

Leadership and the Positive Use of Power

By Richard V. Michaels

When I ask people to identify the traits and characteristics of a leader that they admire or who had influence on their leadership style the following responses are usually given:

Trusting	Supportive
Motivated	Firm but Fair
Motivating	Helpful
Knowledgeable	Humorous
Caring	Ethical
Decisive	Articulate
Encouraging	Visionary

I have posed this question to literally hundreds of people from East Hanover, New Jersey to Singapore in South East Asia; from Spokane, Washington to Berlin in Germany and never once have I been given the response, *powerful*. It seems that there is a disdain, or I might say fear, of associating *power* as an admirable and modeled trait of effective leadership.

Yet the essence of leadership is power; that is, the power to influence others in followership, and thus I believe that we need to find ways of understanding what power is, and how it is used appropriately and effectively in leadership.

A New Paradigm

Does an executive or manager within an organization have power? Of course they do! Is that powerful executive or manager a leader? Not necessarily! In the current paradigm of management and leadership many people believe that they "inherit" leadership by the position they hold within the organization. The misconception they have is that positional power implies leadership, but they have missed the crucial distinction. Power can be taken whereas leadership can only be given. Leadership is the followers belief in you as their role model and mentor, and their willingness to give you the power of influence over them.

The new paradigm of leadership training needs to address this issue of power, its sources and how power can be positively exercised in the practice of leadership.

Leadership & the Positive Use of Power

To use power appropriately, it is first necessary to understand the sources of power which include:

- Strength & Energy
- Money & Resources
- Symbols & Positions
- Organizations & Culture
- Customs & Traditions
- Popular Opinions
- Beliefs & Values
- Knowledge & Information

Each of these eight sources of power, or dimensions as I like to call them, can be used by managers and leaders to gain influence over others in their organization. However, true long term and lasting leadership comes from individuals who have mastered more than one of these power dimensions and use them situationally in a fluid and appropriate manner.

Eight Dimensions of Personal Power

Strength & Energy

In this dimension leaders use their physical energy, vitality, excitement, enthusiasm, and overall zest for life to positively influence others. People recognize that energy is contagious and they want to follow an energized leader. President-elect Clinton demonstrated this effectively in the recent Presidential campaign by his tireless campaign effort.

Used appropriately this power can get people to take notice of the leader, to start to follow the leader; and, it can help to maintain the overall energy of the group.

Money & Resources

Whatever a person controls that someone else wants, can be used as a source of power. Power and influence can be used by people who control access to economic assets such as money, budgets, or investment capital, physical assets such as plant and equipment, human assets such as pools of labor, and even revenue assets such as access to certain markets.

A word to the wise comes from John Gardner, professor at the Stanford Business School and who has served in six U.S. presidential administrations, when he says in his recent book *On Leadership*, "A

Leadership & the Positive Use of Power

familiar feature of economic power is that it is readily translated into other forms of power." This was recently demonstrated in the board room of General Motors where economic power was transferred into positional power in the form of a new Chairman, John Smale, a significant shareholder and the first person from outside the automotive industry to hold that position. In addition, the use of economic power to influence public opinion was demonstrated with H. Ross Perot's personal investment of \$68 million into campaign advertising.

Recognizing the influence that money and resource power can control, the positive use power in this dimension is exercised in a spirit of cooperation, helpfulness, mutual support, mutual gain and always within established guidelines of ethics, policies and legal practices.

Symbols & Positions

President Truman, describing to an aide a problem between himself and General Douglas MacArthur said, "He can do that to Harry Truman, but he can't do that to his commander and chief." Interpretations concerning the power of symbols and positions are varied when you reflect upon this quote. At one level you can interpret it such that positional power is absolute and that all people who fall under a persons positional authority must follow. This I feel is the common belief of many managers and executives who have risen to a position of authority within an organization. However, I take a different interpretation from President Truman's remark. I believe it clearly shows the dichotomy of positional power. The symbolic nature of certain positions within organizations and institutions command and deserve respect separate from the person holding the position. The long term power of leadership is a personal issue of respect that is given to you by your followers.

Another expanded view of the separateness of personal symbolic power comes from the interpretation of the word *position*. You can have positional symbolic power and not hold a formal hierarchical position within the organization or institution. Your symbolic position of respected influence can come from other attributes such as educational degrees, professional awards, positional titles and jobs past held, age and experience, works performed such as projects, inventions, books published, et cetera. The positive use of positional power from this dimension comes from you, and not the organizational position you hold.

Organizations & Culture

Organizations and other institutions such as universities, and governments (state, local and federal) all confer power to individuals holding key positions. This is the power given to the position and is separate from the person holding the position. Your understanding of this distinction is important because your ability to lead in a variety of situations and organizations may be impaired if you don't recognize the differences. Depending on the culture of an organization, different power structures are conferred to key positions.

Organizational power in team based cultures is different than hierarchical based cultures. Large unionized workforces create a different culture. A product based manufacturing culture is different from a service based culture. And, organizations interfacing with government licensing bureaus such as the FDA have different organizational power structures than non-licensed product organizations. Recognize and use the unique cultural power granted to your position.

Customs & Traditions

This dimension does not evoke visions of great power. However, leaders have found that they can enhance their influence of popular opinion when they align themselves with the power of customs and traditions. A good example is the Ayatollah Khomeini who swayed popular opinion against the Shah of Iran and latter against the United States by positioning himself as the protector and voice of religious customs and traditions.

Using power from this dimension is worth considering if only from the standpoint of not violating any customs and traditions of the group you are trying to lead. The positive use of power is exercised when the leader becomes the **keeper** and **maker** of customs and traditions.

Popular Opinions

This can be a strong source of power but it is different depending upon the organization or institution in which you lead and the key position you hold. Popular opinion power is most noticeable in public sector high visibility positions such as in the government. It is less noticeable but just as important in the private sector when you consider the popular opinion of other key power holders. When popular opinion support is given there is a freedom to act. When popular opinion support is withheld, the leader fails.

Leadership & the Positive Use of Power

Like customs and traditions, don't ignore this source of power. Keep your networks open, stay in contact with other key power holders. Align yourself with popular opinion or use other sources of your personal power to influence opinions.

Beliefs & Values

What beliefs and values are deeply imbedded in the culture in which you lead? What are your beliefs and values and are they in alignment with the organization? Should they be? These are the questions to ask yourself when considering the power of beliefs and values.

Beliefs and values in organizations and individuals can take many forms. They can be from a technical, financial, analytical perspective or from a control, process, conservative perspective or from a humanistic, moral, spiritual perspective or from a futuristic, entrepreneurial, artistic perspective. Beliefs and values give meaning to our lives, they tell us how to conduct ourselves. Leaders who align themselves with beliefs and values and are champions of them, legitimize and validate their position.

Knowledge & Information

Knowledge is the strongest source of power, it can never be taken away. Pure information power is fleeting and dangerous though is the building block to knowledge. Information can be manipulated, withheld, and eventually goes out-of-date. Knowledge is always valuable and its power comes from being shared. What knowledge do you possess that should be shared?

Leaders build networks of information, share knowledge, demonstrate comfort with the knowledge and information they themselves have.

As mentioned earlier, you can develop a powerful leadership position which will have lasting affect on your followers if you can master positively many, if not all, of the eight power dimensions.

Quality and Power

This new paradigm of power has significant implications for corporations considering implementing total quality programs. Considering the human side of total quality, there are three major power initiatives to be addressed:

1. Leadership
2. Emulation
3. Distribution

Leadership & the Positive Use of Power

Starting with the last power initiative first because that's what has become so popular in the training and development area, distribution can be thought of synonymously with empowerment. That is, empowering or distributing power to others to make decisions effecting quality. Just as it is important for executive leaders to understand and know how to use power positively, the "empowered" must also share in this knowledge to be effective.

The second quality power initiative, emulation, deals with modeling behavior. Major quality programs throughout the United States have failed because the executive leadership of the organizations did not emulate the quality behavior they themselves empowered others to do. Quality requires teamwork, teamwork requires shared leadership. How do the executive leaders share their leadership responsibilities among themselves? How do they function as a team? If leaders inspire others to follow then they must model the behavior desired.

The first and foremost quality power initiative is leadership. Leadership is the embodiment of power, it is being the source of inspiration, motivation and conviction for quality within the organization.

About the author:

Richard V. Michaels is the President & CEO of Great Circle Learning.