

## Personal Power

No matter what job we do we all hold personal power. Power is something which we tend to think about in terms of how much other people have. We are often more aware of other people's power rather than our own. Depending on what we want at a particular time, will change our awareness of our and the other person's power. We can all remember the power our parents had over us, if we wanted something, or the pester power that some children bring into play at times.

Power is important because of the perceptions and beliefs we have of others. It can affect the ability of the people to make decisions and it can affect the outcomes. The person with more power, perceived or actual, is likely to achieve more of what he wants. You need to be aware of where you get your personal power. This can be from a number of different areas depending on your job, position or status. The key is to recognise where you get your personal power.

### We can categorise personal power in the following ways:

**Legitimate** - This is the sort of power which comes from having a recognised position or authority. Legitimate power comes from being the manager of a department or section, and having authority to make certain decisions and take certain actions. It is the power a policeman has to ask to see your driving licence.

**Reward** - If you are able to give something to someone that they want, or withhold something they want, you have reward power. Every time a parent bribes a child they are using their reward power, or every time a manager promotes a member of staff, or a foreman allows someone to knock off early. Having reward power means that you are able to give or withhold something that the recipient wants or expects. Reward power can be very effective and very useful, however if you use it without care and attention it can also backfire, ever met a spoilt child?

**Coercive Power** - If reward power is a parent bribing a child with a bar of chocolate, coercive power is the child threatening to scream all the way around the supermarket unless they are given a bar of chocolate. Having coercive power means being able to make threats and having those threats believed. The person on the end of the threat knows that you have something unpleasant up your sleeve which you will not hesitate to use if provoked. The crucial element to coercive power is that whoever you are threatening believes that you have the means to carry out the threat you have just made.

**Expert Power** - This is one of the most acceptable types of power. Expert power is perceived as having been worked for or gained; you only get expertise if you have experience or knowledge. It is the kind of power which is most likely to feel comfortable both to those who have the power and those who experience its use. Anyone who knows a lot more about a subject than all those around them, has expert power. The amount of expert power you have depends on the people you are working with; an economist working with other economists will have less expert power than an economist consulted by a group of lay people. Although in the present climate deciding on which economist to listen to can be difficult! Expert power can also be intimidating; in the case of someone who has a lot of technical knowledge but doesn't take the right approach to using it.

**Referent or Charismatic** - Some people have power just because of the sort of person they are. You may know someone at your place of work, or socially, who seems to be able to pull people along with them with very little effort. Usually they have something about them which other people admire or want to emulate. Pop stars or famous people sometimes go on from having referent power to having position power.

**Connection** - This sort of power is to do with who you know, what influence you might be able to have in circles which matter. If you are friendly with or related to someone with power and influence, the people around you may believe you have a connection power; that you have the ear of the MD or the Chairman of the Board. Connection power has often been a way in which children followed their parents into the same profession.

**Information** - The person who is perceived by others as having information which nobody else has, has information power. People with legitimate power also have information power, but it can also be held by those who have no formal power at all within an organisation. The receptionist who always knows the latest gossip. That person who always seems to know before anyone else what is going on in the organisation.

Once you recognise where your personal power lies, you can then use it to influence and to positively affect your working relationships. It is important to remember that you will have different types of power with different people. So you have to remember that what might work with one person, may not with another. Identifying and learning how to use your personal power will eventually gain you benefits, especially in the working environment.