When you are prepared for these dark tactics you will be prepared to handle them in an honorable and ethical fashion.

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