

2. Power Plan: Concrete Steps to Launch Your Career

A Game Plan for Political Power

Based on the leverage areas we saw in the previous lesson, this lesson provides a power plan to help you accelerate your career:

#1. Study The Environment: The Apprenticeship

Let's start from the very beginning, a new hire as a junior position. Social psychology research shows that slow and steady is more likely to win the race.

Here is why:

1.2. Early Dominance Often Fails to Turn Into Leadership

Those who try to “take the group by storm” rarely become leaders.

Why not?

Because the rule of thumb is this: **strong leadership candidates rest on the group's support.**

And when overly dominant individuals try to exert their will, they fail to bond with the other members and to win their acceptance.

And while an already established leader can keep leading with an iron fist, it's much more difficult for an *aspiring* future leader to impose his leadership by *starting* with an iron fist.

1.3. Bide Your Time: The Leadership Apprenticeship

What do the future leaders do, instead?

They start out by being followers.

But not submissive, “hide in the corner” type of followers, of course.

They are *active* followers.

They take part in discussions, contribute, bond and connect with members and, of course, they take over responsibilities and add value to the group.

In short: **future leaders start by being great group members** ([Greenleaf](#) correctly calls this “servant leadership”).

But that’s what many do.

Including many who don’t become -or don’t want to become- future leaders.

What differentiates the future leaders is that they *learn and take notes*. It’s during this period that they develop the foundations of their future leadership (Greene calls it “apprenticeship” in “[Mastery](#)”).

What do future leaders learn?

They learn about:

- Group history
- Culture and identity
- Informal webs of power
- The most/least respected members
- Colleagues’ personalities and histories
- Potential and aspiring future leaders (& threats)
- Current leaders (What do people say about them? How do they act? How can they use that info to position themselves?)

The aspiring leader seeks to be *consonant* and *similar to the group*.
And he seeks to be *liked* by the current leadership.

The successful future leader accepts and internalizes the group's norms, values, and *aspirations*.

He positions himself as someone who can help the group and the members move forward.

Example: The BBC Prison Study

The [BBC Prison Study](#) presents a great case study.

The study allowed for intensive observation while the group strived to form a leadership.

The man who came to represent the prisoners started off participating in group discussions, but without taking them over.

He observed, asked, studied.

He probed about the outgroup (the guards) and their power structures.
And he tested them, too.

And when it came time to decide who was going to speak for the group, it was him who lead the group -and not the most dominant man of the group-.

Reversal of The Law: Failure of Apprenticeship

The reversals of the law are:

- Trying to lead without knowing the group
- Losing support for lack of group's representativeness

Here is John Redwood, a spectacular example of the latter:

<https://youtu.be/GzBq0n8dxFQ>

Lack of knowledge of the national anthem communicated that Redwood was not a true member of the group. And not being a member of the group undermines your ability to lead.

This is especially important if there are still founders in the company. Founders the most are the ones who love to see people like them, and conforming to the culture that *they* created.

2. Identify Your Core Target

Always make friends, but don't forget to prioritize.

Usually, the most important people in your career are, in the order:

1. **Your boss** (responsible for performance review, bonuses, part of your reputation)
2. **Subordinates** (responsible for your results)
3. **Upper management** (possibly fast-tracking career)
4. **Team colleagues** (help you get things done and make for a better work environment)
5. **Other teams whose deliverables impact your work**
6. **All others**

Make friends with everyone, but prioritize based on the power map.

3. Friends And Networks: Never Eat Alone

Never Eat Alone is the name of Keith Ferrazzi's book on networking.

The idea is that you make it a priority to connect, socialize, and get to know people.

While "never eating alone" is figurative, breakfast, lunch, and dinner are actually the best opportunities to network without even wasting time because you were going to eat anyway.

We've already mentioned this strategy: never go to lunch alone and always seek to either go with someone new, or deepen an already existing relationship.

I have used that strategy in my last stint, and it's incredible how your network skyrockets when you force yourself to go to lunch with someone new every day.

If you can't find anyone, message on LinkedIn someone in your city with your same title or in the same industry.

Prepare a well-crafted message saying you work in the same sector and you would love to meet them, so that you don't come across like a weirdo.

I met scores of helpful contacts like that.

4. Improve Relationship With A Difficult Person

Pick one difficult colleague and try to improve things with him.

First of all, step away from your usual negative reaction and your negative mindset about him. Then present him an olive branch (a smile, a compliment, an apology, a lunch invite).

It's hard to do it first, but it sometimes pays off.

And it gets you in the mindset that you can improve your relationships whenever you want.

5. Make Your Work More Visible

This is a concept I got from the book "[Secrets to Winning at Office Politics](#)".

It's based on the idea that good work needs visibility or it's as if it never existed.

You probably know the time quadrant of effective management (important/urgent non-important/non-urgent).

Well, we can plot the same quadrant on importance and visibility.

Important / Visible	Non-important / Visible
Important / Invisible	Non-important/ Invisible

Non-important/ Visible

Your goal with non-important and visible is just to make sure it won't break and attract negative attention.

Important / Invisible

Think of what you're doing that is important but not visible, and come up with ways to make it visible.

Sometimes a good idea can be to look for interesting facts and figures in your tasks and make a report with it.

For example, if you're in HR and handling complaints, you could record and group all the complaints and use it as a metric for employee morale in the different departments -just present the best ones at first so you don't piss off the wrong people-.

Or, simpler of all: learn how to make good stories out of the problems you've solved -and stop saying "all good"-.

6. Learn The Art Of (Subtle) Self-Marketing

When you simply blurt out a good idea without any build-up, you are basically wasting all of your genius.

Just look at the difference between these two approaches:

Old You: We could automate the flow with Zapier, my former company did it

New You: Alright guys, I have been hearing you all and I have been thinking on it. And I have come to this idea, hear me out.

I have been researching this in the past, and I have stumbled upon a solution from Zapier that might improve our workflows.

Imagine a complete automation of reporting, no time wasted anymore, no more human errors.

Here is how it works..

Now everyone will listen.

And everyone will remember it was *you* the one with the solution.

Pro TIP: Use The Whiteboard

Best of all: if you got a winning idea, get up and present it in front of the whiteboard.

Even if your idea is not accepted, you still look like a guy who is not afraid of speaking up and sharing an opinion, and everyone respects that.

Research shows that the whiteboard gives people a feeling you "own" the ideas and increases engagement and retention of your words.

As a side note, if you use PowerPoint for presentations, avoid looking at the slides: you lose people's attention.

7. Elevator Power Moves

Do you know when you meet a superior or some high flyers in the elevator, in the kitchen or at the water cooler and they ask you "what's up"?

And everyone replies "all good, and how are you"?

Well, right there and then people waste a great opportunity to shine.

Instead, from now on, prepare your little "shine pitch":

***Boss:** Hey, how are things*

***You:** Things are going great, thank you!*

I'm very excited on the progress on XYZ project you approved. It's going better than expected and we may bring in X revenue (/cost savings) for the company.

That would be a huge win.

Then if they show interest, ask for their perspective.

The trick not to seem try-hard is to look and behave like you truly care. If you make that your "baseline way of being", then you're good. You just become "future upper management potential" and you don't need to worry anymore what a few jealous underachievers might think.

Whenever you do something like that, you burned yourself in their mind with extremely positive associations, and you look like an important guy who takes his work very seriously. Upper management material.

If you're not working on anything exciting, it's OK. Express happiness and excitement for the job, show you love the company and the big boss will love you.

8. Create Unexpected Value

On top of your normal tasks, find ways to create value for the business or the boss.

If a leader says she'd love to get more questions, raise your hand on the next Q&A. If a boss mentions how useful it would be to get more customers' feedback, start recording it and present it to him.

9. Seek (& Demand) Responsibility

This is standard advice, but it's true.

[Brian Tracy](#) says that it's those who act like owners who get promoted to upper management.

Acting like owners also means you take ownership of everything that impacts on your deliverables.

When you start owning your deliverables and demanding superior performance, owners shareholders will consider you "one of them" because that's the attitude they want to see.

Example: Ask to join interview "because you need to make sure they work well"

When I was in sales and not yet very senior, I demanded to be involved in the interviews of credit managers because "I'd have to work with them on a daily basis to prepare our deals and I must make sure he will be supportive colleague".

It worked in my case, it can work for you as well.

Then all of a sudden you start receiving emails from HR, getting lots of juicy information about candidates who might join the company, too. Do some smart questions, add valuable contributions... And soon you might be helping in hiring decisions, outside of your immediate team, making you more powerful.

Coddling to Bosses

Albeit we have a lesson on how to get rid of a terrible boss, that's the last resort.

Your boss is often the closest power source to you, and that's why a great relationship with your boss is power and leverage. A terrible relationship with your boss instead is a power and leverage drain.

Here are a few ideas to leverage your boss:

1. Brown-Nosing The Boss The Right Way

Some people feel that it's not OK to compliment their managers because:

1. Compliments should only come from top down
2. People see through them

They are not totally wrong: compliments from the bottom up can seem condescending and too open flattery can make you look like a brown noser.

You might want to brown-nose, but you don't want to *look* like one.

But the generalization of "not complimenting bosses" is dangerously wrong.

Leaders can secretly grow resentful: they shoulder all responsibility and when they get no appreciation they feel like their reports are being ungrateful.

Be the bright star instead, send some love upwards.

Complimenting him on something he's slightly insecure about, or using different words to express his own opinions are also extremely effective ways of becoming his favorite.

Bad way of complimenting

The bad way of complimenting is anything which his own boss might say or anything related to performance as a manager or leader.

A compliment on "how good a job they're doing in their managerial position" is bad because they would think "who the hell are you to compliment me".

Good way of complimenting

Compliments that work great are what they have done *for the team* or *for you*.

For example: "wow, we have such a great atmosphere in the team right now, you really picked some great people, boss".

Or something they accomplished that theoretically is good for the team, for example:

***You:** Thank you for getting this customer for us. That's a great win you scored for us and I will do my best to keep them happy*

Many people like to feel like great leaders, and making him feel like he is putting bread on your tables makes him feel like a big important man.

2. Accept That Your Boss Has Authority Over You

Many very smart and highly driven men have fallen prey to overly rebellious attitudes.

Remember, Steve Jobs said: real artists ship. And to ship, you need political savvy and good positive relationship with your boss.

There is no glory in being the genius who gets shown the door because he was too rebellious.

This is all the more important if you are smarter, hungrier and more driven than your boss is.

The time will come for you to overtake your boss. Just **don't burn yourself in a big flare-up if you're not yet ready to take off.**

3. Be Realistic: Most Bosses Are Average Human Beings

This is a problem for highly driven individuals who put high demand on themselves.

And they expect the same from people around, becoming unable to accept average.

I know this is an issue for me, for example, which I also carried over in my intimate relationships sometimes.

If you are the same, expect that your boss is, most likely, an average human being.

And since you're there, don't expect your boss to like you no matter what, don't expect your boss to be your cheerleader and to stand behind every idea of yours.

Expect divergences of opinions instead, bonuses which are smaller than you wanted and expect to have days that you will rather not have him around at all.

4. Focus On Results (That Make You Look Good)

It's worth repeating again: deliver excellent results.

Don't get too hung up if he tries to look good out of your results, that's how it goes sometimes. But do make sure that people around know that it's *also* your good work.

Finally, when delivering great work promote yourself within the company but don't over-promote yourself with your boss or when he's around. That might stir envy and jealousy in some bosses ("never outshine the master").

If he is the envious type, "sterilize" your excellence saying it was a team effort.

If he's a petty idiot, you can forget about him once you move past. But not before.

5. Make Him Your Priority

Always take action quick for your boss.

Answer emails quickly, deliver his tasks quickly and give him priority treatment.

When he sends surveys, makes random questions or organizes stupid events and gift ideas, be the first to contribute and jump in.

If he delivers a speech, sit in the front line, be the first and the loudest to applaud and put a smile on your face (a trick from [Leil Lowndes](#)).

6. Let Him See You Work (& Romance Your Work)

Being quick is good... In general.

But if you are too quick on your work though, there is a danger it might seem like it wasn't complicated enough.

You want your boss to think you are quick, *not* that the job was easy.

The solution is to “romance” the process and sell it as part of your personal branding.

A good way of doing it is to mention the difficulties you have overcome:

You: Boss, I am done with the job. The information wasn't immediately available so I asked Brian from accounting. Some of the figures were missing, but fortunately I could secure a meeting with Cristina and piece together all the missing data -she's wonderful by the way-. Here is the final result..

6.2 Break up your achievements

Imagine you say the following:

You: The project is completed within budget and ahead of schedule

And your boss will think “very good”.

Now imagine you tell your boss the following:

***You:** Hi boss. I'm done today.*

The project is completed ahead of schedule (one week in advance to be precise).

We finished within budget.

And we also met all quality requirements.

Now your boss thinks “wow!”.

[Research confirms](#) what intuition suggests: breaking up accomplishments make them seem more impressive as compared to lumping them up.

If you write your accomplishments in an email, make sure to use bullet points.

And remember that the opposite is true: lump up bad news to minimize their effect.

7. Let Him Know You Take Extra Work

Don't give your help for free.

Sell it!

Best of all, offer it to your boss, first.

Before deciding to help someone on a project you should mention it to your boss.

Something like:

***You:** I'm planning to help Chris on the McKenzie brief, but I wanted to run it past you first in case you have other priorities or need a little extra help.*

If you finish ahead of time and now are free, say something like this:

***You:** Boss, I just wanted to let you know that I finished the project ahead of schedule, so I have some extra capacity. Do you know of anyone who could use my help?*

This is a double whammy: he gets to know you are done early, that you want to help, and that you respect him so much to ask him first. Now he will put you on what he thinks is the priority, thus further increasing your visibility.

8. Don't Let Him See You Sweat (Or Fail)

I remember my very first job as a project manager.

I had managed to send the wrong email with all the “important” heavy-hitters in CC (in truth, just a bunch of corporate drones).

The program manager was furious. He called me up and reamed me on the phone. That was the biggest scolding of my career. Actually, of my life.

But if you had heard the conversation, you would have thought that was the weirdest conversation ever, but you would have never realized I had done a major blunder and was being reamed.

This is how it went:

***PM:** (very angry) Think before you hit “send”, THINK! Are you able to THINK!*

***Me:** (very calm) Yes, I think I am*

***PM:** Who else was in CC, was it Andy in there too?*

***Me:** I think he was, yes*

***PM:** What the fuck were you thinking, ANDY was there, you sent ANDY the wrong report on MY project! Do you know who are they going to blame?*

***Me:** Well, I think me*

***PM:** No, because you're a fucking junior who can't do shit and they will blame ME!*

***Me:** Hmmmm yeah, maybe you're right*

You will notice there was no sorry in there.

This guy had no direct authority over me so, theoretically, my reputation was only at risk if my manager got to know about it.

Then I took a walk, picked up my mobile, called him on his mobile, apologized profusely, told him how I was going to make amend... And also told him I wasn't comfortable with his tone.

Why did I do that move?

Because the first call was on the desk phone and with my boss sitting nearby.

And my boss *never* got to know of my blunder.

A few weeks later I ended that assignment with an "exceeds" in my evaluation.

Had my boss known of all my blunders or had he gotten from me the "non-romanced results".... I don't think I would have gotten an "exceeds".

Moral of the story: **a mistake that your boss hasn't seen is a mistake that doesn't exist.**

9. Don't Complain About Your Boss

Not only many complaints will eventually reach your boss, but it will also influence your own behavior in unconscious, negative ways.

Avoid making your boss the villain in your mind at all costs.

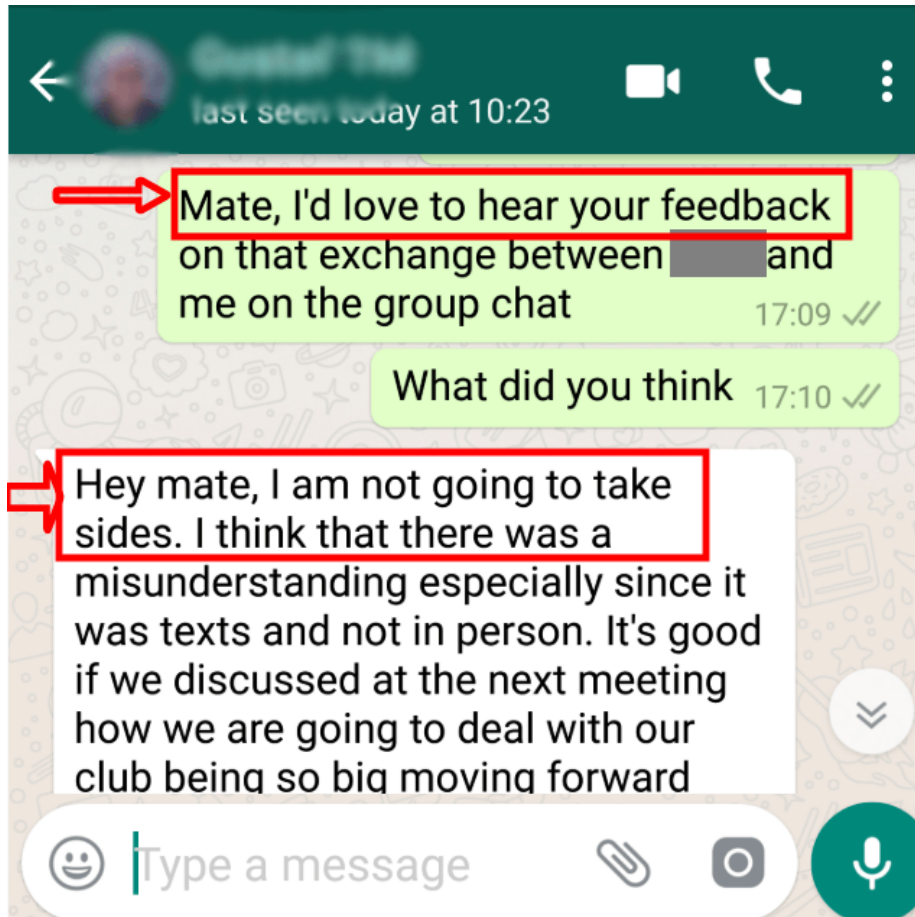
10. Match His Emotional Distance

Look at this real-life message.

The background is that I had had an issue with a team member on the group chat and I had to intervene to put out the fire ([you can read the exchange on the forum](#)).

Since I value growth opportunities, I asked another team member for feedback.

Here's the exchange:



Have you thought about it?

Alright, here is the analysis:

This was a mistake from him.

Me asking him was a compliment to his judgment.

And, in Gottman's parlance, it was a "bid for connection", too.

For him, it was a chance to get closer to another human being -and then president- and build relationship equity.

If he wanted to be president the year after -and he wanted-, that was certainly going help him.

Instead, by telling me “he is not going to take sides”, not only he shuts an imaginary (emotional) door on my face, but also frames my request for feedback like I wanted him to take sides -which was not the case-.

If you face a similar situation with your boss, it's best to **welcome the fact that your boss is opening up to you.**

Don't be the person who wants to “maintain distance” and “just do his job”. You can't “maintain healthy distance” when a boss is aching to get closer: you either accept him, or you push him further away.

Exceptions: Sexual harassment and emotionally unstable bosses

There can be situations though when a boss is emotionally unstable or you're worried it's only the beginning of a slippery slope which might lead to sexual harassment.

In those cases, give quick feedback/support that makes him happy and shuts the door to any back and forth.

For example:

You: I also felt strange about that message to be honest. I think your reply made sense and it feels to me like you two are good now

11. Only Give Positive Feedback (But Pitch It As “Honest”)

Everyone *professes* an open mind.

But few have it.

And everyone will *profess* a willingness to get *real* feedback.

But few really appreciate the tough love of a real feedback.

And few bosses will want to promote those who give them harsh feedback.

Remember: **even if your critical feedback is helpful, your boss will see you as a non-friend and a potential threat.**

Here is the rule of thumb: **bosses might learn the most from your critical feedback, but they prefer promoting the sycophants who support them.**

If you must give critical feedback, always make sure that it's presented with a 3:1 ratio of positive aspects.

12. Don't Be Too Chummy

It's OK for a boss to make the first step towards getting closer.

But it's more dangerous if it's the report to make that first step.

Most bosses don't like it when employees get too chummy or friendly because it decreases their authority.

And it's never good when a boss has to step in to enforce his boundaries of authority.

Show you see him as a normal human being, but that you also respect their authority position.

13. Align Your Communication Style

Remember the importance of studying people?

Learning people's communication styles will serve to align yourself to your boss, and since people like those who are like them, your boss will naturally like you more.

NLP practitioners focus on communication styles such as kinesthetic (“it feels like... “), visual (“I can see why..”) or auditory (“I hear you.. “). I’m not against it, but I recommend you prioritize on more obvious - and more important- factors such as:

- Direct / indirect
- Quick / long winded
- Formal / informal
- In person / electronic

Align your communication style to your boss and especially pay attention to the latter as it’s a major sign of extroversion/introversion.

People who avoid in-person communication will feel like you are violating them if you keep seeking in-person interactions. And people who much rather prefer to talk in person will feel like you are shifty if you write.

So put aside your preferences and power-align instead.

Once you will be the one in power you will then demand that others adapt to you.

14. Reduce Awkwardness

There is always a bit of awkwardness between boss and employee.

And it tends to grow when the boss is not as experienced or not as good as you are.

Make it your task to help smoothen that relationship.

You do it by first eliminating any reserve you have and seeing him as a person. Then you could find an opportunity for some humor, building

on his jokes, or commenting on something he likes.
Or it may mean getting a coffee and going to lunch together.

When I felt the most confident of getting great work reviews was when I routinely went to lunch with my boss and I listened to his “Treasure Hunt stories”.

15. Make Him Your Mentor

This is mostly useful for those who are starting out on their career or those who are not obviously more experienced than their bosses.

Those who elect their bosses as their teachers and mentors win major brownie points.

Mentors often put their mentees on the fast track.

And that's all you need to know.

16. Don't Make It Feel Like You're Working Him

A word of caution: engage in everything we've talked about, but never make it look like you're “working” your boss.

17. Protect Yourself From Jealous Colleagues

As you develop a stronger relationship with your boss your colleagues might get jealous.

Be friendly and gregarious with your colleagues as well (of course!) so it seems like it's just your personality that makes friends with people.

Never brag about your special relationship with your boss, never try to make it seem like you two are in cahoots.

That's the best way to ruin that relationship -and to look like an idiot while you "brag"-. Do the opposite instead, hide and deny. Say: "oh yeah, the boss is great... Just like the rest of the team, I think we're a great team".

16. Adapt Your Strategy To His Power

Finally, to decide how to position your relationship with your boss, asses his power position and trajectory (ascending, stationary or descending?).

If he's powerful and going up, you can gain in becoming his right-hand man, mentee, or a trusted sounding board on ideas.

If he's not moving and he has a "meh" reputation, develop a good relationship but don't become his right-hand man as that wouldn't reflect too well on you.

If he's losing power and possibly on the way out, keep it professional and friendly but don't get too close.
You must never tie your fortunes to falling angels, no matter how cool they are and how well you get along.

Coddling to Execs

For the specifics of dealing with executives, [check out this forum entry](#) (link only valid for enrolled students).

Embrace The Show

The more you come to enjoy the political game, the more successful you will be.

See it as a chance of honing your people's skills and your influencing skills -which it is- and as your life university.

That attitude will give you the biggest career boost of them all.