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YOUR CIRCLE OF INFLUENCE: WHAT DO YOU HAVE GOING FOR YOU?

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Brought to our attention a few years ago in *Seven Habits* by Stephen Covey, this concept is crucial to anyone wishing to have greater impact on their world. No matter who you are or where you are located in your system, you have a circle of influence.

Where Does Influence (Power) Come From?

No one actually has power. Ultimately, power or influence is *granted* for reasons belonging to the person who grants it. Power or influence is not inherent in the one desiring to exercise it. Others *give* you power—or not. So, on what basis are people granting you the right to influence them? Some years ago (1960, in fact), social scientists French and Raven identified seven fundamental sources of power or influence.

Compliance-Oriented Influence - These three sources of power are likely to get you *compliance*, but don't expect anything more.

1. Position Power

This is power people give you as a result of the RANK you hold in the system. Think org chart or 'chain of command.' Parents in some families have position power. People say to themselves: *'I am letting you influence me because you are higher in the system than I am.'*

2. Coercive Power

This is power people give you as a result of your capacity to HURT them, or to make life hard for them in some way. There is an implied threat in this person's presence. It could be physical (e.g. someone with a weapon), or organizational (e.g. their reputation as a punisher). People say to themselves: *'I am letting you influence me because you could hurt me if I don't.'*

3. Reward Power

This is power people give you because they believe you could give them something they WANT or need. Think Pavlov or Skinner here: positive reinforcement. People say to themselves: *'I am letting you influence me because you could give me something that I would like to have.'*

Commitment-Oriented Influence - The next four go beyond compliance. These have a better chance of getting to commitment.

4. Information Power

This is power people give you as a result of **WHAT** you KNOW that they need to know. Think of it as 'needed knowledge.' People say to themselves: *'I am letting you influence me because you know something that I don't know and could help me.'*

5. Connection Power

This is power people give you as a result of **WHO** you KNOW that they want to have access to, or be connected to. This is influence granted to someone who has a special relationship with



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important people. (Think: the Personal Assistant to the boss.) People say to themselves: *'I am letting you influence me because you know someone that could benefit me.'*

6. Expertise Power

This is power people give you as a result of what you KNOW HOW to DO. Think Brain Surgeon here: they can get ___ done—and it needs to be done right. People say to themselves: *'I am letting you influence me because you can accomplish something that I need done.'*

7. Personal Power

This is power people give you as a result of WHO you **ARE** as a human being. In Social Science jargon, this is called 'referent power.' It means the other person sees in you things they admire or simply like. People say to themselves: *'I am letting you influence me because I like who I am when you are around. I feel good (or strong, or valued, or significant, or safe, or ____) in your presence.'*

Organizational Helplessness

Recently I was working with a room full of managers—fast-trackers, actually—from a large government organization, and when I got to this part of the course, several people said, 'But we are low on the totem pole; we don't have any power or influence.'

'That won't wash,' I said. 'You *always* have the potential to generate power and influence, no matter where you are in the pecking order. What you are saying is that you don't have the first three compliance-oriented sources of power: Position, Coercive or Reward. But you always have access to the other four commitment-oriented: Information, Connection, Expertise and/or Personal. WHAT do you know, or WHO do you know, or what can you DO that people might want to have access to? And last, but in a way, first—you always have the possibility of being the kind of human being people could want to be around.'

Ultimately, with Personal Power, which is based simply on authenticity (do you 'ring true?'), you have pretty much all you need, regardless of your situation. Check it out. "