

## 1. Basics of Workplace Power

Workplaces the whole world over are a hotbed of power moves.

Why is it so?

Think of work this way:

1. **It's a place where groups of people congregate *unnaturally*.** All the typical social dynamics are at play, plus the high-school feeling of people “having” to be there
2. **People go to work to get resources.** People care about resources, making work a crucial aspect of life's success for many. And those resources are limited, which fuels competition.
3. **People are ranked by titles.** Titles confer social status and social power. But it does so, again, in a rather unnatural way: titles only loosely overlap with true leadership skills
4. **There are written guidelines and unwritten ones.** Theoretically, it's all about the team, but practically it's not. Promotions are *theoretically* only based on merit, but in reality they are also based on politics, appearances, liking and more or less illegal or immoral exchanges

And that's why politics, games and power moves thrive at work.

## Power Moves Are Hidden & Sneaky At Work

What makes office politics so peculiar is that power moves tend to be very sneaky and hidden.

Most highly driven people want to win for themselves first and foremost. And it makes sense.

But given that the official policies are often about “team and customers first”, they go after their selfish goals while pretending to be professional and playing for the team.

Add to that the fact that goals are not always exactly the same. Most people know that, more often than not, a loss for their teammates means a comparative advantage for them and for their promotions opportunities.

The result is a schizophrenic environment where people *profess* team loyalty and honesty but secretly hope their teammates will fail. They pretend to care for the company all the while they maximize their selfish interests.

Of course, not *everyone* is like that.  
But a good chunk of highly driven people are.

## The Key Levers of Political Power

Power in the workplace is the result of excelling in the following fields:

### 1. Results: The Hard Currency

Never neglect results for politics: results and politics are *not* antithetic but interdependent.

People who say “*it’s not what you do, it’s who you know*” don’t understand a thing of workplace power.  
As a matter of fact, don’t associate with those people because they rarely go far.

Saying that politics is more important than results is like saying “it’s not tails that matter, it’s all about head”. That makes no sense because they’re *both* inseparable parts of the same coin!

Same for power: **results and politics are two sides of the same coin.**

Politics clear the pathway that allows your results to bring you

upwards and provide you with the opportunities to showcase your results.

A few exceptions apply, but you don't make the rules with the exceptions.

And if you were forced to focus on one only focus on results. Not because politics are not equally important, but because results build skills which are transferable and last a lifetime. Politics instead are company-specific and evaporate the moment you step out of the organization.

*Focusing on results build transferrable skill and long term power.  
Politics instead disappear the moment you step out of the organization.*

Some authors also say that if you are in a company where politics trump results, you are in a toxic environment.

And I agree.

## **2. Domain Knowledge: The Expert Power**

When you become the repository of sought after information and expertise your power increases exponentially.

You probably know someone in the organization that everyone always goes to when you need answers to difficult questions. It's the name that always comes up when people say "oh, for that you need to ask to X". Become *that* guy.

When people start coming to you with problems and the difficult questions nobody could answer, take it as the clear sign that you are increasing your power base. Become the guy people say "you need to ask to X" and you become

untouchable.

Double power if you become the guy to go for topics that matter to the CEO. Government relations, investors, taxes, international law, etc.

### 3. Attitude: The Pleasure of Having You Around

Positive attitude means optimism and a personality that brightens the team.

Basically, the kind of person people *want* to work with and include in important and visible projects.

We probably know some of these guys and we probably know their opposites too: those who complain, lament and bring others down. The former stay and get promoted, the latter are the first to get the chop.

### 4. Friends: the Power of Social Networks

A long time ago I went to my very first mentor in my very first job with an inter-department power issue on my hands. I had been slighted and I wanted to hit back. Badly. I asked my mentor for advice and I will never forget what he told me.

Here it is for you, simple and life-changing:

*Make friends, not enemies*

Needless to say, it doesn't mean being a pushover and accepting what's not acceptable.

But it does mean approaching all situations with the goal of making friends and allies –*all* situations-.

Because here is the rule of thumb: **friends and allies increase your leverage, while fights and enemies decrease it.**

People are power.

Study the people.

What's important to them, how driven they are, how introverted/extroverted they are, what they think of the company and the boss.

If they're powerful invest time with them outside of work, too. Meet their spouses, go to their parties and bring with you top-shelf Italian wine.

A crucial approach to effective friend-building strategy is seeing people for who they are, with flaws and all, *but not allowing the flaws to destroy the whole*.

If you can, seek a mentor within the senior membership team of your organization.

Pay attention to what they say, and what they don't say.

The mentor of a friend of mine pointed him outside the company for career growth. My friend struggled to understand... Until a few months later the department was shut down.

The mentor could not share that news, but what he did *not* say communicated what he could not say.

### **PRO Tip: Avoid As Much As Possible Putting People In The "Enemies" Category**

I have met many people who fell victim of black and white thinking.

For them, people are good or bad, friends or foes. Guess what happens with that approach? The "enemies" category becomes huge.

The worst approach is negative black and white thinking. These people think there are too many "jerks" and "morons" around to make friends and they stick to the one or two friends they have.

Avoid that mentality: befriend everyone (except management's enemies on their way out).

## **5. Special Friends: The Power of Allies**

Allies are a sort of “special friends”, going the extra mile to support you.

Special friends can be sexual trysts, but also simply “deeper friendships”.

One way of making special friends is by going beyond simple work and getting to people for who they really are outside of work. When people talk to you of things they don’t talk with anyone else, you develop a network of trusted confidantes that grows your political knowledge and power.

This works *especially* well with troubled individuals with lots of power. Many super driven individuals, the ones going places, have a darker side which is driving them. They don’t share it with the world. But if they get to share it with you... You’re bonded for life. And you made yourself a powerful ally.

These are not the type of people who go to therapy, because instead of sharing their demons, they use them to move forward. Do you get it now... ? *You* will be their therapist. With your friendship.

Support them for real, keep your mouth shut about their true history... and you are creating win-win friendships because sharing their burden is also highly therapeutic for them.

[An example: the emotionally troubled friend](#)

An ex-colleague of mine escaped an abusive father with 5 Dollars in his pocket.

He gave up a past of drug dealing and ad one single obsession: becoming rich.

Of course, nobody knew that.

He's the most driven and motivated person I have ever met and I was the only one he would talk about his past of abuse and "hustling".

When my last company hired me, or should I say, hired us, they hired us *as a team*.

He was far more accomplished than I am, had a stellar reputation for being the best sales guy around, and I wouldn't have gotten that chance -or that salary- without him. Who knows where I'd be today if it weren't for him... And for my ability to listen and bond, allowing people to feel trusted to share their true story.

He took me upward for the ride because of our special bond and friendship.

Now he's gone on to found a recruiting company.

This is something you absolutely do as well.

Make two or three of these friends and you'll get immense leverage for life.

## 6. Outside of Office Network

Your network is anyone whom you can call to ask for information or support.

Internal network is useful to move up.

But the external network is more useful to save your ass and/or to provide you with more future opportunities for lateral moves.

Networks also provide power and leverage against your employer. **The bigger and stronger your network, the bigger your walkaway power.**

One great tip which helped me increase my network was to never go to lunch alone.

If you need to, send LinkedIn message to people you don't know yet or ask for introductions. Then go to lunch with people relevant to your

work.

So for example, if you do IT sales at SAP, get to know people at Oracle, Sage, SunSystems, and Salesforce.

And make friends with other salespeople in your city.

And stay in contact with colleagues who left.

*Especially* if they stay in the same industry: they become future opportunities and a present sources of information.

## **7. Closeness to Money: The Power of Being In The Money**

The N.1 resource for any business is money.

The greater the influence you can exert on your company's bottom line -or the people directly responsible for your bottom line-, the greater your power.

If you're in sales or account management, develop very close relationships with your customers and you will immense leverage. The same is true for investors or any other money provider.

Write down their birthdays, service them, do lunches and dinners with them... Love them. Make love to them too if you can. And visit their homes and show love to their families if you can.

Try to be the only point of contact they have in the company. If you speak more than one language, seek customers in your second language so you will be the only one to service them.

### **Example:**

With my last employer, I had found strong Italian prospects with which I became good friends.

When I left they contacted me to ask if they should go ahead with my employer now that I wasn't there anymore.



*That's leverage.*

I also kept all my prospects close to me and mostly avoided intros to my whom, whom I did not trust and did not like.

## Power Assessment: The Power Map

Some people say that your network is your net worth.

But the net worth of your network also matters.

Politically intelligent players assess the power distribution in their organization and prioritize based on that power map.

This section is a quick primer on building power maps in the organization.

### **Assess Your Own Workplace Power**

This assessment is an expanded version of Marie McIntyre's analysis of office politics.

It's not a scientific test, but it gives you a good idea about what you should consider when assessing your personal power and people's power.

Give yourself a mark for each point:

#### **Position**

- 10 if CEO
- 0 if intern learning the ropes

#### **Positional Relevance**

- 5 if direct impact on bottom line like sales
- 0 for any cost-centers with no bottom-line impact such as compliance, project support, learning & development etc.

## **Uniqueness of Contribution**

- 8 if only you can provide certain results or information that are useful to the business and to management
- 0 if anyone can easily do what you do

## **Internal Network**

- 9 if you're friends with top management and department heads and they like you
- 0 if nobody from upper management knows you

## **Friends & Attitude**

- 7 if colleagues and people around think you're cool and fun to be around
- -7 if people think you're a downer

## **Results**

- 10 if you're driving the company/department forward
- 0 if nobody noticed your departure
- -8 if you've recently fucked up important work

Note: results count only if visible to the people with influence on your career.

## **Reputation**

- 7 for great reputation
- 0 for no reputation
- -10 for very bad reputation in either work deliverable or behavior

**Results:**

If you scored higher than 30 you're on the right way.

Lower than 20 you got work to do.

And if you scored negative than you are "the problem" and need to start revolutionizing your approach.

## Assessing Other People's Power

Here are a few questions for you to assess people's power:

**Do top managers know them?** Powerful people either are top management or are friends with them

**Does the CEO/head of the department visit them to talk?** If they do, that means they have strong domain knowledge or are involved in decision making or have a strong personal influence on the decision-makers

**Do they talk more about the past or the future?** People with no future talk about the past. Especially the high flyers who like to reminisce of when they had power

**Who do they have lunch with?** Powerful people have lunch with powerful people

**Do they share doubts and reservations about the company or are they fully bought in?** People who talk about company's issues more than opportunities are likely on the way out -or they're rarely going to be promoted-

**When they want something, do they get it?**

**Do they look happy and optimistic or are they unhappy and dissatisfied?** If the latter, they likely have no future.

**In the recent past have they been promoted or demoted?** It takes a looong time to re-acquire power after being demoted

**Do they talk badly of management or do they have an “us” approach?** People who talk smack about management will never be managers. Stay away (or join them in their startup: they can make for great entrepreneurs)

**Did their team increase in size or shrink?** Shrinkages are often political punishments

**With the seating change did they get a better office / location or worse one?** Space, location and position are strong indicators of power

These questions will help you make sense of the political landscape around you.

Avoid people who have obviously fallen out of grace, people who complain all the time and people who are enemies of your boss.

## Women & Men: Approaches to Power

Men focus on dominance hierarchy with a pecking order.

Women tend to be less hierarchical and more collaborative, and that's why female punishment comes more often in the form of isolation (“shunning games”, more on it later).

Because women tend to be more focused on building alliances and reaching decisions through consensus men sometimes can view

women as weak.

And because men tend to go for a more direct and top-down approach women can view men as overbearing and overly aggressive.

Which style is best?

Neither, they're just different.

The most effective power players adapt to the style of the people they are dealing with.

Until they get on top.

Then they let others adapt to them.

## **Problems & Fixes Of Male & Female Styles**

Men act more deferential and submissive in the presence of the most powerful man in the room.

Often, *too* deferential, and that gives too much power away.

We have seen it in this course already: it's the tendency to kiss up to the powerful, and it happens to men much more so than to women.

If you're a man: resist the temptation to be too obsequious, submissive and deferential. Powerful people are just people.

Women's weakness is being more tentative in their verbal production, sometimes using conditional tenses even when they're reasonably confident about their answers.

They also tend to allow people to interrupt them and sometimes apologize too much.

Women who want to make it in a male business should correct those tendencies (go back to the basics of power if you need to, there is a list of videos to show you exactly what are the verbal expressions that make you look submissive).

# What Does Research Say?

Researches in the context of politics and workplace success are obviously difficult to perform, and their results are limited.

How are you going to record and measure strategies?  
And who is going to agree to be recorded and measured?

That being said, there have been some attempts, and the results can be helpful for our real-world purposes.

Research has identified three major tactics to get ahead:

- **Deception/Manipulation:** Derogate and exclude others; ingratiate self with superiors; use sex; “sell” your results; use deceptive self-promotion (e.g., claim credit for the work of others).
- **Social Display/Networking:** Cultivate friendships; display positive social characteristics; participate in social events; enhance appearance.
- **Industriousness/Knowledge:** Work hard; display knowledge; obtain education or knowledge; organize and strategize; assume leadership; hold one’s own.

All three tactics can be effective in Western organizations.

However, the Industriousness/Knowledge tactic is most highly correlated with educational attainment and both Deception/Manipulation and Industriousness/Knowledge are positively correlated with actual salary.

The use of the Deception/Manipulation tactic can also be effective, but it comes at a personal cost: those who use this tactic have significantly lower life satisfaction.

I suspect this is the case because these people feel like they are

faking it, they are less confident and more anxious about getting caught, with a higher incidence of “impostor syndrome”. However, if you use deception together with hard skills, then you can probably limit its downsides.

In short, what does it mean to you?

What we said already: everything matters, but prioritize hard skills and results. And then focus on how to sell them effectively. Last but not least, focus on networking and making friends and allies.