

8 Sources of Power – by Julia Menard

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A client of mine was commenting recently on how much power someone had over her. She didn't see that she had any power in her situation at all, so she was very surprised when I commented on how powerful I saw her. From her perspective, her boss had all the power – especially since a boss can fire you!

Her perceived lack of power balance in their relationship, however, was actually a part of the problem! Her belief was contributing to her feeling "shut down" and therefore not unable to be as assertive as she'd like to be with her boss.

As we spoke, I challenged her notion that her boss had "all the power" and she had none. We talked about different kinds of power - where only one kind is "positional" (someone getting their power from their position of authority "over" you).

She wanted to know what other types of power there might be so we explored that, as we did, she started to see where and how she had more power than she realized.

This realization not only impacted her own sense of confidence in relationship with her boss, but also helped her start to empathize a bit more with the idea that perhaps her boss also had a sense that she had some power in this situation – and maybe he felt uncomfortable with her power. As she had that thought, she became curious for the first time about how her wielding of power might be impacting her boss.

To give you a clue about other sources of power, I will tell you that my client was in a small team, and she knew the team members very well. In fact, she referred to them as her "best friends." They socialized together after work and had a strong relational bond. All of them were very sympathetic to her needs and all reported to her boss. Another place where my client held a lot of power was in her interpersonal ability. She had higher education in communications and was a naturally pleasant and warm person. Her boss wasn't.

Below are 8 types of power – see if you can identify the types of power my client didn't realize she had. And see if you can identify some of your own sources of power you may not realize you are wielding! This work is from French and Raven, two sociologists, who identified these in research carried out in the 1950s. See if you can expand your own definition of who holds the "power" in some of your power imbalanced relationships.

Positional power

This type of power comes from one person's position in relation to another. For instance, a manager may have power because of the position that he or she occupies, whereas a supervisor may have less power because of the way in which people perceive their relative positions. Bear in mind that the people who are subject to it award this type of power to the person in question. Positional power is characterised by a need for the relationship to continue.

Information power

As individuals, the more information that we have, the more we feel able to control what is going on about us. This form of control involves one person having more information than another and using it to control the other person's uncertainty. People can become dependent upon others because of their need to control their own uncertainty.

Control of rewards

This is about having the power to reward for desired performance or behaviour. This type of power creates dependency upon the person giving the reward.

Coercive power

This is about having the power to punish for failure to behave in a desired fashion. This type of power is also likely to create dependency. People can depend on not being punished as well as depend on being rewarded.

Alliances and networks

Where "who you know" matters. Also known as Relational Power. People who are well-connected hold court here.

Personal power

This type of power is also be called 'referent' power. It is the type of power that springs from wanting to be like someone because you feel that they have some desirable quality or qualities. It is being a model in how you behave – someone with stellar interpersonal skills holds a lot of power (to persuade, for example).

Access to and control of agendas

If a person or an organisation can control the agenda in a negotiating situation, they can effectively set the ground rules. This means that they can legislate for the introduction of items that are favourable to themselves and for items that are unfavourable to be blocked. If the agenda is controlled, one of the parties to a relationship can be dependent upon the other to explain the rules for communication and subsequently negotiation.

Control of meaning and symbols

This type of power is one whereby one party will dominate the other by means of their use of language or the setting in which the relationship takes place. The legal system is a system that uses control of meaning to a great extent with its

own language and many arcane symbols to support its power. Bank managers and solicitors use this type of power to some extent also. Consider the setting of your bank manager's office and the content of your discussions.

Source:

<http://www.shell-livewire.org/home/business-library/general-management/Resource-Management-Working-with-Suppliers/Negotiation-4-Relational-influence-and-power/>