

The Importance of Power:

Power is intricately connected to persuasion in that it increases your ability to persuade, influence and stir action in others. Power enhances all aspects of persuasion and influence. Power will magnify your ability to hit the persuasion target and it opens the window for you to have greater persuasive capabilities and influence over your audience. Consequently, when your audience perceives that you hold great power over them, you will be very persuasive in moving them to action.

Power exists only because your audience allows it to. They grant you the ability to persuade them based upon your real or perceived power over them. Your audience has the discretion to follow, to remain indifferent or to rebel against your power. Even if your boss has made threats or the thief wields a gun over you, you have the choice of deciding which behavior you will use in response to his power play.

You only have power over a person to the extent that you control something s/he wants, needs or desires. This “something” could come in the form of safety, information, rewards, freedom or avoidance of punishment. Keep in mind that power does not have to be exerted to be effective. A bank robber holds power over his audience as he stands menacingly with a pointed gun at them, yet he doesn’t have to actually shoot anyone to exert that power. A police officer has power over you when he’s simply sitting in his police car, even if he’s not following you with his siren and lights on. Likewise, the fact that your boss can fire you, even if he hasn’t made any threats, gives her/ him a position of power over you.

Interestingly, it seems to be natural human tendency to seek not only out power but also those who have it. Dr. Floyd Allport, a social psychologist, talks about this instinctive characteristic in his book *Social Psychology*. He believes that deep inside each person there exists a desire to produce reactions in others. He further asserts that as we age, these desires grow even more strongly into a yearning for control. Let’s face it—we hunger for power. When we have power, we feel more confident and in control. Why is power so

seductive? Because when we possess power and control over our environment, we feel strong, invincible and often exhilarated.

Indeed, the world runs on the concept of power. There would be no order without it. The legal system has the right and 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 their children.

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 power good or bad? Power tends to make us nervous—and with good reason. We have all seen great abuses of power—many of them tragic, deadly abuses. We also feel that power inhibits our personal freedoms and our ability to control our own lives. But just like persuasion, power is really a neutral concept. It can be used to inspire and uplift to great good. The good or bad aspect of it comes from the person who is exercising that power. If a police officer uses his power to stop a murderer, he is bringing good to the world. However, he could just as easily use that same power to help drug dealers, thereby bringing bad into the world. Here you see that the power is the same, but the intentions of the person behind it are different and ultimately the controlling factor.

Using and Responding to Power

There are five points of power that move an audience to respond. These points are called the Five Power Structures and are: Authority, Coercion, Legitimate, Reward and Psychological. These structures will be discussed in detail later in this chapter. For the time being, however, it is important to remember that the more sources of power you possess, the easier it will be to persuade and influence your audience.

People react to power in different ways, but there are three general responses to power figures. First, there is the automatic response—performing the action with no thought or questions. Second, there is the manual response—you understand that the person has power, you have second thoughts about doing what s/he requests, but you comply

anyway because of her/his power position. Third, there is resistance—you know the person has power over you, but you do everything within your personal power to resist her/him. Alternatively, resistance manifests itself when the power source removes her/himself from the situation.

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