Power, for All

Tags: *#power*
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Dialogue

Title: How to Discover People Want

> Power as we've defined it is the ability to influence others' behavior, be it through persuasion or coercion. But what determines this ability? The answer is surprisingly simple: what enables one person to influence another is control over access to resources the other person values.

Point: To be powerful in a relationship, it means having control over resources the other person values.

We all know this is value. Re: research -- what do leaders receive get getting a lot clearer on what others' value?

> Even when you know to ask people what they need, they don't always tell you.

That's a real problem for leaders?

You highlight that human's have two basic needs:

1. Safety
2. Self-esteem.
   Tell me about those.

To discover what people want, you need to earn trust. There are two criteria that people judge others on across cultures:

Competence
Warmth

Connection back to the two basic needs?

> Given a choice between a competent jerk (a colleague who is skilled but not very nice) and a lovable fool (one with below-average expertise but warm and goodhearted), most people choose the lovable fool.

To overcome the suspicion of others, social psychologists tell us there are potent sources of interpersonal liking: familiarity and similarity.

Once you've established some warmth, what should you be listening for to discover what the other person values?

Material Resources
Morality
Achievement
Status
Autonomy
Affiliation

The above go back to safety and self-esteem (page 60).

Point --> Those things may change.

What have you changed your mind on?

Reserve

> Power is neither inherently moral nor inherently immoral. History shows us that power can be used for virtuous purposes as well as dishonorable ones.

> People vary in their desire to occupy positions of influence; and research shows that those who do the best job in these roles are neither the people most eager to get them nor those who adamantly eschew them. They are, instead, the individuals who are somewhat reluctant to be at the helm. 57 The reluctantly powerful, as it were, are most likely to use power well, but also less likely to acquire it because they don't seek it.

Quotes

Highlight [page 6]: This, after all, is what power ultimately is: the ability to influence another's behavior be it through persuasion or coercion.

Highlight [page 8]: The first fallacy is the belief that power is a thing you possess, and that some fortunate individuals have special traits that enable them to acquire it. If you have those traits, the reasoning goes, or you can find a way to obtain them, you will always be powerful. Those special characteristics are not too different from the magic artifacts that figure in epic stories and myths; not surprisingly, people are curious to discover what these "ideal traits" are. But think about the relationships in your own life. You probably feel more in control in some of them than you do in others; and yet, most

of the time you bring with you the same underlying traits and capabilities. Although personal attributes can be sources of power in certain situations, you will come to appreciate why searching for special traits that would make someone powerful always and everywhere is largely a waste of time.

Highlight [page 8]: The second fallacy is that power is positional, reserved for kings and queens, presidents and generals, board members and CEOs, the rich and the famous. It's common to mistake authority or rank for power, so common that we see it every year on the first day of class. When we ask students to list five people whom they view as powerful, 90 percent of the time they name people at the apex of some hierarchy. Yet, you would be surprised by the number of top executives and CEOs who come to us because they struggle to get things done in their organizations. They realize that being at the top is no guarantee that their teams will do what they want them to do. Comedies from the ancient Greek plays of Aristophanes, to the British Monty Python television sketches, have made audiences laugh by ridiculing figures of authority, from emperors to chiefs, ministers, and puffed-up bosses. Our analysis will reveal why being at the top may well give people authority, but doesn't necessarily give them power.

Highlight [page 9]: The last and perhaps most widespread misconception is that power is dirty, and that acquiring and wielding it entails manipulation, coercion, and cruelty. Literature and film abound with ghastly examples: Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth and Iago, Voldemort in the Harry Potter series, and Frank and Claire Underwood in House of Cards. We can't look away, but we can't abide the thought of being like these characters either. Power fascinates and repulses us at the same time. It seems like fire: Bewitching, but capable of consuming us if we get too close. We fear it could make us lose our minds, or our principles. The shepherd in the Ring of Gyges transforms into a manipulative murderer, while Tolkien's One Ring turns its wearer gradually evil. In reality, there is nothing intrinsically dirty about power. Although the potential to be corrupted by it always exists, its energy is equally essential if we wish to achieve positive ends as well. When a third grader convinces her classmates to participate in a fundraising campaign to benefit a not-for-profit organization that cares for kids with disabilities, she is exercising power constructively. So is the manager who persuades the corporate office to give his team the resources they need to do better work in better conditions.

Highlight [page 40]: Unchecked absolute power is quite likely to corrupt absolutely. And, interestingly, while those who do not have power are aware of this trap and are then more prone to think of power as dirty, those who do have power seldom do, because the experience of power makes us less likely to feel morally impure.

Power Can Make Us Feel Virtuous, Too

Highlight [page 42]: The moral value of altruistic behavior explains why, in all our studies, people who feel powerful are least likely to feel dirty when they network professionally, even when they do so with the explicit purpose of accessing resources they value. Being powerful means, by definition, having control over resources others value. People who

feel powerful, therefore, are more likely to network with a clear conscience, since they know they can benefit other people by giving them access to resources they control. When it's a two-way street—at least in their mind—it takes the shadow of exploitation away from their networking. This doesn't mean that powerful people always reciprocate benefits; nor that they are always generous with their resources as they acquire resources from others. We all act selfishly at least some of the time. But the powerful can more easily justify their networking to themselves as altruistic and virtuous, because they have something of value, potentially, to contribute.

Humanity's Two Basic Needs: Safety and Self-Esteem

Highlight [page 60]: Observed from afar, humanity is but a speck of dust in an endless universe, in which our position is as inconsequential as it is fleeting. At the deepest level, what we humans long for are two defenses against this existential dilemma: first, protection from the whims of dangerous forces much greater than our own that could annihilate us in a moment; second, reassurance of our value as individuals in a universe that is indifferent to us. Ultimately, then, we aim to satisfy two basic human motives: safety from harm, and confirmation that we are worthy of esteem. The 56

Highlight [page 61]: need for safety and the need for self-esteem are so fundamental that they reliably shape power relationships across time and space.

Earning People's Trust to Uncover Their Needs

Highlight [page 80]: Earning People's Trust to Uncover Their Needs Ning navigated his challenging circumstances superbly. At first, he had the title but not the power to influence call center employees. But by figuring out what they valued that he did 76

Highlight [page 81]: have access to, and finding clever ways to deliver those resources, he gained the power he needed to create the change he aspired to. What made Ning's accomplishments even more impressive is that he had to overcome massive skepticism and downright suspicion. As his trial by fire demonstrates, even when you know to ask people what they need, they don't always tell you. Ning knew that he needed to gain the agents' trust if he really wanted to understand their needs. He also realized that they were sizing him up. Across cultures and contexts, people judge other individuals and groups on two criteria: competence and warmth.76 Competence encompasses our perception of a person's efficiency, achievement, skills, and ability. Warmth refers to our perception of a person's sincerity, honesty, and benevolence. Warmth is trust in someone's intentions; competence is trust in someone's ability to act on their intentions. We pay a lot of attention to the warmth and competence of the people we interact with because they offer safety. If I can trust you to look out for me (and not stab me in the back), I feel safe. And if you can deliver the goods and not leave me in the lurch, I feel safer yet. Warmth and competence also feed our self-esteem. People who have good intentions toward us make us feel respected and cared for; and if they respect and care for us, we feel worthy of their benevolence. Surrounding ourselves with competent

people makes us more competent, too, which also increases our self-worth. It's no wonder that these two attributes account for the lion's share of our interpersonal perceptions. Ning understood that, to help the agents, he needed them to trust him, both for his intentions and his ability to act on them. He also intuited that he had to establish his good intentions first, because he knew he was perceived as an outsider (as a Chinese national in Australia) and as someone to fear (since he came from corporate headquarters). While people 77

Highlight [page 82]: value both competence and warmth in their colleagues, warmth rises to the top when people are forced to make tradeoffs. 77Given a choice between a competent jerk (a colleague who is skilled but not very nice) and a lovable fool (one with below-average expertise but warm and goodhearted), most people choose the lovable fool. 78We avoid working with jerks no matter how competent they are, and we value every bit of competence we can get out of lovable fools. Ideally, of course, we'd like to have both warmth and competence. But at the margins, giving people more reassurance as to your good intentions and moral character makes you a more attractive work partner than competence does (provided a minimal level of both, as is typically the case in organizations that select people based on ability and interpersonal skill). You might think that in highly competitive and profit-driven industries (such as consulting, investment banking, and private equity), or in technically demanding professions (such as surgery, software development, and the military), competence would override warmth. But we find the same dynamic in those industries as in others. This is what Ning got so right. To overcome the suspicion of the call center personnel, he used what social psychologists tell us are the most potent sources of interpersonal liking: familiarity (by plopping himself on the call center floor right next to the other agents), and similarity (by showing that he and the agents had a lot more in common than met the eye). And, he did so genuinely with a real desire to improve their working conditions. Once his benevolence was established and the call-center agents felt that they could confide in Ning, he was relentless in demonstrating his ability to act on his intentions, his competence. He attacked their issues head on, fast, leveraging his contacts at headquarters and delivering for the agents, over and over. He became the lovable star everybody wanted to work with.

Highlight [page 83]: What we have constructed through this chapter is a roadmap to understanding which resources matter most to others at a given moment in time. The first step is to uncover what someone values in their context: money or status? Friendship and supportive relationships or a feeling of competence and progress? A sense of autonomy or a desire to feel virtuous? You can count on most, if not all, of these to be relevant to some degree in most situations. The second step is to identify who controls access to these valued resources. Ning was brilliant at uncovering what the call center employees wanted, but he was equally clever about figuring out how to get access to those resources and deliver them to the call center agents. How can we discern who controls access to the requisite valued resources, and why, in any given setting?

References