# CONTROL THE DYNAMIC

## FORCING STRATEGIES

*People are constantly struggling to control you--getting you to act in their interests, keeping the dynamic on their terms. The only way to get the upper hand is to make your play for control more intelligent and insidious. Instead of trying to dominate the other side's every move, work to define the nature of the relationship itself. Shift the conflict to terrain of your choice, altering the pace and stakes to suit you. Maneuver to control your opponents' minds, pushing their emotional buttons, and compelling them to make mistakes. If necessary, let them feel they are in control in order to get them to lower their guard. If you control the overall direction and framing of the battle, anything they do will play into your hands.*

> *"Pressing down the pillow" refers to one's efforts not to let the head of one's opponent rise. In battles based on martial strategy, it is taboo to let your opponent take the initiative, thus putting yourself on the defensive. You must try at all costs to lead your opponent by taking complete control of him. During combat, your opponent intends to dominate you as much as you want to dominate him, so it is vital that you pick up on your opponent's intentions and tactics so as to control him.... According to the principle of martial strategy, you must be able to control your opponent(s) at all times. Study this point well.*
>
> *THE BOOK OF FIVE RINGS*, MIYAMOTO MUSASHI, 1584-1645

# THE ART OF ULTIMATE CONTROL

Control is an issue in all relationships. It is human nature to abhor feelings of helplessness and to strive for power. Whenever two people or groups interact, there is a constant maneuvering between them to define the relationship, to determine who has control over this and that. This battle of wills is inevitable. Your task as a strategist is twofold: First, recognize the struggle for control in all aspects of life, and never be taken in by those who claim they are not interested in control. Such types are often the most manipulative of all. Second, you must

master the art of moving the other side like pieces on a chessboard, with purpose and direction. This art was cultivated by the most creative generals and military strategists throughout the ages.

War is above all else a struggle over who can control the actions of the other side to a greater extent. Military geniuses such as Hannibal, Napoleon, and Erwin Rommel discovered that the best way to attain control is to determine the overall pace, direction, and shape of the war itself. This means getting enemies to fight according to your tempo, luring them onto terrain that is unfamiliar to them and suited to you, playing to your strengths. And, most important of all, it means gaining influence over the frame of mind of your opponents, adapting your maneuvers to their psychological weaknesses.

The superior strategist understands that it is impossible to control exactly how an enemy will respond to this move or that. To attempt to do so will only lead to frustration and exhaustion. There is too much in war and in life that is unpredictable. But if the strategist can control the mood and mind-set of his enemies, it does not matter exactly how they respond to his maneuvers. If he can make them frightened, panicky, overly aggressive, and angry, he controls the wider scope of their actions and can trap them mentally before cornering them physically.

Control can be aggressive or passive. It can be an immediate push on the enemy, making him back up and lose the initiative. It can be playing possum, getting the enemy to lower his guard, or baiting him into a rash attack. The artist of control weaves both of these into a devastating pattern--hitting, backing off, baiting, overwhelming.

This art is infinitely applicable to the battles of everyday life. Many people tend to play unconscious games of domination or get caught up in trying to control someone else's every move. In trying to manage and determine too much, they exhaust themselves, make mistakes, push people away, and in the end lose control of the situation. If you understand and master the art, you will instantly become more creative in your approach to influencing and controlling the other side. By determining people's moods, the pace at which they must move, the stakes involved, you will find that almost anything people do in response to your maneuvers will fit into the overall dynamic you have shaped. They may know they are being controlled but be helpless to fight it, or they may move in the direction you desire without realizing it. That is ultimate control.

*In short, I think like Frederick* [*the Great*] *, one should always be the first to attack.*

NAPOLEON BONAPARTE, 1769-1821

The following are the four basic principles of the art.

**Keep them on their heels.** Before the enemy makes a move, before the element of chance or the unexpected actions of your opponents can ruin your plans, you make an aggressive move to seize the initiative. You then keep up a relentless pressure, exploiting this momentary advantage to the fullest. You do not wait for opportunities to open up; you make them yourself. If you are the weaker side, this will often more than level the playing field. Keeping your enemies on the defensive and in react mode will have a demoralizing effect on them.

**Shift the battlefield.** An enemy naturally wants to fight you on familiar terrain. Terrain in this sense means all of the details of the battle--the time and place, exactly what is being fought over, who is involved in the struggle, and so on. By subtly shifting your enemies into places and situations that are not familiar to them, you control the dynamic. Without realizing what is happening, your opponents find themselves fighting on your terms.

**Compel mistakes.** Your enemies depend on executing a strategy that plays to their advantages, that has worked in the past. Your task is twofold: to fight the battle in such a way that they cannot bring their strength or strategy into play and to create such a level of frustration that they make mistakes in the process. You do not give them enough time to do anything; you play to their emotional weaknesses, making them as irritable as possible; you bait them into deadly traps. It is less your action than their missteps that give you control.

**Assume passive control.** The ultimate form of domination is to make those on the other side think they are the ones in control. Believing they are in command, they are less likely to resist you or become defensive. You create this impression by moving with the energy of the other side, giving ground but slowly and subtly diverting them in the direction you desire. It is often the best way to control the overly aggressive and the passive-aggressive.

*One who excels at warfare compels men and is not compelled by others.*

*--Sun-tzu (fourth century B.C.)*

# HISTORICAL EXAMPLES

**1.** By the end of 1940, British forces in the Middle East had been able to secure their position in Egypt and take back a good part of Libya that the Italians (an ally of Germany) had seized early in World War II. Having captured the important port town of Benghazi, the British were poised to advance farther west, all the way to Tripoli, allowing them to push the Italians out of the country for good. Then, unexpectedly, a halt was called in their advance. General Archibald Wavell, commander in chief of British forces in the Middle East, was waging battle on too many fronts. Since the Italians had proved themselves to be rather inept in desert warfare, the British felt they could afford to create a defensive line in Libya, build up their forces in Egypt, and launch a major offensive against the Italians by April of the following year.

News that a German armored brigade under the leadership of General Erwin Rommel had arrived in Tripoli in February 1941 did not alter the British plans. Rommel had been a superb commander during the blitzkrieg in France the previous year. But here he was under Italian command, dependent on the incompetent Italians for supplies, and his force was too small to make the British nervous. In addition, intelligence reports revealed that Hitler had sent him there with orders to do no more than block the British from advancing to Tripoli.

Then, without warning, at the end of March 1941, Rommel's tanks swept eastward. Rommel had broken up his small force into columns, and he hurled them in so many directions against the British defensive line that it was hard to fathom his intentions. These mechanized columns moved with incredible speed; advancing at night with lights dimmed, time and again they caught their enemy by surprise, suddenly appearing to their flank or rear. As their line was breached in multiple places, the British were compelled to retreat farther and farther east. To Wavell, who was following these events from Cairo, this was downright shocking and humiliating: Rommel was causing chaos with a disproportionately small number of tanks and severe supply limitations. Within a few weeks, the Germans had advanced to the border of Egypt.

What was most devastating about this offensive was the novel way in which Rommel fought. He used the desert as if it were an ocean. Despite supply problems and the difficult terrain, he kept his tanks in perpetual motion. The British could not let up their guard for a moment, and this mentally exhausted them. But his movements, though seemingly random, were always for a purpose.

If he wanted to take a particular city, he would head in the opposite direction, then circle and attack from an unexpected side. He brought along an armada of trucks to kick up enough dust so that the British could not see where he was headed and to give the impression of a much larger force than was actually on the attack.

Rommel would ride with the front line, risking death so that he could make rapid judgments on the move, sending his columns here and there before the British had time to figure out the game. And he used his tanks in the opposite way of the British, to deadly effect. Instead of pushing them forward to punch holes in the enemy lines, he would send out his weakest tanks, then have them retreat at first contact; the British tanks would invariably swallow the bait and go in pursuit, kicking up so much of their own dust in the process that they would not see they were running straight into a line of German antitank guns. Once a sufficient number of British tanks had been taken out, Rommel would advance again, wreaking havoc behind the British lines.

> *Given the same amount of intelligence, timidity will do a thousand times more damage in war than audacity.*
>
> CARL VON CLAUSEWITZ, 1780-1831

Kept constantly on their heels, forced to come to rapid decisions in response to Rommel's moves, the British made endless mistakes. Not knowing where he might show up next, or from what direction, they spread their forces over dangerously vast areas. Before long, at the mere mention that a German column was approaching, Rommel at its head, the British would abandon their positions, even though they greatly outnumbered him. In the end the only thing that stopped him was Hitler's obsession with Russia, which bled Rommel of the supplies and reinforcements he needed to conquer Egypt.

**Interpretation**

This is how Rommel analyzed the situation first confronting him: The enemy had a strong position to the east, which would only get stronger as more supplies and men came from Egypt. Rommel had a much smaller force, and the longer he waited, the more useless it would become. And so he decided to disobey Hitler's orders, risking his career on a truth he had learned in the blitzkrieg in France: making the first hit against the enemy completely alters the dynamic. If the enemy is the stronger side, it is upsetting and discouraging to be suddenly put on the defensive. Being larger and unprepared makes it harder to organize an orderly retreat.

To get his strategy to work, Rommel had to create maximum disorder in the enemy. In the ensuing confusion, the Germans would seem more formidable than they were. Speed, mobility, and surprise--as agents of such chaos--became ends in themselves. Once the enemy was on its heels, a deceptive maneuver--heading one way, then attacking from another--had double the effect. An enemy that is in retreat and without time to think will make endless mistakes if you keep up the pressure. Ultimately, the key to Rommel's success was to seize the initiative with one bold maneuver, then exploit this momentary advantage to the fullest.

Everything in this world conspires to put you on the defensive. At work, your superiors may want the glory for themselves and will discourage you from taking the initiative. People are constantly pushing and attacking you, keeping you in react mode. You are continually reminded of your limitations and what you cannot hope to accomplish. You are made to feel guilty for this and that. Such defensiveness on your part can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Before anything, you need to liberate yourself from this feeling. By acting boldly, before others are ready, by moving to seize the initiative, you create your own circumstances rather than simply waiting for what life brings you. Your initial push alters the situation, on your terms. People are made to react to you, making you seem larger and more powerful than may be the case. The respect and fear you inspire will translate into offensive power, a reputation that precedes you. Like Rommel, you must also have a touch of madness: ready to disorient and confuse for its own sake, to keep advancing no matter the circumstance. It is up to you--be constantly defensive or make others feel it instead.

*When they came to the ford of Xanthus, The eddying river that Zeus begot, Achilles split the Trojans. Half he chased Toward the city, across the plain where yesterday The Greeks had fled from Hector's shining rage. Hera, to slow this stampede of Trojans, Spread a curtain of fog between them.*

*The others swerved--And found themselves herded into the river. They crashed down into the deep, silver water As it tumbled and roared through its banks. You could hear their screams as they floundered And were whirled around in the eddies.*

Fire will sometimes cause a swarm of locusts To rise in the air and fly to a river. The fire Keeps coming, burning them instantly,

And the insects shrink down into the water.

*Just so Achilles. And Xanthus' noisy channel Was clogged with chariots,*

*horses, and men. Achilles wasted no time. Leaving his spear Propped against a tamarisk And holding only his sword, he leapt from the bank Like a spirit from hell bent on slaughter. He struck over and over, in a widening spiral.*

**2.** In 1932, Paramount Pictures, following a craze for gangster films, began production on *Night After Night*. The film was to star George Raft, who had recently made a name for himself in *Scarface*. Raft was cast to type as a typical gangster. But *Night After Night*, in a twist, was to have a comic edge to it. The producer, William Le Baron, was afraid that there was no one in the cast who had a light enough touch to pull this off. Raft, hearing of his concern, suggested he hire Mae West.

West was a celebrity in vaudeville and on Broadway, starring in plays she had written. She had made her reputation as a saucy, aggressive blonde with a devastating wit. Hollywood producers had thought of her before, but she was too bawdy for film. And by 1932 she was thirty-nine years old, on the plump side, and considered too old to be making a film debut. Nevertheless, Le Baron was willing to take a risk to liven up the picture. She would create a splash, provide an angle for promotion, then be sent back to Broadway, where she belonged. Paramount offered her a two-month contract at five thousand dollars a week, a generous deal for the times. West happily accepted.

At first West was a little difficult. She had been told to lose some weight, but she hated dieting and quickly gave up. Instead she had her hair dyed a rather indecent platinum blond. She hated the script--the dialog was flat and her character unimportant. The part needed to be rewritten, and West offered her services as a writer. Hollywood people were used to dealing with difficult actresses and had a panoply of tactics for taming them, particularly those who wanted their parts rewritten. What was unusual was an actress who offered to rewrite her own lines. Baffled by the request, even from someone who had written for Broadway, the studio executives came back with a firm refusal. Giving her that privilege would set a terrible precedent. West countered by refusing to continue with the film until they let her rewrite the dialog.

Paramount boss Adolph Zukor had seen West's screen test and liked her look and manner. The picture needed her. Zukor had a studio executive take her out to dinner on her birthday to try to cajole her; the goal was to calm her down enough so that they could begin shooting. Once cameras were rolling, he thought, they would find a way to get West to behave. But that night at dinner, West pulled out a check from her handbag and handed it to the executive. It was for twenty thousand dollars, the amount she had earned to that point. She was giving the money back to the studio and, thanking Paramount for the opportunity, told the

executive she was leaving for New York the next morning.

Zukor, immediately apprised of this news, was caught completely off balance. West seemed willing to lose substantial money, risk a lawsuit for breach of contract, and guarantee that she would never work in Hollywood again. Zukor took another look at the script--perhaps she was right and the dialog was lousy. She would rather give up money and a career than be in an inferior picture! He decided to offer her a compromise: she could write her own dialog, and they would shoot two versions of the movie, one hers, one the studio's. That would cost a little more, but they would get West on film. If her version was better, which Zukor thought unlikely, that would only improve the picture; if not, they would go with the original version. Paramount couldn't lose.

West accepted the compromise and shooting began. One person, however, was not amused: the director, Archie L. Mayo, a man with an extensive resume. Not only had West changed the script to suit her wisecracking style, she insisted on altering the blocking and camera setups to make the most of her lines. They fought and fought, until one day West refused to go on. She had demanded a shot of her disappearing up some stairs after delivering one of her patented wisecracks. This would give the audience time to laugh. Mayo thought it unnecessary and refused to shoot it. West walked off the set, and production came to a halt. Studio executives agreed that West's lines had lightened up the picture; let her have her way with the direction and shoot the shot, they told Mayo. They would edit it out later.

Production resumed. The other actress in her scenes, Alison Skipworth, had the distinct impression that West was determining the pace of the lines, getting the camera to focus on her, stealing the scene. Protesting that West was taking over the direction of the movie, Skipworth, too, was told not to worry--it would all be fixed in the editing.

When it came time to cut the film, however, West had so altered the mood and pace of her scenes that no editing could bring them back to the original; more important, her sense of timing and direction were solid. She had indeed improved the entire picture.

The film debuted in October 1932. The reviews were mixed, but almost all agreed that a new star was born. West's aggressive sexual style and wit fascinated the men in the audience. Though she appeared in just a few scenes, she was the only part of the film anyone seemed to remember. Lines she had written--"I'm a girl who lost her reputation and never missed it"--were quoted endlessly. As Raft later admitted, "Mae West stole everything but the cameras."

Audiences were soon clamoring for more Mae West--and Paramount, in financial trouble at the time, could not ignore them. At the age of forty, as plump

as ever, West was signed to a long-term contract at the highest salary of any star in the studio. For her next film, *Diamond Lil*, she would have complete creative control. No other actress--or actor, for that matter--had ever pulled off such a coup and in so short a time.

> *Hideous groans rose from the wounded, And the river water turned crimson with blood.*
>
> Fish fleeing a dolphin's huge maw Hide by the hundreds in the harbor's crannies, But the dolphin devours whatever it catches.
>
> *Likewise the Trojans beneath the riverbanks.*

*THE ILIAD*, HOMER, CIRCA NINTH CENTURY B.C.

**Interpretation**

When Mae West set foot in Hollywood, everything was stacked against her. She was old and passe. The director and an army of studio executives had just one goal: to use her in a scene or two to animate a dull picture, then ship her back to New York. She had no real power, and if she had chosen to fight on their battlefield--one in which actresses were a dime a dozen and exploited to the fullest--she would have gotten nowhere. West's genius, her form of warfare, was slowly but surely to shift the battlefield to terrain of her choice.

She began her war by playing the part of the blond bombshell, charming and seducing the Paramount men. Her screen test hooked them--she was difficult, but what actress wasn't? Next she asked to rewrite her lines and, receiving the expected refusal, ratcheted up the stakes by not budging. Returning the money she had been paid was her campaign's key moment: it subtly shifted the focus from a battle with an actress to the script itself. By showing herself ready to give up so much, she made Zukor begin to wonder more about the dialog than about her. After his compromise, West made her next maneuver, fighting over the blocking, the camera angles, the pacing of the shots. Her writing had become an accepted part of the scenery; the battle now was over her directing. Another compromise, which translated into another victory. Instead of fighting the studio executives on their terms, West had subtly shifted the battle to a field unfamiliar to them--fighting with an actress over the writing and directing of a film. On such terrain, against a smart and seductive woman, the army of Paramount men was lost and helpless.

Your enemies will naturally choose to fight on terrain that is to their liking, that allows them to use their power to best advantage. Cede them such power and you end up fighting on their terms. Your goal is to subtly shift the conflict to terrain of your choice. You accept the battle but alter its nature. If it is about money, shift it to something moral. If your opponents want to fight over a particular issue, reframe the battle to encompass something larger and more difficult for them to handle. If they like a slow pace, find a way to quicken it. You are not allowing your enemies to get comfortable or fight in their usual way. And an enemy who is lured onto unfamiliar terrain is one who has lost control of the dynamic. Once such control slips from his hands, he will compromise, retreat, make mistakes, and effect his own destruction.

**3.** By early 1864 the American Civil War had settled into a stalemate. Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia had managed to keep the Union forces away from Richmond, capital of the Confederacy. To the west the Confederates had established an impregnable defensive position at the town of Dalton, Georgia, blocking any Union advance on Atlanta, the key industrial city of the South. President Abraham Lincoln, facing reelection that year and gravely worried about his chances if the stalemate continued, decided to name Ulysses S. Grant overall commander of the Union forces. Here was a man who would go on the offensive.

> *Let us admit that boldness in war even has its own prerogatives. It must be granted a certain power over and above successful calculations involving space, time, and magnitude of forces, for wherever it is superior, it will take advantage of its opponent's weakness. In other words, it is a genuinely creative force. This fact is not difficult to prove even scientifically. Whenever boldness encounters timidity, it is likely to be the winner, because timidity in itself implies a loss of equilibrium. Boldness will be at a disadvantage only in an encounter with deliberate caution, which may be considered bold in its own right, and is certainly just as powerful and effective; but such cases are rare. Timidity is the root of prudence in the majority of men.... The higher up the chain of command, the greater is the need for boldness to be supported by a reflective mind, so that boldness does not degenerate into purposeless bursts of blind passion.*
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> *ON WAR*, CARL VON CLAUSEWITZ, 1780-1831

Grant's first move was to appoint his chief lieutenant, General William Tecumseh Sherman, to command the Union forces in Georgia. When Sherman arrived on the scene, he realized that any attempt to take Dalton was doomed from the start. The Confederate commander, General John Johnston, was a master at defensive warfare. With mountains to his rear and a solid position to his front, Johnston could simply stay put. A siege would take too long, and a frontal attack would be too costly. The situation seemed hopeless.

Sherman decided, then, that if he could not seize Dalton, he would take hold of Johnston's mind, striking fear in a man notorious for being conservative and cautious. In May 1864, Sherman sent three-fourths of his army into a direct attack on Dalton. With Johnston's attention held by this attack, Sherman then sneaked the Army of the Tennessee around the mountains to the town of Resaca, fifteen miles to the south of Dalton, blocking Johnston's only real route of retreat and only supply line. Terrified to find himself suddenly surrounded, Johnston had no choice but to give up his position at Dalton. He would not, however, play into Sherman's hands: he simply retreated to another defensive position that gave him maximum security, again inviting Sherman to attack him straight on. This quickly turned into a dance: Sherman would feint going one way, then would somehow divert a part of his army to the south of Johnston, who kept backing up...all the way to Atlanta.

The Confederate president, Jefferson Davis, disgusted by Johnston's refusal to fight, replaced him with General John Hood. Sherman knew that Hood was an aggressive commander, often even reckless. He also knew that neither the time nor the men were available to lay siege to Atlanta--Lincoln needed a quick victory. His solution was to send detachments to threaten Atlanta's defenses, but he made these forces temptingly small and weak. Hood could not resist the temptation to leave his stronghold in the city and move to the attack, only to find himself rushing into an ambush. This happened several times, and with each defeat, Hood's army became smaller and the morale of his men quickly deteriorated.

Now, with Hood's army tired and expecting disaster, Sherman played yet another trick. At the end of August, he marched his army southeast, past Atlanta, abandoning his supply lines. To Hood this could only mean that Sherman had given up the fight for Atlanta. Wild celebration broke out throughout the city. But Sherman had cunningly timed this march to coincide with the ripening of the corn, and with his men well fed and Hood unsuspecting, he cut off the final railway line still open to Atlanta and wheeled back to attack the unguarded city. Hood was forced to abandon Atlanta. This was the great victory that would ensure Lincoln's reelection.

Next came Sherman's strangest maneuver of all. He divided his army into four columns and, completely cutting himself loose from his supply lines, began a march east from Atlanta to Savannah and the sea. His men lived off the land, destroying everything in their path. Unencumbered by supply wagons, they moved with incredible speed. The four parallel columns were far enough apart that the southern forces could not tell where they were headed. The southern column seemed headed for Macon, the northern for Augusta. Confederate forces scrambled to cover both places, leaving the center open--which was exactly where Sherman planned to advance. Keeping the South on what he called "the horns of a dilemma," off balance and mystified as to his intentions, Sherman marched all the way to Savannah with hardly a battle.

> *The Olympians could now join battle with the giants. Heracles let loose his first arrow against Alcyoneus, the enemy's leader. He fell to the ground, but sprang up again revived, because this was his native soil of Phlegra. "Quick, noble Heracles!" cried Athene. "Drag him away to another country!" Heracles caught Alcyoneus up on his shoulders, and dragged him over the Thracian border, where he despatched him with a club.*
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> *THE GREEK MYTHS*, VOL. 1, ROBERT GRAVES, 1955

The effect of this march was devastating. For the Confederate soldiers still fighting in Virginia, the ruin of Georgia--where many had left behind homes--was a terrible blow to their morale. Sherman's march cast a mood of deep gloom over the entire South. Slowly but surely it was losing its will to keep up the fight, Sherman's goal all along.

**Interpretation**

In any conflict it is often the weaker side that in fact controls the dynamic. In this case the South was in control in both the strategic and the grand-strategic sense. In their immediate, local strategy, the Confederates had entrenched themselves in powerful defensive positions in Georgia and Virginia. The temptation for the North was to fight on the enemy's terms, to hurl division after division against these positions, at tremendous loss of life and with little chance of advancing. In the South's grand strategy, the longer this stalemate prevailed, the more likely Lincoln was to be thrown out of office. Then the war would end through negotiation. The South set the tempo for the battle (slow and grinding) and controlled the stakes.

As Sherman saw it, his goal was not to capture a city or to defeat the Confederates in battle. In his view the only way to win the war was to regain

control of the dynamic. Instead of brutal, frontal attacks against Dalton or Atlanta, which would play into the South's hands, he operated indirectly. He frightened the timid Johnston into abandoning his stronghold and goaded the rash Hood into senseless attacks, in both instances playing upon the psychology of the opponent to force the issue. By constantly putting his enemy on the horns of a dilemma, where both staying put and moving were equally dangerous, he took control of the situation without having to waste men in battle. Most important, by demonstrating to the South with his destructive march that the longer the war dragged on, the worse it would be for them, he regained grand-strategic control of the war. For the Confederates, to keep fighting was slow suicide.

The worst dynamic in war, and in life, is the stalemate. It seems that whatever you do only feeds the stagnation. Once this happens, a kind of mental paralysis overcomes you. You lose the ability to think or respond in different ways. At such a point, all is lost. If you find yourself falling into such a dynamic--dealing with a defensive, entrenched opponent or trapped in a reactive relationship--you must become as creative as General Sherman. Deliberately shake up the pace of the slow waltz by doing something seemingly irrational. Operate outside the experience of the enemy, as Sherman did when he cut himself loose from his supplies. Move fast here and slow there. One major jolt given to the stale dynamic will shake it up, force the enemy to do something different. With the slightest change, you have room for greater change and taking control. Injecting novelty and mobility is often enough to unbalance the minds of your rigid and defensive opponents.

**4.** In 1833, Mr. Thomas Auld, the slaveholding owner of a plantation on Maryland's Eastern Shore, summoned back his slave Frederick Douglass, fifteen years old at the time, from Baltimore, where Douglass had just spent seven years serving Auld's brother. Now he was needed to work the fields of the plantation. But life in the city had changed Douglass in many ways, and to his chagrin he found it quite hard to disguise this from Auld. In Baltimore he had secretly managed to teach himself how to read and write, something no slave was allowed to do, for that would stimulate dangerous thoughts. On the plantation Douglass tried to teach as many slaves as possible to read; these efforts were quickly squashed. But what was worse for him was that he had developed a rather defiant attitude, what the slaveholder called impudence. He talked back to Auld, questioned some of his orders, and played all kinds of tricks to get more

food. (Auld was notorious for keeping his slaves near starvation.)

One day Auld informed Douglass that he was hiring him out for a year to Mr. Edward Covey, a nearby farm renter who had earned a reputation as a consummate "breaker of young Negroes." Slaveholders would send him their most difficult slaves, and in exchange for their free labor Covey would beat every last ounce of rebellion out of them. Covey worked Douglass especially hard, and after a few months he was broken in body and spirit. He no longer desired to read books or engage in discussions with his fellow slaves. On his days off, he would crawl under the shade of a tree and sleep off his exhaustion and despair.

One especially hot day in August 1834, Douglass became ill and fainted. The next thing he knew, Covey was hovering over him, hickory slab in hand, ordering him back to work. But Douglass was too weak. Covey hit him on the head, opening a deep wound. He kicked him a few times, but Douglass could not move. Covey finally left, intending to deal with him later.

> *Well, my dear reader, this battle with Mr. Covey,--undignified as it was, and as I fear my narration of it is--was the turning point in my* "life as a slave." *It rekindled in my breast the smouldering embers of liberty; it brought up my Baltimore dreams, and revived a sense of my own manhood. I was a changed being after that fight. I was* nothing *before; I WAS A MAN NOW. It recalled to life my crushed self-respect and my self-confidence, and inspired me with a renewed determination to be A FREEMAN. A man, without force, is without the essential dignity of humanity. Human nature is so constituted, that it cannot* honor *a helpless man, although it can pity him; and even this it cannot do long, if the signs of power do not arise. He only can understand the effect of this combat on my spirit, who has himself incurred something, hazarded something, in repelling the unjust and cruel aggressions of a tyrant. Covey was a tyrant, and a cowardly one, withal. After resisting him, I felt as I had never felt before. It was a resurrection from the dark and pestiferous tomb of slavery, to the heaven of comparative freedom. I was no longer a servile coward, trembling under the frown of a brother worm of the dust, but, my long-cowed spirit was roused to an attitude of manly independence. I had reached a point, at which I was* not afraid to die . *This spirit made me a freeman in* fact , *while I remained a slave in* form . *When a slave cannot be flogged he is more than half free. He has a domain as broad as his own manly heart to defend, and he is really* "a power on earth." *While slaves prefer their lives, with flogging, to instant death, they will always find christians enough, like unto Covey, to accommodate that preference. From this time, until that of*

*my escape from slavery, I was never fairly whipped. Several attempts were made to whip me, but they were always unsuccessful. Bruises I did get, as I shall hereafter inform the reader; but the case I have been describing, was the end of the brutification to which slavery had subjected me.*

*MY BONDAGE AND MY FREEDOM*, FREDERICK DOUGLASS, 1818-1895

Douglass managed to get to his feet, staggered to the woods, and somehow made his way back to Auld's plantation. There he begged with Master Auld to keep him there, explaining Covey's cruelty. Auld was unmoved. Douglass could spend the night but then must return to Covey's farm.

Making his way back to the farm, Douglass feared the worst. He told himself that he would do his best to obey Covey and somehow survive the weeks ahead. Arriving at the stables where he was supposed to work that day, he began his chores, when out of nowhere, like a snake, Covey slithered in, rope in hand. He lunged at Douglass, trying to get a slipknot on his leg and tie him up. He was clearly intending the thrashing to end all thrashings.

Risking an even more intense beating, Douglass pushed Covey away and, without hitting him, kept him from getting the rope around his leg. At that moment something clicked in Douglass's head. Every defiant thought that had been suffocated by his months of brutal labor came back to him. He was not afraid. Covey could kill him, but it was better to go down fighting for his life.

Suddenly a cousin came to Covey's aid, and, finding himself surrounded, Douglass did the unthinkable: he swung hard at the man and knocked him to the ground. Hitting a white man would most likely lead to his hanging. A "fighting madness" came over Douglass. He returned Covey's blows. The struggle went on for two hours until, bloodied, exhausted, and gasping for breath, Covey gave up and slowly staggered back to his house.

Douglass could only assume that Covey would now come after him with a gun or find some other way to kill him. It never happened. Slowly it dawned on Douglass: to kill him, or punish him in some powerful way, posed too great a risk. Word would get out that Covey had failed to break a Negro this one time, had had to resort to a gun when his terror tactics did not work. The mere hint of that would ruin his reputation far and wide, and his job depended on his perfect reputation. Better to leave the wild sixteen-year-old slave alone than risk the kind of crazy or unpredictable response Douglass had showed himself capable of. Better to let him calm down and go quietly away when his time of service there was over.

For the rest of Douglass's stay with Covey, the white man did not lay a hand

on him. Douglass had noticed that slaveholders often "prefer to whip those who are most easily whipped." Now he had learned the lesson for himself: never again would he be submissive. Such weakness only encouraged the tyrants to go further. He would rather risk death, returning blow for blow with his fists or his wits.

**Interpretation**

Reflecting on this moment years later in his book *My Bondage and My Freedom*, after he had escaped to the North and become a leading advocate of the abolitionist movement, Douglass wrote, "This battle with Mr. Covey...was the turning point in my '*life as a slave*.'...I was a changed being after that fight.... I had reached the point at which I was not *afraid to die*. This spirit made me a freeman in *fact*, while I remained a slave in *form*." For the rest of his life, he adopted this fighting stance: by being unafraid of the consequences, Douglass gained a degree of control of his situation both physically and psychologically. Once he had rooted fear out of himself, he opened up possibilities for action--sometimes fighting back overtly, sometimes being clever and deceitful. From a slave with no control, he became a man with some options and some power, all of which he leveraged into real freedom when the time came.

To control the dynamic, you must be able to control yourself and your emotions. Getting angry and lashing out will only limit your options. And in conflict, fear is the most debilitating emotion of all. Even before anything has happened, your fear puts you on your heels, cedes the initiative to the enemy. The other side has endless possibilities for using your fear to help control you, keep you on the defensive. Those who are tyrants and domineering types can smell your anxiety, and it makes them even more tyrannical. Before anything else you must lose your fear--of death, of the consequences of a bold maneuver, of other people's opinion of you. That single moment will suddenly open up vistas of possibilities. And in the end whichever side has more possibilities for positive action has greater control.

**5.** Early in his career, the American psychiatrist Milton H. Erickson (1901-80) noticed that patients had countless ways of controlling the relationship between patient and therapist. They might withhold information from him or resist entering into a hypnotic trance (Erickson often used hypnosis in his therapy); they might question the therapist's abilities, insist he do more of the talking, or emphasize the hopelessness of their problems and the futility of therapy. These

attempts at control in fact mirrored whatever their problem was in daily life: they resorted to all kinds of unconscious and passive games of domination while denying to themselves and to others they were up to such tricks. And so, over the years, Erickson developed what he called his "Utilization Technique"--literally using these patients' passive aggression, their clever manipulations, as instruments to change them.

Erickson often dealt with patients whom someone else--a partner, a parent--had forced to seek his help. Resentful of this, they would get revenge by deliberately withholding information about their lives. Erickson would begin by telling these patients that it was natural, even healthy, not to want to reveal everything to the therapist. He would insist they withhold any sensitive information. The patients would then feel trapped: by keeping secrets they were obeying the therapist, which was just the opposite of what they wanted to do. Usually by the second session, they would open up, rebelling to such an extent that they revealed everything about themselves.

One man, on his first visit to Erickson's office, began anxiously pacing the room. By refusing to sit down and relax, he was making it impossible for Erickson to hypnotize him or work with him at all. Erickson began by asking him, "Are you willing to cooperate with me by continuing to pace the floor as you are doing now?" The patient agreed to this strange request. Then Erickson asked if he could tell the patient where to pace and how fast. The patient could see no problem with this. Minutes later Erickson began to hesitate in giving his directions; the patient waited to hear what he was to do next with his pacing. After this happened a few times, Erickson finally told him to sit in a chair, where the man promptly fell into a trance.

> *It is not the same when a fighter moves because he wants to move, and another when he moves because he has to.*
>
> JOE FRAZIER, 1944

With those who were patently cynical about therapy, Erickson would deliberately try a method of hypnosis that would fail, and then he would apologize for using that technique. He would talk about his own inadequacies and the many times he had failed. Erickson knew that these types needed to one-up the therapist, and that once they felt they had gained the advantage, they would unconsciously open themselves up to him and fall easily into a trance.

A woman once came to Erickson complaining that her husband used his supposedly weak heart to keep her on constant alert and dominate her in every way. The doctors had found nothing wrong with him, yet he genuinely seemed

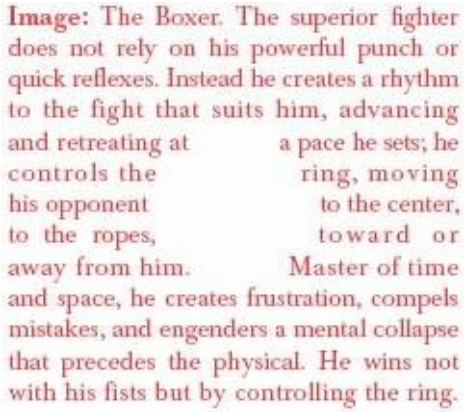
weak and always believed that a heart attack was imminent. The woman felt concerned, angry, and guilty all at the same time. Erickson advised her to continue being sympathetic to his condition, but the next time he talked about a heart attack, she was to tell him politely she needed to tidy the house. She was then to place brochures she had collected from morticians all around the house. If he did it again, she was to go to the desk in the living room and begin adding up the figures in his life-insurance policies. At first the husband was furious, but soon he came to fear seeing those brochures and hearing the sound of the adding machine. He stopped talking about his heart and was forced to deal with his wife in a more direct manner.

**Interpretation**

In some relationships you may have a gnawing feeling that the other person has gained control of the dynamic, yet you find it hard to pinpoint how or when this occurred. All that can be said for certain is that you feel unable to move the other person, to influence the course of the relationship. Everything you do only seems to feed the power of the controller. The reason for this is that the other person has adopted subtle, insidious forms of control that are easily disguised and yet all the more effective for being unconscious and passive. Such types exert control by being depressed, overly anxious, overburdened with work--they are the victims of constant injustice. They cannot help their situation. They demand attention, and if you fail to provide it, they make you feel guilty. They are elusive and impossible to fight because they make it appear at each turn that they are not at all looking for control. They are more willful than you, but better at disguising it. In truth, you are the one who feels helpless and confused by their guerrilla-like tactics.

To alter the dynamic, you must first recognize that there is far less helplessness in their behavior than they let on. Second, these people need to feel that everything takes place on their terms; threaten that desire and they fight back in underhanded ways. You must never inadvertently feed their rebelliousness by arguing, complaining, trying to push them in a direction. This makes them feel more under attack, more like a victim, and encourages passive revenge. Instead move within their system of control, applying Erickson's Utilization Technique. Be sympathetic to their plight, but make it seem that whatever they do, they are actually cooperating with your own desires. That will put them off balance; if they rebel now, they are playing into your hands. The dynamic will subtly shift, and you will have room to insinuate change. Similarly, if the other person wields a fundamental weakness as a weapon (the heart-attack tactic), make that threat impossible to use against you by taking it further, to the

point of parody or painfulness. The only way to beat passive opponents is to outdo them in subtle control.




**Authority: In order to have rest oneself it is necessary to keep the enemy occupied. This throws them back on the defensive, and once they are placed that way they cannot rise up again during the entire campaign.**

*--Frederick the Great (1712-1786)*

# REVERSAL

This strategy has no reversal. Any effort to seem *not* to control a situation, to refuse to influence a relationship, is in fact a form of control. By ceding power to others, you have gained a kind of passive authority that you can use later for your own purposes. You are also the one determining who has control by relinquishing it to the other side. There is no escape from the control dynamic. Those who say they are doing so are playing the most insidious control game of all.