

## 5. Power Words: How Power Sounds & Speaks



Same as the previous lesson, but focusing on the verbal signs of social power and dominance.

### **#1. Leading the Conversation**

There are a few key variables which determine the flow of a conversation, and dominant individuals heavily influence them all:

**Tempo** (how long to speak about each topic)

**Tone** (happy, sad, serious etc.)

**Subject** (what to talk about)

**Who speaks** (who speaks and for how long)

How questions relate to power depends on the context but, on average, it's the dominant person who poses questions and asks for clarifications.

When dominant individuals answer questions, they take more freedoms instead.

They choose whether to answer the question or whether to go off topic. Their answers are less about answering questions and more about what they choose to talk about.

## **Group Conversations Play by Different rules**

Group conversations have different rules and dynamics.

Jesters and loudmouths can monopolize the conversation and the socially powerful man does not compete for attention.

You shouldn't compete for the group attention. It's best to pick an individual in the group and start a deeper side conversation instead.

You can use this technique strategically and progressively get engrossed in the conversation.

When the group tires of the loudmouths they will look to join your conversation. And now you got power.

### **1.1. Dictating the Tempo**

Dominant men control the speed of the interaction to make sure they understand what's being said and that they don't waste their valuable time.

If it's a group they are leading, they make sure everyone is on the same page.

You can often see this behavior in interviewers since they need to keep things simple and engaging enough for the audience.

This is an example with Nassim Taleb and you can hear the interviewer doing it 3 times in 20 seconds:

<https://youtu.be/orp-2Q6gHuc>

This example also shows that “dominance” does not equal intelligent, effective or good leadership. The interviewer overdoes it and comes across as too dominant and too dumb to interview a wise man like Taleb.

Other expressions of controlling the tempo even more directly include:

***Socially Powerful:** Go ahead*

***Socially Powerful:** Wait a second*

***Socially Powerful:** Let's hear Mark here what he thinks*

***Socially Powerful:** Slow down, you're going too quick*

## **1.2. Dictating The Frame (Judge Role)**

Do you remember the frames from the lessons on the basics of social power?

Dominant men hold the frame of what's right, what's fair, what's "normal" or not normal to do. And the more power they have, the more they can buckle groups and cultural diktats.

A (dramatized) example from Horrible Bosses:

<https://youtu.be/TgACfyfjFBI>

Drinking at 8:15 in the morning is not normal, but his rank and social power manage to impose on the more submissive man his new normality.

Of course, this is an exaggerated movie example, but the concept is the same for your real life situations.

## **1.3. Dictating The Scope**

Socially powerful individuals define what's the scope of the conversation (goals, and limits)

If others go off-topic he will assertively bring the conversation back where it belongs -or where *he* thinks it belongs-:

<https://youtu.be/LMnal9EXFSQ>

## 1.4. Dictating the Mood

If someone is too nervous, sad, or too out of line, the dominant individual will intervene demanding a change of tone.

When people comply, they are legitimizing and confirming that the dominant individual is in charge.

Example through a meme:



Note the emphatic -and submissive- nodding from the cyclist, a huge sign that he is accepting authority and submitting.

In these situations, you *should* listen to the authority and explain what happened, but you don't need to submit so obviously. Avoid nodding, avoid looking up, avoid repeating "yes sir" too often.

## 1.5. Asking Questions

Dominant individuals ask the questions, and the submissive individuals reply.

When the domination/submission dynamic is very pronounced the submissive party will also be nervous while providing the answers.

This dynamic is replicated in seduction as well.  
Here is an example from The Saint:

<https://youtu.be/Nj9FGXdc7Y>

## 1.6 Correcting People

Corrections are a form of attacks on authority, which makes it a potential power move.

Corrections increase the authority and credibility of the person making the correction while decreasing the authority of the individual being corrected.

That's why submissive people will often avoid correcting others.

### **Dating Power Move:**

Correcting people is also a strong sign of intellectual dominance. In the dominance and seduction lesson, we will see an example of how you can use this -or how it can be used against you-.

## 1.7. Contradicting People

Similar to correcting, but packing an even bigger punch, is to contradict people by saying the exact opposite of what they just said.

Here is an example from Meet the Parents:

<https://youtu.be/-OP0S5doiyo>

**PRO Tip: this is a huge rapport breaker, only use strategically**

Don't use this one too much unless you know what you're doing and it's a strategic choice.

Yes it's dominant, but it's also a huge rapport breaker.

The more socially smart individuals say "yes" and then redirect the conversation towards the right answer.

## **1.8. Summing Up The Conversation**

A dead giveaway of who's the leader in a conversation is who sums up the discussion.

Whenever you want to take a step forward and advance your leadership, always sum up what's been said and people will look at you like you're the de-facto leader.

Here is an example of Trump meeting with Democrats leaders Schumer and Pelosi:

## **#2. Assertiveness**

Dominant individuals are not easy to hush.

They won't buckle down and they will defend their rights to speak.

### **2.1. Defend Right of Speech**

A dominant individual will not allow others to stop him, speak over him or take the lion's share of the shared allotted time.

**Advanced Power Move:**

Jordan Peterson does the opposite and often allows others to speak

over him, raise their voice and even fails to correct them right away when they twist his words.

It's a great technique to make your opponent look overly aggressive and sneaky. He patiently waits for his turn and then delivers a perfectly worded answer that makes him look rational, smart and, in contrast to this opponent, even polite.

You can do the same if you're going for a more intellectual style, otherwise, stick to defending your speaking time.

## **2.2. Confirm Understanding**

People who are in charge will assertively want to make sure their subordinates understand. They will say "did you get it?" or "everything clear?".

In the most extreme situations, they will tell them to repeat. As in this example from Pulp Fiction:

<https://youtu.be/DicYF4RQBnU>

## **2.3. Expect a Reply (and ask twice)**

Sometimes in social exchanges, people will try to avoid answering a question.

Dominant men will make it clear when they don't appreciate it, and they might keep questioning with the attitude of the person who *expects* an answer.

Great example from Jackie Brown:

<https://youtu.be/6v6C3lZ9lc0>

*“well, let’s say I just got one”.*

If at that point he had laughed uncomfortably, he would have admitted she’s the dominant one. Instead, he keeps inquiring as if the were the most normal thing in the world.

Super powerful.

## **2.4. Repeat the Message (and expect compliance)**

Look at Theresa May doing something similar to the video example above.

If during her “deferring vote speech” she had sidetracked and addressed the jeering, she would have raised the MPs to her level - and lowered herself to their levels-.

A tremendous loss of power and very un-leader like.

By repeating her statement instead she communicates something like this: “you can laugh as much as you want, but you gotta listen to me because I’m the authority”:

<https://youtu.be/3PaBxES7Nu4>

*“to what’s been said in this chamber and out of it”,* as her voice raises on the repetition, she is conveying power and disapproval with her assertive tonality and inflection.

Also notice it was very smart of her not to acknowledge the jeering, not even with her facial expression. She looks professional and “strictly-business”, without time for games.

## **#3. Verbal Aggression**

The dark side of dominance is the ability -and willingness- to punish others.



### 3.1. Speaking Over Others

Dominant and aggressive individuals will trample your right of speech if you let them to.

They will also go over time, not allow you to make your point or talk over you.

If you saw any of Trump's debates, it's shocking how many times he blatantly interrupted, spoke over or simply just robbed opponents of their right to speak.

And whenever others fought him, he won almost all the times -if not all the times-.

Here is an example with Jeb Bush:

<https://youtu.be/Pr1D-HjSZ7Y>

Jeb Bush, like everyone else, was unprepared to deal with Trump at his level of dominance, aggression, and Machiavellianism.

Bush makes a litany of mistakes.

Not only he allows Trump to win, but turns towards him with a smile, suggesting with his body language that Trump is the real leader of the pack.

Trump caps it all off telling him "go ahead", and Bush starts speaking on cue like a puppet on a string.

Note that you can speak over others and interrupt without being rude to others. You can still come across as socially powerful, but by building them up and apologizing you will neutralize the "dickhead effect" of interruptions.

Here is one example:

<https://youtu.be/bwG2kkf3W-0>

See?

If you apologize right after the interruption you are giving a lot of power back, which basically communicates “I *can* interrupt, but I still want to play fair and be polite”, and people respect and appreciate that.

### 3.2. Cutting People Off

Similar to speaking over people, but without the intention of ever giving the word back.

In this scene from Platoon (second 4):

<https://youtu.be/2hb83Zy9WLc>

When people accept your cut-offs like in this example, it is much more powerful than speaking over because people comply with you. Speaking over also always underlines a veneer of bullying behavior, but cutting off is raw power.

**PRO Tip: Only use when an underling was being out of line** for both of the above, avoid them most of the times unless you have superior authority, must say something really important, or need to lay down the law.

### 3.3. Pushing Others on The Defensive

Whenever there is an argument, look at who's attacking and who's defending.

The person attacking is the dominant one, and the one defending is the submissive one.

This is an example with a shame attack:

<https://youtu.be/Qw03Rexl37w>

The interviewer is being dominant by not accepting any of Julien's rebuttals and pushing Julien to defend only.

Julien would like to counteract but ends up only defending without really ever making his point (he is also nervous, understandably).

### **Beating Verbal Attacks:**

Don't defend.

Either defend and counterattack, a typical politician's approach to debating, attack back right away or, best of all, reframing the topic or attack the frame.

We will see examples going forward.

## **3.4. Ignoring People**

Ignoring is a way of showing dominance through (slight) disrespect.

You will see it most often when submissive individuals make a mistake or get into a topic that the leader doesn't like.

Instead of openly stating his disapproval, he ignores it.

An example from Beautiful Girls:

<https://youtu.be/E8LYvfISTAE>

By starting with "so what do you do" Matt Dillon ignores the previous topic and gives the impression he is starting the conversation from scratch.

But since the red-headed had already started the conversation, Dillon is lowering his status and presenting himself as the dominant man of the group.

**PRO Tip: learn this one and do more of it. It's super powerful without even the risk of escalation**

Ignoring people and remarks is a skill you must develop. It's powerful and high quality while at the same time it avoids escalations and unneeded time-wasting.

### 3.5. Judgmental Aggression

Judgmental aggression is an aggressive form of judgment.

Example from Trump aggressing reporters for what he labels a “stupid question”

<https://youtu.be/xMntkZCGKzc>

That's dark power, but it's high octane power nonetheless. Look at it very well. The pauses, the anger in his voice, the hand gestures and, in the end, his judgmental head shaking. He looks authoritative, strong and, given his conviction, even right. People tend to side with authority and power. Many people who have no idea about what happened will laugh and side with Trump there. Poor leadership, but strong dominance.

**Note:**

when he says “I watch you a lot”, he lost lots of power though. Why?

By now you can start guessing why: it's because he shows a lot of investment in them. He spends lots of effort to keep up with them. He is basically admitting that they are a high priority for him (and they get under his skin).

### 3.6. Wielding Social Pressure

Social pressure is not necessarily rude or intimidating. However, it does instill a certain fear or at least some social discomfort.

An example from Meet The Parents:

<https://youtu.be/OOwoBrGeAJM>

De Niro's questions are strong and direct.

Stiller makes a joke to relieve some pressure but instead of accepting the release of pressure -a friendly gesture- De Niro keeps piling pressure on, culminating with "but you didn't pick it".

Now if Stiller wanted to be equally dominant, here is how he could have done it:

***De Niro:** They say geniuses pick green.... But you didn't pick it*

***Stiller:** "They" say it? Who says it*

Here he would be questioning his authority and forcing him to explain.

Then he could have delivered his dominant coup de grace by taking the judging position and ending with "hmmm I'm not convinced.

Anyway...".

If he wanted to be even more direct and aggressive:

***De Niro:** They say geniuses pick green.... But you didn't pick it*

***Stiller:** That's funny, I heard idiots pick green. But anyway...*

And this is a powerful yet polite way of handling it:

***De Niro:** They say geniuses pick green.... But you didn't pick it*

***Stiller:** I don't know about that Jack. It's just a nice color as far as I'm concerned. And it fits well with your lovely garden too (smiles ). Shall we go in now guys*

This last example is real social power.

It handles it like a champion without breaking rapport and becoming the de-facto leader.

## #4. Authority

Authority is a crucial element of power as we've seen.  
These are signs that convey authority:

### 4.1. Explaining

In a relationship where someone explains and the other listens, the one explaining looks more powerful.

The person explaining wields what French and Raven call the “expert power”. As the subject matter experts, their opinion matters (and the listeners’ opinion matters little).

#### **Exception:**

There are exceptions, for example when a confident man is paying a coach and posing a lot of tough question while controlling the interaction. In that case, the coach is not the dominant one.

### 4.2. Directing

Directing within domain authority is different than commanding and leading (and it's less powerful).

A plumber telling you to open the water is directing you and a car mechanic telling you to press the clutch is directing you.

Example from the movie Election:

<https://youtu.be/E40FrvgSQY>

Directing is only localized power. But it can be enough to make women attracted :).

### 4.3. Directing & Seduction

In the previous example directing helped seduction.

But if it's women who direct men, they lose all attraction.

*Especially* when they direct their admirers on what they need to do to win their hearts.

Terms of Endearment has one such example:

<https://youtu.be/RNDyuXDaDiA>

Depending on how things develop, it's not impossible for him to even "get" her. But only as the submissive party -or the puppet- of that relationship.

P.S.: Shirley McLaine shows major signs of narcissism here, highly harmful for her daughter.

### 4.4. Feeding

Feeding occurs when the dominant individual is talking and he asks the audience to give a quick nod of approval.

They might do it by saying "right" or "am I right" and then expecting a "yes".

Or they can talk about someone else's specific area of expertise while looking at them and expecting a nod of confirmation.

It can even be done by wielding social pressure, for example during a speech the president might say "we're going to do a big party, unless the treasurer objects" and then smiling towards the treasurer.

That one communicates that "the treasurer might *officially* say no, but I have so much influence that we will do it".

You can see Trump doing it here with Schumer:

<https://youtu.be/6wm-NtMkqz8>

## **4.5. Charismatic Conviction**

Nothing screams authority and charismatic leadership like conviction.

If you listen to the biggest dictators of the world, those that many people loved, they all exude conviction, confidence, and unwavering belief.

Here is one of the best examples, Benito Mussolini on his declaration of war speech:

<https://youtu.be/i4J4xSzpSuA>

Words matter little with highly charismatic men leading crowds of fawners.

Mussolini says he's just declared war, but he adds "to give a long period of peace and justice to Italy, Europe and the world". That makes no sense, of course. But people aren't paying much attention to words.

## **4.6. "Now It's My Way" Final Authority**

This is one is good.

Depending on the situation it shows confidence, power, or superior knowledge. But in a slightly cheeky way because instead of directly saying it, you let them finish the imaginary sentence.

<https://youtu.be/swLD9l5NZtg>



Most times people will either push back, in which case you will remain mostly unreactive, or you see a slight smile, the sign they got the point and accept your leadership.

**PRO Tip: Do more of it, show your power with less words**

This is a powerful one I recommend you familiarize yourself with. Let people reach the conclusion you're in charge instead of having to tell them. Play with it, and add a slight smile when you want to take the edge off of it.

## **#5. Avoid Submission**

Dominant men avoid expressions of submission.

Makes sense, no?

They don't submit to other people's tempo, don't defend themselves, reject contradiction and corrections and, finally, they approach questions differently than non-dominant men.

But how to do that exactly?

Here is how:

### **5.1. Take Liberty In Choosing How to Reply**

Remember that answering questions put you in the submissive position?

Well, here is how dominant men avoid to fully commit to answering questions:

1. Don't answer with everything there is to say
2. Say something, then ask a question back
3. Only address a bit of the question, then talk about what inspires you

Here is an example from the intellectually dominant Aleksandr in *Sex and The City*:

<https://youtu.be/heifkOGToEo>

Observe Aleksandr for the whole scene, very socially powerful with his facial expression and social-pressure inducing silences (albeit he is a bit emotionally distant).

Aleksandr comes across as socially powerful and intellectually dominant (which it's even more important for him as an older man). If Carrie wanted to be less submissive, she could have insisted in a socially smart way. For example: *"very nice, I liked that. But you must remember something more.. how did you feel there, was it a good time?"*

**Note:**

This is why it's difficult, extremely difficult to be dominant and socially powerful at a Senate hearing or at an interrogation. Being the one grilled, forced to reply and forced to stick to what people want you to answer is the opposite of social power.

## **5.2. Answer Without Answering**

This is very socially smart and shows high-level social skills.

It consists of answering in a way which presupposes yes or no *instead* of saying yes or no

Here is a great example from Jackie Brown:

<https://youtu.be/jj1IH26Ky08>

Saying “no” would have followed her lead while decreasing his value - admitting of not being a well-traveled man- and would have put an end to the conversation.

The way he answers instead presupposes the “no”, without following her lead. Plus it allows the conversation to continue.

Here is another example from the Hedge of Tomorrow:

<https://youtu.be/ynjOUts1aKo>

Notice the general does not reply with “yes”.

Replying with “yes” would have elevated Cruise’s question to a level where it “deserves” to be properly addressed. That would entail a respectful conversation between two people of equal power.

Instead, he raises his voice and makes his point, which shows a slight disdain for Cruise’s question and communicates that he is not up for a conversation between equals.

### **5.3. Block All Attempts at Soft Power**

Social power often requires you to “see” the social dynamics and avoiding people to take a power position over you.

This is exactly where this course will help and here are two ways to avoid people from pushing you on the defensive with the judge role:

<https://youtu.be/ulvFaO5wo5U>

## #6. Fewer Words

Remember the law of social effort?

It applies to verbal production as well, of course.

Socially powerful men, on average, speak less.  
And when they speak, they say something important that people will listen to.

### 6.1. Pregnant Pauses

Fearful people speak quickly as if they cannot stand being at the center of attention.  
Speaking quickly also signal they're afraid someone will steal their speaking time.

Powerful people instead speak slowly and use lots of pauses.

Olivia Cabane in [The Carisma Myth](#) recommends people who want to look powerful and charismatic to wait 2 seconds before replying.

Here is possibly the most famous example of pregnant pauses from The Godfather:

<https://youtu.be/9GUz9OLYtzk>

### 6.2. Wielding Social Pressure With Silences

One of the most powerful ways of exerting dominance is by actually *removing* words in a way that puts social pressure on people.

Di Caprio does it in this scene from Wolf of Wall Street:

<https://youtu.be/ndTbiDQjbiE>

He puts pressure on the banker to answer his question and gets down to business through pure silence.

However, my by far favorite example of the power of silence is in Casino.

<https://youtu.be/CuqJdlZNQ8s>

Both of these are examples convey final authority without words.

## **#7. Rational Words**

Power is also often exhibited through the pursuit of rationality.

Socially powerful individual seek to rise above emotions and feelings and do what's best to achieve the goal (it overlaps with intellectual dominance).

Why, what, where, when, who, and how are all questions that the powerful rational man asks. Especially when people are being vague, the dominant man will press for hard facts.

Trump lost two exchanges in a row here because the journalists managed to take the rational high ground on him when Trump declared national emergency:

<https://youtu.be/FFPvAlUkczw>

## **More Typical Words of Dominance**

Here are some typical dominant expressions in conversation and how you can maneuver around them:

(Yo) ***listen*** (to me)

It's dominant, staking claim on the time and making sure you are listening well because he's about to drop some important wisdom. A [timeless example from Carlito's Way](#).

**Countermove:**

Tell them "go ahead", which is basically a counter-order.

***I didn't understand anything, tell me again***

First slightly hints that you are being a poor communicator, then gives an order.

**Countermove:**

"What didn't you understand". If there are people around you might even ask them if they got it. If they did, you made the power mover look daft. If they didn't get it, you repeat without following the order right away.

***What did you just say?***

Implies that what you said was out of line, pushing you into a defensive position. Plus it implies an order to repeat without even having to give you that order.

**Countermove:**

The tendency here is to repeat yourself and to take a step back by rephrasing in a nicer or defensive way.

Don't.

Give it a few seconds as he most likely understood. If he doesn't speak, ask "what didn't you understand".

## ***That's right***

Confirming something is correct. When you can give the stamp of approval you show domain authority (expertise) or social status authority (or both).

## ***No! It's not like that at all...***

This is an example of contradicting, as we saw earlier.  
Submissive people do not contradict.

Intellectual authorities like Peterson instead, do contradict:

<https://youtu.be/LNuZiEH0ldQ>

### **Countermove:**

Don't take it personally as it's easy to escalate. You can say that their correction is "not true" and prove it. If you can't prove it, say "not true" and move on.

## ***Wrong!***

Similar to the above, but more concentrated power.

<https://youtu.be/LSVyj3lOCh4>

As we said earlier Godin is a typical example of a Smart Alec, such as a man who seeks power through intellectual dominance.

## ***And you think there is nothing wrong with that?***

This is very, very parent-like and super powerful to take over the judge role. It implies that *they* know what's right and wrong and you're in the wrong.

It's also the same as saying "*and you think that's OK?*" or "*and you don't see anything wrong with that?*".

Or the most powerful of them all "*and does that seem normal to you?*", which implies you are acting crazy without even realizing it.

**Countermove:**

"Please define what's normal". Then proceed to disagree with their definition.

**"Alright?"** (as if to say "did you get it?" or "done, now we move on")

This one is usually used at the end of an explanation. It highlights that they are doing the explaining and you must listen.

This is a friend talking at "FridayatSix talkshow":

<https://youtu.be/kioFe4ul0yo>

That "I need you to..." is a very dominant approach. And the "alright" in the end, as if to confirm people better listen.

**Countermove:**

Never answer "yes".

Instead, you want to void their power of closing the argument.

A good countermove then is to make a question or raise an issue that forces them to re-open the conversation and explain something to you.

With that, you are implying they didn't explain well, you invalidate their "alright" power move and establish yourself as someone who demands (and obtains) full clarity.

***No, answer my question***

Very powerful: they are demanding that you reply to their question as they want it and not allowing you any wiggling room.



Tom Cruise does it here:

<https://youtu.be/tFgF1JPNR5E>

**Countermove:**

If you want to keep it quiet and friendly, then the way the interviewer handles it in the video is close to perfection.

He doesn't give in to Cruise's argumentative approach but also does not answer the question -and that's the key!-. Very, very well done.

If you're interested in debating, politics or journalism make it a priority to develop the same "power of detachment" (more on it later).

***Sorry, I don't wanna hear about it right now***

An example of dictating the topic and the tempo -when and when not to speak-.

**Countermove:**

If it's important for them to hear, tell them they need to. If you need something from them, say that you have no interest in talking about it... As long as they do what they have to do.

***Tell me something more interesting***

Rather obvious power move, and women sometimes play it with men. Example from Training Day:

<https://youtu.be/xkHNoP6LSRg>

**Countermove:**

Do NOT ever try to say or do anything interesting. Instead, say you're boring and *they* should say something more interesting.

Then, if you want to power-move them back, you say "oh, and *that's* supposed to be interesting?".

## Parent-Like Expressions

As we mentioned in the basics of power lesson, there is an overlap between the judge role who dispenses (emotional) punishment and rewards and the parent role.

Any time someone uses parent-like expressions that would be used on a child, that's a highly socially dominant gesture.

Some examples include:

*"What should I do with you"* (we'll see one example of this one in the quizzes)

*"ah, ah, ah"* (as if to say, "don't do that or else..")

Repeating someone's name 3 times

All of these are "babying" power moves comparable to the ones we saw in the previous lesson -remember the cheek pinching?-.

They consist of acting or speaking as if you are the caring, father-like figure in a relationship.

It can be used either in a loving way only or in a loving way but with a slightly punishing undertone, as if to say "what am I gonna do with you".

It's also very good to use with girlfriends, and here is an example from The Godfather:

[https://youtu.be/0\\_IsXQRM6uk](https://youtu.be/0_IsXQRM6uk)

Or if you prefer a real-life example, [see Trump doing it here](#).

His attitude is as if to say "George, George... Let the adult speak now".

# Obvious Power Expressions

And then, of course, there are the most obvious expressions of verbal dominance:

**Shut up! / Silence! / Quiet ([example](#))**

**Aggression with curses, threats or disrespect**

**Raising voice to make a point ([example](#))**

To counteract it I'd recommend prevention first of all. Don't interrupt if you know it's their speaking time and you can't enforce your interruption.

Then equally defend your speaking time if they interrupt you.

If it's really important that you speak, you can raise your voice as well.