



SYMBIONT PERFORMANCE GROUP, INC.

WHAT IS THE SOURCE OF YOUR PERSONAL POWER?

Each of us to one degree or another is continually involved in the process of influencing the thoughts and actions of other people, and correspondingly, we regularly experience the effects of the influence of other people on ourselves. This capacity to affect the behavior of others can be described as the exercise of *personal power*. The use of personal power is generally acknowledged as being a natural social tendency of human beings, and its practice can be observed in virtually any situation in which people interact with one another. A person's ability to effectively exercise personal power can be a critically important factor in gaining the help and cooperation of others in achieving personal and professional goals which in turn, can play a key role in one's overall success.

One's personal power can be derived from a variety of different sources, but can generally be characterized as stemming from a person's ***position, personality or attributes***.

Position Power

Position power reflects authority a person has by virtue of the rank he or she holds in an organization's hierarchy such as in a business, government, family or other social structure. It is power that is bestowed on a person by the organization of which he or she is a member by either a higher authority, popular choice, custom or heredity. Sometimes position power is described as being the *opposite* of personal power because its source is the organization to which the person belongs rather than being an intrinsic characteristic or ability residing in the person exercising the power. However, a strong case can be made that any power a person displays in interacting with others is *personal power* regardless of its source. After all, positions don't exercise power, people do.

When a person relies on position power to influence the behavior of others in organizations, he or she is simply executing the authority that comes from being *in charge* or of *being the boss*. Position power can be very compelling. People who possess it usually have a great deal of control over others in an organization because they generally have the authority to impose undesirable consequence if their directives aren't followed. People who primarily use position power to influence others take what amounts to a "do it or else" approach. While such an approach *does* work, it rarely captures the hearts and minds of those being influenced especially if they are subordinates. As a result, those on the receiving end of position power tend to continually try to find ways to dilute or negate its impact on them and rarely develop any positive impressions of the person executing the power. Furthermore, the elements reflecting position power must always be evident. The minute they are absent, the impact of position power is lost.



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Attribute Power

An attribute is any quality, characteristic trait or feature a person may exhibit or have the potential to exhibit. Knowledge and skills, attitudes, physical aspects, material possessions, social standing and personal relationships all represent categories of personal attributes that a person may possess. Attribute power derives from a person's ability to leverage one or more attributes to influence the behavior of others. The underlying strength of attribute power rests in the fact that people and organizations desire to associate or interact with those possessing important attributes so that they can benefit from them.

There are two ways in which attribute power may be manifested. One is through the way a person's recognized expertise influences the thinking of others. An expert in any field commands the attention of others and through his or her demonstrated proficiency engenders trust and respect. An individual such as a prominent doctor, businessman, scientist, sports coach or any other expert who has clearly exhibited proficiency in a particular field is very likely to be in a position to influence what others believe and how they approach the issues relating to that field. Such individuals are commonly referred to as *thought leaders*.

The other way in which a person may exercise attribute power is by determining the conditions under which he or she will share his or her desirable attributes with others. An important advantage of possessing attribute power is that it can be used to get others to voluntarily provide you with the things you want in life in exchange for your allowing them access to your attribute(s). Everyday examples of this can be seen in the incredibly high salaries and extensive perks that are provided to company CEOs, professional athletes and television and movie personalities whose talents and expertise are in high demand.

Personality Power

Personality power refers to personal power that comes from having appealing interpersonal or social skills that enable a person to influence others by connecting with them physically, emotionally and intellectually. It is often referred to as having a "magnetic personality" or as possessing *charisma*. Each of us has at some point encountered people who have inspired us with their words and motivated us by their energy. We may even have been drawn to them and found ourselves performing beyond expectation to accomplish *their* goals. Some examples of individuals who have possessed personality power include President John F. Kennedy, Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

While the concept of personal power can be somewhat elusive and may at first appear difficult to come by, of the three forms of personal power discussed, it is the one that can most easily be developed. At the core of personality power is *communication excellence*,



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and there are virtually limitless resources available today to the person who desires to increase personality power through improved interpersonal communication skills.

Strive for a Balance

It is very hard to be effective in influencing other people if a person's personal power rests solely in one domain. Position power by itself can cause a manager be effective for a while, but it is difficult for anyone to be consistently effective relying on position power alone. At some point "the boss" needs to demonstrate a level of knowledge and skills appropriate to his or her position of authority. Additionally, people will not obey directives indefinitely unless the person issuing them demonstrates some emotional or intellectual connection with them.

Attribute power is a great source of personal power so long as it exists. Many attributes such as physical strength and appearance, money and personal relationships can diminish over time and perhaps disappear totally. If attribute power is the only thing a person has, when it goes away the person has nothing left. Similarly, personality power can rule the day for a while, but eventually words alone will no longer suffice and people will want to see some actions of substance to support them.

The three domains of personal power can be graphically represented by three spheres. The greater the overlap of the three personal power spheres, the more balanced and more effective one will be in exercising sustainable personal power.

