

## EVERYONE CAN WIN audio script edition

### SKILL 5. Co-operative power

Podcast time codes:

Mins:secs	Topic
2:53	Sources of power
8:36	Manipulation or influence
14:40	Power game triangle
29:40	Personal power
45:40	Summary

*When power is used well, it's not controlling and not manipulative.*

*It's 'power with' others to produce positive results for everyone.*

This skill is co-operative power. It's skill number 5 from the book, *Everyone can Win*, about handling conflict constructively. Co-operative Power is about engaging our power to steer in the direction of partnering relationships.

Power dynamics lurk below the surface of relationships. They can shape conflicts and influence outcomes. So it's worth getting clear about relative power, how much it is being relied on and what we can do about it when it's seriously out of balance. Power dynamics do play out a bit differently in different cultures, but the fundamental building blocks are the same.

For this skill we're focusing on building co-operative power: the power of pulling together, using 'power with' rather than 'against' as the driving force underpinning our outcomes. We'll each need to stand in our personal power, able to hold our own ground while still considering others in the process. We'll need to stay alert to possible misuses of power. So let's discuss the sources of power and how we can redirect manipulative power tactics. And we also need to look at how we diminish



our own power, how we can empower ourselves, and then how we can guide the combined power of people so that we all pull together.

But first, let's wake up this topic: what does power mean to *you personally*? What role is it taking in your life? Do you think it's affecting how some of your relationships play out?

- Perhaps you are caught up in issues with some authority figure or group, or perhaps with a government department. How does it show up? Do you submit reluctantly or are you an angry rebel?
- Perhaps you often feel very powerless and frequently defeated. Who or what has power over you? What happens to make that so?
- Are there people who support you feeling powerful? How are they doing that?

There's a lot of food for thought here!

## **WHAT ARE THE SOURCES OF OUR POWER?**

There's an underlying mesh of factors influencing **who has what power over** us and who we have power over. Let's unravel some of these individually and look at some major sources or bases of power. Let's consider ...

### **The value we place on the relationship itself.**

We want them to think well of us. How could that suffer if we didn't comply? Are we anxious about staying on good terms with this person?

### **Another power base is physical power**

Strength, size, gender and age differences can influence outcomes. We definitely don't want this person against us. So around them we tend to comply or remain silent. Of course, it's relative. If they're a lot *taller* or *bigger* than us, consciously or not, we may feel intimidated. We definitely would have as a child, especially if their physical power includes the use of violence or even the threat of it.



Another source of power arises from the other person's

### **Expertise**

Do we respect their suggestions because *they know more than we do* about the matter?

Again it's relative. What is their special area of knowledge, information or special skill?

### **Their ability to reward or to punish**

may be a source of power in a particular situation.

You might be dealing with someone who holds the power to reward you if you agree?

Which rewards actually influence you? Can they refuse to deliver something you want if you disagree? Do they scold you if things don't go their way? Or punish you by withdrawing something - sex and money are two big ones here.

### **Position or status is another power base**

Do you defer to the authority that they hold in the organisation? How would you describe where *you* stand in the hierarchy? Is there a clear-cut pecking order?

### **Access to resources**

can bring immense power to the table. Money can offer us the freedom and the time to get things done. Some people acquire it from business, others inherit it. The aristocracies of birth, industry and fame bring with them tremendous hierarchical power and influence. They can be a great resource! How about us? Can we attract such people's support or investment with our own personal power and influence?

### **Group power**

represents the combined power of a group the individual represents. For example, the trade union representative is the voice for his powerful trade union. Are they the



official or unofficial leader of the family or the 'gang'? Or of a religious, social or political alliance?

### **Power is also delivered by the law**

Is the law or are the regulations on their side or ours? Is it clear-cut or can we afford to test our case? Rules are supposed to be obeyed, of course. But they can be changed if we have enough power!

### **Of course, the best power source of all is personal power**

That's what's most impressive and may be more influential than all these other power bases. We respect and trust them because of who they *are*! They're persuasive! What qualities make up their personal power? Perhaps, we admire or respect their common sense, their ability to sell an idea well, their charisma or their integrity. We might be convinced by their positive leadership energy, their ability to get things done, their enthusiasm, or perhaps their considered and perceptive approach. That's the power base we definitely want more of ourselves!

So, to recap on the power sources that could be influencing conflict and its outcomes: the value we place on the relationship; relative to us, their physical power, expertise, and power to reward and punish; each person's status, the law, any group clout that backs them up can all be influential; and their personal qualities may be very impressive. One or many of these will lie beneath your conversations. If they're not being used excessively, we can let them stay buried. But when relative power is *directing* the outcome, it's worth being very alert to what is going on underneath.

There is one more power source and it's huge and, in my experience, it's not focused on nearly enough.

### **It's the power that comes from co-operation**

It's about individuals or groups working together rather than squandering their energy in opposition. What's getting in the way of it and how can we develop more of it in our own relationships, be they at work or in our personal life, and how about nationally or even globally?



Co-operative power does depend on one side *influencing* the other so that everyone is choosing to pull in the same direction. However, this united strength may be rotten at its core if one side has been *manipulated* by the other into an unfair agreement.

Let's get clear about the difference between

## **MANIPULATION AND INFLUENCE**

Influence is a necessary process in communication and it's often needed to resolve a conflict. But if we feel tricked, used, or stood over, then something has gone wrong. We've been manipulated rather than influenced.

The difference is not black and white. Let's face it, we've all done a little manipulating from time to time. I'm afraid I have! Whether or not it was acceptable depends on how positive the outcome was and how open I was about my motives and process.

Here are some principles for **influencing** with integrity:

- Is everyone benefitting in the process and is that the intention?
- Do they really know what they are being asked?
- Are they free to decide for themselves?
- Can they actually refuse if they choose to?

We need not regard influence of itself as a threat. In fact, not much gets done without it. We don't have to be so cautious about *persuading* that we end up with too little of what we actually want. If our goal is co-operative power, we'll often need to influence the direction decisions are moving towards.

**Sounds good, but what if you suspect that you *are* actually being manipulated, rather than influenced?** Here's some general principles to start with:

- **Slide out from under.** State your own ideas clearly and firmly. 'I' statements come in very handy.



- If the manipulator is stuck in *worst-case* scenarios, shift away from their negatives by moving towards a vision of possibilities. **Move from problems towards solutions.**
- If on the other hand, the manipulator is *overly optimistic*, start a **conversation on the possible consequences** of the proposed decision. Encourage the flow of information to build a fuller picture. Point out where people's needs that are not being considered. Perhaps you can organise the person or child affected to speak for themselves.

### **What if you notice a *particular* POWER TACTIC being used on you?**

People might use them for extra leverage. They're often a form of manipulation. They might

- be overly critical
- behave righteously
- or rebel.

If they do it repeatedly, the mere threat of it becomes manipulative. Other power tactics include:

- withholding information
- backstabbing and
- refusing to discuss the issue or
- using up all the available time without discussing the issue at hand

People might milk their valued relationship by:

- turning on the charm or using seductive behaviours
- by behaving stubbornly
- sulking
- withdrawing
- crying or
- finding a supportive ally



These don't always start out as a tactic. Crying or rushing to someone else for comfort may be a knee-jerk reaction, but can slip into a manipulation. Children sometimes stage-manage us very successfully by crying nonstop or appealing to the other parent! Adults have their own way of doing the same thing.

People might misuse their position, their known expertise or their ability to reward or punish. Coming from their position of strength they manipulate, rather than influence. They might:

- threaten
- argue you down
- dismiss your hot emotions with cold indifference
- they might pull rank or
- exclude you from decision-making on important matters.

### **You know you've been manipulated, but what can you do?**

Firstly we can notice the behaviour. When we see it as a tactic, it immediately has less effect on us.

- Sometimes naming it can take the wind out of its sails. You might say: 'Are you pulling rank here?' Or 'I can see you are upset. When you've stopped crying let's discuss the options.' Or 'Do you realise you are shouting? It's not really persuading me.'
- Sometimes it will be better to side-step the tactic – ignore it. Or stop the conversation until the person is back in charge of themselves. Don't be overly hurt, overwhelmed or vindictive when you return.
- If we recognise that an unmet *need* is driving the tactic, we might be able to take the tactic in our stride, and begin to include their unmet need in what we say next. For example: at work: 'I know you're short of time and need a quick decision.' At home: 'Do you know how much I love and care about you?'



- Perhaps the person feels a *value* that's important to them is being undermined. Maybe they feel their right to equality is threatened? You could take a moment to support that value directly. 'I really am listening to what you have to say.' Or if someone feels you're challenging their status you might say: 'I hope it's clear that you have my respect.'

Here's a general rule of thumb:

***When a tactic you dislike is used on you,  
redirect the conversation towards the positive.***

Sometimes it's not just one tactic once. Sometimes the underlying web of power relationships can **slide** into a very destructive and habitual pattern.

We all operate within a variety of power relationships, such as parent-child, child-teacher, employee-boss, male-female and then there's all the hierarchies we're part of in the community.

We have absorbed our patterns of relating within these from our past experiences, our culture and our family traditions. Dr Eric Berne developed Transactional Analysis to describe a model of entrapping behaviours that people can become addicted to: **Persecuting, Rescuing and being Victim.**

Together they form

### **A POWER GAME TRIANGLE**

They are styles of interaction that keep us stuck, replaying a learnt pattern from our past. They seem satisfying for the moment, but they place a heavy burden on our personal power. We diminish ourselves when we're addicted to one or more of these roles. We're not free.





## **If we become addicted to a PERSECUTING approach**

we'll use aggression to get what we want and silence the opposition. Perhaps we shout, perhaps we're so forthright that there's no room for argument. Perhaps we seem gentle, but underneath we know we hide an iron fist.

Whole systems, not just individuals, can also persecute people. Persecuting demands obedience, and relies on blame, rewards, punishments and position or authority. Sure it looks powerful, but it's *reactive, not responsive*. It's a protection against the fear of uncertainty, or perhaps loss of control and powerlessness.

Let's face it, most of us will have persecuted from time to time. We may not even realise that we've done it. For example, if you've pushed your point without including others or without giving the other person a chance to express their side, you've succumbed to what we mean here by 'Persecuting' behaviours. When it's habitual, watch out. Long term, it's untenable. Marriages break down because of it. Even high-level managers get fired these days because of an acceptable relational style.

The second pre-programmed behaviour pattern to consider is

## **Being VICTIM**

First let's distinguish clearly between *genuine* victims of circumstance and when we're playing out Victim as a social role, based on our own sense of inadequacy.

Real victims who suffer from hardship, injustice or an accident, naturally deserve support while they're going through a rough patch until they can manage on their own. It's normal and healthy to need some help, advice or empathy in hard times and they won't need it anymore when things get better.

This is quite different to the person with a **Victim attitude**. In itself it's a power base, though a warped one. When we are caught up in this pattern, we give our power away to others and hold other people responsible for our troubles. We see others as powerful, while we feel powerless. But are we using 'power under'? Are we in effect crying: 'Poor me, you've got to help me'? Are we relying too much on other



people to jump to our rescue? And if they don't, do they become our latest 'baddie' in our Victim stage show?

We can stay stuck in inappropriate situations and blame others for it. Perhaps we focus too much on how bad and hopeless it all is. Worse still, watch out if you regularly accumulate new dramas in your life. We can become magnets for situations where we're badly done by – some of them are real, but some of them may be imagined. We may even have more accidents, and illnesses than others. The problem is that when we're caught in the role of Victim, we don't take *action* to find our way out of our difficulties, but we do a lot of *talk*. We're actually drawing a little power from the attention and support we get from others. At times we can even be quite consciously manipulative. If we have an ingrained attitude of self-defeat, it will become our trap and ultimately our real tragedy. It often arises after overwhelming trauma in early life. That trauma still holds us back from our true sense of self-esteem.

We've considered the destructiveness of Persecuting and Victim behaviours. Let's now turn to the third piece of pre-programming in this triangle:

## **RESCUING**

Perhaps you fit better here? People who fall into a Rescuing approach *assume* that the other person needs their help. They set aside their own needs and focus on fixing things for someone who seems to be getting a bad deal. A thoroughly worthy sentiment! If we're a Rescuer we pride ourselves on being very helpful ...and we can become too helpful, even disempowering of the other person. We'll take on other people's work or make their choices for them. We might try to solve their conflicts for them, running between our victim friend and the other party.

As an inveterate Rescuer, we may be *caught* by an unconscious motivation, the need to be needed. Therefore, we'll rescue, *whether the person really needs it or not*.

***Remember: too much Rescuing locks the other person into being a Victim***



If you've ever put a lot of time and effort into supporting a friend or colleague only to find that they aren't really taking your suggestions on board or that they're continually asking you for more help, chances are you've been manipulated by a Victim and you've been played – into 'Rescuing'! You're going to end up feeling used. And then you'll be giving off the "blame" vibe and that makes your Victim person turn against *you*. Now they'll see you as a Persecutor!

### **Oh, it's a vicious web!**

An unproductive three-way manipulation can be going on here. Persecuting and Rescuing agendas both need someone to be a Victim. Victims are walking around with their 'Pick on Me' and 'Rescue me' badges shining. Rescuing and Persecuting keeps the Victim stuck. Victim behaviours get rewarded with lots of care and attention. Their apparent neediness will hook a dedicated Rescuer every time. Then the Rescuer and the Victim gang up together against the outside other and lock the Persecutor into their role as enemy.

Often, we've settled into this pattern because that's how it was in our childhood. As adults we fall into the role of the parent that we most identified with. An authoritarian parent demonstrates just how Persecution is done. ('Do it because I said so.') If they also used violence, they may be teaching their child violence as a strategy. The wife or husband of the Persecutor may have been your saviour as a child, your Rescuer. You might grow up wanting to be just like them. Or they may have been the brow-beaten Victim, and you learn their attitudes of self-defeat and powerlessness.

We can fall right into familiar roles the moment we're inflamed or hurt. Incompetence or a lack of respect might trigger our Persecuting reaction. We might be scared back to the Victim state of our childhood by a dictatorial boss or an uncaring system. Or we notice an injustice, or our dear ones are hurting and we just have to jump in and Rescue.

It can become like stage play with Victim and Rescuer playing out the drama provoked by the 'baddie' Persecutor. We might swap roles around from time to time and rope in others to play. In some families, this drama includes physical violence. In



others it's more sophisticated, using subtle put-downs, innuendos and private 'hate sessions.'

Sometimes the play is staged in organisations. Management might be cast as the Persecutors by those Rescuing the Victims. Victims get together and white-ant projects and other people with malicious gossip. A power triangle flavour can taint union disagreements or worker's compensation issues. It can play out in community groups, aid organisations and even in the international arena, sometimes with incredibly destructive results.

Once we're caught in the triangle, we can cycle endlessly through these roles, adopting different roles according to the situation. But there are ways out, towards empowerment. Here are some principles:

- If it's looking like we're persecuting, we can learn to *consult* much more frequently.
- If we're rescuing *again*, we can put on the hat of *coach*, and support the other person where they find their own solutions and take their own steps forward.
- If we've been stuck in being the Victim for way too long now, can we begin to take on *responsibility* for getting *ourselves* out of the mess?

We can train ourselves away from **Persecuting** towards consulting. It's easy to get caught inside our own heads and presume that what we see *is* the truth. Before we decide 'of course we're right', we'd better consult, inquire and not let it sound like a cross-examination. The cue to switch modes? We're doing all the talking!

Stop, ask a question. Listen more. We need to be clear about our intention – to empower others. Our role is just to make sure they're going in the right direction. We're a guiding hand behind them.



When we notice we're often playing **Rescuer**, we can switch to coaching the person so that they handle the situation by themselves. Of course if they're a real victim of circumstance, we'll want to give them a helping hand. We know we've done well when we *see positive results*. But there will be times when we should check if we're overdoing the support. If you groan at their latest request, if you feel worn down or taken advantage of, that's definitely your cue to *pull back*. Ask yourself: how much time do I want to give this? Get clear on your advice and support boundaries. You won't help write their assignment or report but you may be willing to edit a finished draft. Your goal is to get them to stand on their own two feet, kindly and helpfully.

If they seem focused only on the problem and not on solutions, you're probably hearing lots of 'yes, buts...' or 'ain't it awfully...' sprinkled through your conversations. Help them focus in present time, on one thing that they can change. If it's not working, pull right back. Let it be another cue to step away from rescuing.

Check: have they actually asked for my help? Perhaps this time they really only need me to be a sounding board while they work out what they're going to do. Sometimes people just need a **witness** to what they're going through. Really listening while they talk it out can be a tremendous support. Don't underestimate it. Give them your full attention and, when they're ready, they take their next step without your help.

The disempowered **Victim position** is a hard one to shake off. Yes, we may indeed be a true victim in this circumstance. That awful thing really did happen to us. But are we compounding the problem with Victim behaviours that diminish our personal power? Firstly, we do need to be kind to the vulnerable shaky parts inside us. Life can get us down. We just don't need to add to it by loading on self-blame or self-pity. We probably will need to re-focus our self-talk onto the positive, the active and into present time, not the past. Ruminating and blaming someone else won't help. Focus instead on what we can do now. We can pat ourselves on the back for every small step we take out of defeat and overwhelm.



Perhaps it's time to stand up for what we deserve, get the feedback and learn new and better ways. Rather than searching for *who* to blame, we do better to consider *how* and *why* this happened, to avoid the trap in the future.

Here's a useful reframe. Can you recast your Persecutor in your mind, swap them over into the role of your teacher? They might *think* they're teaching you to keep quiet and submit, but *use* them to train you in how to become wisely assertive. The lesson we now take from them is about finding our courage – perhaps it's to stand up to them, or maybe it's finding the strength to walk away.

Victim, Persecutor or Rescuer behaviours diminish our personal power. Consulting, coaching or taking responsibility for ourselves puts us back in charge. We take back our personal power.

### **Personal power comes from within us.**

When we're resentful, cowered by a situation or feeling rebellious, we undermine our personal power. And we invite conflict. Don't expect others to respond well. They won't!

These negative attitudes arise from a fundamental weakness in our world view. We're seeing our personal circumstances as out there, 'an uninvited other.' We are not choosing to **work with what we have**. We haven't taken charge. Every one of our circumstances can be a wonderful opportunity for developing new strengths and better ways of dealing with the world.

When we look back on past difficulties, we can often see how much we've learnt from them. And we can commit to **working with** the difficulties we face right now. We can take charge of our response. Might as well greet them with the best attitude we can. And respond to them as our opportunity for practicing kindness or staying positive or making life meaningful, despite or even because of our circumstances.

Little by little as we reprogram our responses, we can regularly choose to work *with* exactly what we do have in our life, and to make the most of the challenges we face. That's our strength and the core of our personal power.



Start small, on some little thing that you're feeling resentful, intimidated or rebellious about. Is there something you don't like doing, you don't want to do, but you know you **SHOULD** and you probably will? **CHOOSE** to do it instead.

Find yourself a good reason. Instead of 'I should go to the party' try 'I choose to go to the party because I know my presence makes all the difference to...(someone, a friend perhaps).' Instead of 'Groan...I should finish that assignment,' try 'I choose to finish my assignment this weekend because that is the best way to structure my time.' 'I hate shopping.' Wait, we can choose the next shopping expedition: 'That's my time for making healthy food choices for my family.'

Sometimes it's hard to really own a choice, to bring all of our self along. We can get quite stuck in resenting some external pressure that is making us do something we really don't want to. If we know we're going to do it anyway and it's not something we really should refuse to do, we can try saying: 'I choose to...' a few times. 'I choose to, I choose to.' You might feel the energy shift. If you're not quite there yet, offer yourself some sweeteners. How can you make the situation nicer for yourself? 'I'll play my favourite music in the background.'

Make a personal commitment to operate out of choice. You'll reclaim your personal power and you'll be much more alive and available to what's going on right now. When we feel good about ourselves, what we are doing and where we are going, we naturally build more fruitful relationships.

### **There's great personal power in self-esteem**

that won't be damaged by arguments, adverse circumstances or even by someone else's poor opinion of us. We're not caught up in defending our own shaky foundations. We can be compassionate and vulnerable when it's appropriate. We can find that we've been quite wrong and be willing to admit it.

It's unfortunately true that most people's self-esteem is not actually that indestructible. So how can we strengthen our own?

- **Generalise from positive experiences** – 'I completed that task without a hitch. I can complete tasks successfully.'



- **Form a loving relationship with yourself.** Be kind to yourself. Be your own best friend. Keep plugging away against your self-destructive tendencies, even after a fall from grace.
- **Catch yourself on negative self-talk, and nip it in the bud.** It's unhelpful to you and does not take you forward.
- **Build your competencies.** Take a course. Develop a new skill. Learn that computer program.
- **Set yourself big goals and take small steps.** What would you love to achieve? What can you do towards it this week, next week, next month? Make a plan.
- **Really taking in praise, feels good!** Just say: 'Thank you!' and don't deflect it. It can be a great healer. Honest praise is a gift. We really shouldn't turn it down.

## **We're aiming for CO-OPERATIVE POWER**

where we feel powerful and support others being powerful too. 'Power with' relies on the personal power of each person in the relationship. Other power sources take a back seat. It's definitely not about us controlling others.

### **So we may need to curb our Control issues.**

If we are accusing and pointing fingers at the others, or our tone is becoming demanding, or we've reduced another person to a sullen silence, we have slipped away from co-operative power. We're in danger of inviting rebellion or stifling creativity or self-responsibility. For example, our control issue may be having a major impact on our teenager's rebelliousness. We might be able to pull back on control if we ask ourselves:

- Does the problem really affect me personally?
- Does their way actually work – at least adequately?
- Can I or can't I live with the problem that their way produces?





- What compromises can we make together so they feel more in charge?
- Can I see that fear is underlying my need to control? What am I fearful of? Uncertainty, powerlessness, or of things going horribly wrong? Re-evaluate. How realistic is it?
- Perhaps I don't have to take full responsibility for everything. Maybe I don't have to save this situation all by myself. What responsibility can be and should be shared?

### **Cooperative power thrives under consensus decision-making**

where every person involved is equally influential. Many group meetings, partnership arrangements and family decisions operate in this way a lot of the time. Relative power retreats for the discussion and rarely becomes an issue.

So, how do we support a group or team to use more consensus decision-making?

- Set goals and rules together.
- Value contributions.
- Share information.
- Be flexible around requests for change.
- Delegate tasks and responsibility.
- Give people permission to make mistakes, own up to them and correct them without fear of punishment.

Even where we must retain the power to make the final decision there is still much we can do to **include others**.

- We can give people the opportunity to see the issues from a broader perspective. We can inform, explain, coach and educate.
- And then we might brainstorm ideas together, now that the others can take all the factors into account.



- Can we consult our team (the family or our workgroup) before making major decisions? We can encourage others to offer their point of view, even to disagree. And when they do, being careful not to take it out on them.
- We're being smart when we respect all contributions without being rude about a poor idea. It could be the seed of something, and we want the person to have the confidence to add their perspective next time.
- When we have to correct unacceptable behaviour, we give objective rather than emotive feedback, keeping in mind our aim – to build, not destroy this team member.
- Even though we're in charge, we can let people make many decisions on their own if we set appropriate limits. Perhaps on the amount they can spend before getting our approval first.
- People are not just tools to get the job done, they're *people*. They need our acknowledgement as individuals in our daily interactions, not just when there's something to be done or there's a problem.

When we're not the one in charge, it can be quite hard to say what we need to say and respond well to a more powerful authority figure.

## CONFRONTING POWERFUL PEOPLE

can be quite a challenge. What can we do when a person we perceive to be more powerful than us, says 'No!', talks us down, out-votes or overrules us?

First, we need to check that we *are* in a position to face up to them and redress a bad decision or an injustice. It won't always be wise or helpful. Decide which issues are worth fighting for and which are not. Work out alternatives. Sometimes having a supporter or several will help you present your case for change more potently. You may need to adapt your approach to fit a different culture.



When you decide you are going to speak to the person directly, you'll have a better result if you can still keep them on side. Diplomacy is the key:

**Make it clear you respect their authority. Be deferential, not arrogant.**

And definitely don't verbally attack them if you know what's good for you. One of their core concerns may well be 'loss of authority' so don't challenge that. You might adapt your approach to fit their style. For example, task-oriented people value action and results. Respect their time and get to the point without getting emotional or personal.

**Reaffirm their needs.** Explain how your suggestion will meet their needs.

You might **acknowledge a good intent** behind their original position, and shut up about the problematic intentions you've interpreted from their behaviour. When we support a good intent, we encourage more of it.

**Don't imply you're blaming them** while you're explaining what your problem is to your person in authority. Use questions and reframes to improve the agenda.

**Remember, you can only suggest.** Make it clear that you understand that the power is with them to decide.

You'll find you can often influence a person in authority if you're seen by them to have integrity and to be trustworthy. This is how this played out for a man I'll call Luke. He shared this in one of our forums on our online course.



**Luke wrote:**

My boss is a very intellectual and dogmatic man. I find it hard to stand my ground with him. He doesn't listen to my views and continually argues his point until others back down. I understand he's wearing a lot of responsibility, but often I feel he uses his power to manipulate people.

Not long ago we got a memo from him instructing us all on how to carry out some new procedures. They would create a lot more time-consuming work for everyone. I thought the memo was badly written. It sounded dictatorial to me, as well as to a number of other staff members. I felt I had only two choices - to obey unwillingly or outrightly rebel. I was at the end of my patience. Either way, I was going to feel terrible about the disharmony it caused. Was there another way?

It wasn't just an internal shift I had to make. This time I had to take a stand against that memo. I thought hard about how I'd open the conversation. I went to my boss with the memo and said: 'I just need you to know that when I read this, I felt like doing the opposite of what you asked - and I don't want to be like that. I want to be supportive and co-operative.' My approach wasn't challenging, but it was factual. I'd particularly tried to keep my opener short and just talk about my response.

I was relieved when my boss didn't immediately go on the defensive. Instead, he said, 'That's interesting. Which parts made you feel like that?' I explained to him that I would have liked to understand why this



new method was best for everyone. My boss explained his reasoning and our discussion stayed friendly. I got a different slant on the situation. I acknowledged that he had to make the final decisions, but I did suggest that perhaps next time the staff could offer their ideas beforehand. I left feeling I could now follow the new procedures much more willingly and with a whole lot less resentment. I think my boss also saw some better ways to approach the rest of the staff as he put this new plan into effect.

When you're going into a difficult conversation

**Stake your play on 'Power with' rather than 'Power over'.**

But it's not just a question of power dynamics, we'll need to use all our skills of assertiveness – clean, clear and concise 'I' statements: 'The way I see it...' 'I'm concerned about...' 'I feel....' If we face an attack, we need to be ready to drop into active listening for a while to calm the situation, moving it away from a fight for control and back towards a more equal balance of power.

We're after a co-operative partnering where people stand in their personal power together, and find solutions to shared problems. When we do it well, group projects move forward rapidly because energy isn't being wasted on competitiveness, hostility or putting up opposition just for the sake of argument. Each person consults the others and might explain, coach or educate as needed. Each person is free to agree or disagree and add their vision into the plan. You might even argue it out strenuously and at length, but the focus is on the problem and alternate solutions, not on attacking the people. At the end everyone accepts responsibility for the choices they make together.

Do you have a 'power with' relationship in your life? Maybe it's not perfect, but you now have some extra tools to head in that direction.



## HERE'S THE SUMMARY

When relative power is affecting outcomes, we should be very alert to how power is being used and by whom. It's a question of intent.

- If our intent is to serve ourselves at the expense of the other person, we are using our power to *manipulate*. If our intent is to create benefits for others as well as ourselves, we might be able to helpfully *influence* each other.
- If you become aware that an unfair power tactic is being tried on you, draw out underlying needs and values, and redirect the conversation towards the positive.
- When we stand fully in our personal power, we can speak up with confidence for what's fair. But Victim, Persecutor or Rescuer behaviours will ultimately diminish that ability. We can transform those roles into consulting, coaching and taking responsibility for moving forward.
- We also honour our personal power as we choose to work with the difficulties and challenges we face. It's not 'I should', it's 'I choose'. We're taking charge of our lives.
- Don't undermine your own self-worth or self-esteem. You'll need all of it to exercise your personal power effectively.
- Of course, we're going to have to respect others in authority over us. We'll need to work with them quite carefully to have our point of view included in decision-making.
- If you're in charge, find ways to promote a climate that values the collaborative approach. Include the input of others.
- When we're committed to co-operative power relationships, we need to keep our own control issues well in check. We emphasise 'power with' rather than 'power over'.



- We respect the other person and what they need. And then, combine our strengths to work together towards solutions to shared problems. We move forward more powerfully with agreed plans and joint visions.

If you'd like more details on all of this, have a look at our website, at Conflict Resolution Network. Our headquarters are at [crnhq.org](http://crnhq.org). You can download a transcript and explore extra study notes on power. There's a free manual for trainers there too. And for ongoing reference, you can purchase a searchable PDF of the book, *Everyone Can Win*.

Well, in this episode we've got a better grasp on how to share power with others. But the deep feelings that must be negotiated in conflict also can trip us up. So join me for the next episode where we look at Managing Emotions – our own and other peoples'. It's the next skill area in our twelve skills toolkit.

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