

## LEADING WHEN YOU ARE NOT IN CHARGE

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How often have you needed the support of others to succeed when you had absolutely no formal authority? The “because I said so” option was not available. But what was even more troubling was the fact that the -“I ain’t gotta do it; I’m outta here”- option was clearly available to the other party. This unfortunate balance of forces did not diminish the need for you to get the other party to willingly do something according to your needs. The purpose of this article is to offer a few concepts and skills to help you exercise influence without authority.

First, let’s briefly refresh your memory on the four types of power available in the work place. *Positional Power* comes from your position (title) in the formal hierarchy of your company. If you are a VP, you have more positional power than first line supervisor and rightly so. The perks, authority, and prestige of positional power are highly valued and rigorously pursued in corporate America.

There’s good news and bad news about positional power. The good news is that a structure of positional power and authority is absolutely necessary to bring order and discipline to organizations. Often, respect is earned where men and women accomplish jobs of great responsibility. The bad news is that positional power can be easily abused. Army Colonel Custer had more positional power than any of his soldiers when they met Chief Sitting Bull at the Little Bighorn River in 1876. All of his staff officers strongly advised him against attacking the Indians, but he was the boss, the colonel, and he failed to listen. As a result of that abuse of positional power his entire unit was massacred - Colonel Custer was one of the first men to wear an “arrow shirt”.

Positional power used to work reasonably well, but today, every time we lean heavily on the “because I said so” option, there is always unwanted collateral damage to the relationship with your colleagues. Positional power should be minimized and understated. It only guarantees the job will get done to the absolutely lowest standard.

*Coercive Power* is the power to punish or to dole out negative consequences. Yes, that’s what we call threat and intimidation and it’s not all bad. The national defense strategy of deterrence with the Russians during the Cold War was primarily the application of coercive power. We told the communist leaders, “If you attack the US or our allies, we have the capacity and resolve to destroy your country.” They were deterred by our awesome coercive power. But, alas, this article assumes you have no positional or coercive power so let’s explore your real options.

*Expert Power* is the power behind special knowledge or skills one possesses. The Ph.D.’s of the world earn that prestigious moniker by making a contribution to mankind’s body of knowledge in a particular field. Being a Ph.D. at Leading When You are Not in Charge requires a thorough knowledge and application of several key “people skills.”

Finally, *Personal Power* exists in the eye of the beholder. You have personal power if, and only if, the other party perceives that you do! When you are perceived as a person of character, integrity, honesty, selfless passion for the company and as someone who can be trusted at all times, under all circumstances - then you will have personal power.

Now, the best news yet. Positional and coercive powers are limited by the job description. These two types of power underwrite a behavioral rental agreement that expires every day at quitting time. Bottom line - these two "blunt instruments" are limited by law. However, if you operate from a base of expert and personal power, then your capability to influence without authority is virtually unlimited. People will be willing to do far more for you, the company, and the customer than you can ever demand. You will harness their enthusiasm, creativity, loyalty, and commitment - those precious intangibles which are never for sale - you must earn them every day. Unfortunately, we have all witnessed people who were "in charge" with the positional and coercive power to prove it, but have chosen the quickest route by resorting to "because I said so!" Therefore, they never develop the most valuable expert and personal powers.

Our brief time together allows me to share one simple, yet powerful, technique to aid in soliciting support from other when you have not authority. This process has served me well; I have shared it with thousands of people on four continents.

When you want to influence someone to "do something," whether you have authority or not, I suggest the following:

- \* Always use that person's name or nickname if they prefer. If you are on a first name basis, use it, but don't take such informal liberties if Mr. Jones or Ms. Smith prefers those titles.
- \* Use the word "please." "Please" and "thank you" are courtesy cushions which soften the interaction.
- \* Make your request in the form of a focused question. This was Socrates' secret; he asked his students questions because questions create answers. When we think of an answer ourselves, we tend to own and value that answer. The question identifies exactly "what" you want the other person to do.
- \* Finally, state the reason "why" the task needs to be done or "why" you asked that particular person. When we combine the "what" and the "why", people understand.

Tom and Bill are co-workers; there is no authority relationship between them. When Tom asks, "Bill, will you please do the time report for my section this Friday? Mary, the only trained person in my section, will be at home with a sick child until Monday." If you were Bill, how would you respond? "Sure, Tom, I would be glad to help." And Tom would say, "Thanks, Bill, I really appreciate your support."

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Now, for the icing on the cake. Tom takes 30 seconds to send a note or an e-mail to Bill's boss. "Susan, please express my appreciation to Bill for doing our time report this week while Mary is out with a sick child. He's a real team player. Thanks."

It has been my experience that when Tom uses this simple but effective tool, he not only gains the ability to lead when he is not in charge, but others in the office begin to model the same behavior. The team is now moving from a relationship grounded in authority, which tends to be limited to the last period in the job description, to one of influence based on positive professional relationships which far transcend authority. Remember, it is influence, not authority, which keeps an organization running smoothly.