

You Have More Influence Than You Think

Tags: [#human-relations](#) [#power](#)

Creator: vanessa-bohns

Dialogue

Your job working with kids in a sleep lab.

Power can sometimes lead people to underestimate the impact of their words and actions on others even more. In other words, the very people with the most influence over others may be especially oblivious to that influence.

Strip basketball story

Justification from the coach --> this was just fun, nobody was forced to take off their clothes or to run.

Power tends to:

1. Lead people to ignore the perspectives of others.
2. Reduce what psychologists call "the press of the situation." (powerful people feeling freer to do what they want.)

People in positions of power seem to feel freer to do what they want to do. But that's not all. As it turns out, an important consequence of feeling like you are free to do what you want is that you assume that other people are also free to do what they want. This leads people in positions of power to view others' actions as more freely determined, and opens the door for blaming others for things that may in fact be beyond their control.

A powerful person's whisper can sound more like a shout to the person they have power over.

The effects of power are not inevitable. Some people become more aware of their influence over others.

Power who think of power as responsibility: assign fairer workloads and show greater interpersonal sensitivity -- and they tend to avoid crossing inappropriate lines.

How do to better:

1. See the impact of our actions on others. (Adopt third party.)
2. Feel the impact of our actions on others. (Ask people what they are thinking of feeling.)

3. Experience our influence. How do people do this?

Reserve

Es on foreheads

Quotes

What I hope to show throughout this book is that we've all got a little Mr. Magoo in us. As we lumber through our everyday lives, not seeing past our own noses, we leave behind our own trail of impact on the various people we encounter throughout our day. And, like Mr. Magoo, we are largely oblivious to that impact.

Power is often defined as the capacity to influence others. As such, you would think people with power—those in leadership positions, or who have substantial control over others' outcomes—would be acutely aware of their influence over others. But, in fact, power can sometimes lead people to underestimate the impact of their words and actions on others even more. In other words, the very people with the most influence over others may be especially oblivious to that influence. And as we will see, this bias can be particularly problematic when people in leadership positions, such as coaches, supervisors, and CEOs, stretch the boundaries of what is appropriate to ask of their s...

In many cases, the first thing power does is to lead people to ignore other's perspectives. The second thing power does is reduce what psychologists call "the press of the situation," the environmental and social forces that shape many of the things we do. This means that people with power feel freer to do what they want, rather than what the situation calls for or what others want them to do. They feel freer to be "mavericks," readily spurning group opinions and social norms, and are less worried about how they look to othe...

Thus, people in positions of power seem to feel freer to do what they want to do. But that's not all. As it turns out, an important consequence of feeling like you are free to do what you want is that you assume that other people are also free to do what they want, as researchers Yidan Yin, Krishna Savani, and Pamela Smith have found. This leads people in positions of power to view others' actions as more freely determined, and opens the door for blaming others for things that may in fact be beyond their control.

Imagine you're in a position of power and you make what you think is a mild or off-handed suggestion to a subordinate, expecting them to push back if they disagree. However, as we saw with the case of Coach Bannon, even an offhand suggestion by someone in power can feel like a command to someone in a position of low power. Or, as put by Adam Galinsky, one of the researchers involved in the previous studies, a powerful person's whisper sounds more like a shout. Your subordinate will likely think your suggestion wasn't really a suggestion. Yet you are likely to be oblivious to this; you're not spending time obsessing about how your subordinate interpreted your

suggestion. Besides, according to your world view, people can take or leave other people's suggestions as they see fit. That's what you do, after all. Ultimately, then, you may not realize how forcefully your "mild" suggestion actually ...

As we've seen, a powerful person's whisper can sound more like a shout to the person they have power over.

Yet as I mentioned earlier, this effect of power is not inevitable. Indeed, we can probably all think of leaders who eschewed this trend. People in positions of power who seemed acutely aware of the impact of their words, actions, and decisions on other people. Some leaders, aware of how compelled subordinates might feel to conform to their opinions, make a conscious effort to speak last, as President Obama has been said to have done. Others cultivate a culture of helping in which senior executives don't need to be asked to jump in and offer an assist on a project, like the culture created by David Kelley at IDEO. Still others have the insight to look around and recognize the impact of their mere presence, even when they may not like what they see. For example, Alexis Ohanian, co-founder of the social news website Reddit, decided to step down from the company's board out of the recognition that, as a white man occupying that seat, his presence was one more barrier to increasing diversity at the company. All of this can be summed up by a line President-Elect John F. Kennedy chose to represent his newfound "responsibilities to the state" in a speech following his election: "For those whom much is given, much...

This is because people who construe power as responsibility tend to focus more on others than themselves. If I am thinking about the responsibility I have for people who are dependent on me, I am focused on their potential outcomes, thoughts, and feelings—not only my own. That means that when I have an impulse or make a decision, I am likely to think carefully about how following through on that impulse or making that decision will impact others. I'm likely to think about the awkward position I would put my employee in by asking her out, or how hard it would be for one of my players to tell me I had pushed him too far during a drill. As a result, research finds that people who think of their power in terms of responsibility assign fairer workloads and show greater interpersonal sensitivity. They may also be less cavalier about crossing lines and making the kinds of inappropriate requests we saw earlier.

These three goals are for all of us to get better at seeing, feeling, and experiencing our influence over others:

1. The first goal is to start to see the impact of our actions on others. In order to do this, we need to get out of our own heads. When we peer out at the world through our own eyes, we don't see ourselves or the role we play in creating the situations we are in. We will explore some strategies for getting out of our own heads so that we can see the role we play in shaping the world and people around us.
2. The second goal is to truly feel the impact of our actions. Once we are outside of our own heads, we may be able to see the things we do that impact others, but

that doesn't mean we fully appreciate their impact. To do that, we need to get inside other people's heads. We must get better at predicting and understanding how others might feel, as a result of the things we do and say.

3. The third and final goal is to actually experience our influence. This aim comes from watching the dramatic transformation participants in my studies have had after being instructed to go out and ask people for things and realizing how much easier it is than they anticipated, and also hearing others' accounts of having similar transformations. However, as we will see, accurately learning about your own influence through direct experience turns out not to be as simple as it may initially seem.

References