

4. Power Signs: How Power Looks Like

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0vVRWi2XrFU>

In the previous lesson, we saw the body language of dominance with mostly still images.

This lesson focuses on behavior, and uses video examples.

This lesson will help you to start seeing social dynamics in real-time. You will start recognizing who is acting with powerful confidence and who is trying to dominate you.

#1. Leading

One of the most obvious signs of social power is, of course, leadership.

Powerful people lead, and these are the signs of leadership:

1.1. Act First

If a group is moving somewhere, less dominant individuals will not take the first step, both literally and figuratively.

They will look around to see who is going first and who is going to take the lead.

Dominant individuals do the opposite: they walk first; if there is a decision to make, they speak first; if there is an important guy to meet, they greet him first.

Look at the character Tony Montana in Scarface.
What's the obvious sign that he is a dominant man?

<https://youtu.be/V4xCwYiXApM>

The title of the video is “Tony meets Frank for the first time”. Tony has never seen Frank, he has never been there before. Going into unknown places is where you will see most people behave tentatively, looking around for leadership’s cues. Super dominant individuals will take the lead even in unknown situations, which is exactly what Tony does as he starts walking towards the house first. Omar, who is Frank’s friend, has to speed up to catch up with Tony. The character of Tony Montana is a typical meathead/young gun.

PRO Tip: Only lead first if you know the way (or if nobody knows the way)

Albeit highly dominant individuals take the lead in unknown situations, I don’t recommend this course of action as your default behavior.

Great leaders don’t lead for leading’s sake, but they take care of the group and lead it to success.

It’s best to first check in the group if there is someone who’s more knowledgeable than you are. And if it’s a high stake situation, consider consulting others in any case before committing to an action.

Taking the group down the wrong path because you wanted to look dominant is exactly what poor leadership is about.

1.2. Check Up on People

In work environments, checking up on people means to ensure they are doing what they are supposed to do.

Outside of work environments, it means to make sure everyone is doing well in a more caring and protective way.

Taking care of the people around communicates leadership and a sense of power over the environment.

Dominant individuals check up on people asking questions like “how are you, all good?” while they put a hand on your back or shake your hand.

PRO Tip: Do it often

If you are in a leadership role and people accept your leadership, then there are no cons to checking on them and making sure everyone’s doing well. This is what great leadership is about.

Checking up on people is also a great way to ease into a leadership role because nobody resists this act of caring as they do with other forms of dominance.

1.3. Protective Leadership

Any behavior to protect and care for the group is inherently leader-like and socially powerful.

This is also great from a man to a woman.

For example, putting an arm around her, guiding her by putting his hand on her lower back or helping her get up.

Example from the movie Spread:

<https://youtu.be/4nj7SnX2f7M>

PRO Tip: Do more of it in romantic relationships (& sometimes in dates)

There are no cons to protective and caring leadership in a romantic relationship.

As a matter of fact, I highly recommend men to take a protective and caring leadership approach in their relationships.

It’s the healthiest way to maintain control and leadership of the relationship.

1.4. Show The Way / Make Them Follow Your Lead

Any time people follow your lead, you are by definition acting as the leader and as the most powerful individual.

Politicians, natural-born dominant men and schooled by communication experts, show the way on each other all the time.

A typical politician's move upon first meeting looks like this: shake hands, place a hand on people's back, then open up their body and point to something in the environment.

What they're trying to do right there is to have their colleague follow their lead.

Of course, Trump heavily engages in it.

Here with Macron while they *both* try to play each other and end up being quite awkward:

<https://youtu.be/8E51M4t9XXI>

PRO Tip: Do it if you're the host or if people are looking up to you, otherwise go easy with this

When you're obviously the most powerful party and others want to follow your lead, then you should provide that leadership.

This is the epitome of social power.

But if you are not yet sure people accept your leadership, proceed with caution or they will resent you. If you are around the same power and you are *not* the host, take it easy with too obvious "I'm showing you the way games".

1.5. Guiding Behavior: The Host Role

Socially powerful men politely invite others to "be their guests".

“Be my guest” signs include:

Follow me gestures or walking first

Invites to sit down

Inviting to go through the door first

Guiding behaviors represent a positive form of leadership that is expressed through politeness.

If you are the host, guiding behavior is also a polite way of asserting dominance over the environment. It communicates “this is my place, and you are welcome in it and I want you to be comfortable here”.

Here Obama and Putin trying to play host on each other:

https://youtu.be/ne-lRhy_z7U

If they are not rude, it's OK to accept guiding behavior when you are actually the host.

No need to play the game back on them [like North Korean's president did on South Korean's president](#) when they met in North Korea.

Neutral Territory Power Moves

When meeting in neutral territory playing the host becomes more of a disguised form of power move because, remember, behind the politeness, it's also a way of saying “I'm guiding you through my place”, which asserts dominance over the environment.

How to handle it:

If you are in neutral territories, try to avoid full compliance.

For example, you can wait 10 seconds longer before sitting. If your opponent tells you to go inside, pretend you want to stop one second to admire the panorama. If you can't avoid following them, then sit or follow them nonchalantly, without looking at them and without saying “ok”. Just do it as if *you* wanted to do it.

Then make a mental note that you're one down and need to even the scores.

Otherwise, you can turn the table on them. Say "thank you" and pat them on the back, as if to say "thank you for taking care of me... Mr. Butler".

PRO Tip: do it if you're the host, otherwise let the host guide you

If you are hosting an event at your place or if you have the ranks and formal authority of leadership, then you should engage in guiding behavior.

If you are someone's guest, avoid leading them because it's highly jarring being told what to do in one's own place.

As a matter of fact, it's OK to let people play the host if they are the actual hosts.

If they overdo it, seek to neutralize their commands and invites (more on it later).

1.6. Command With Nonverbal

This one consists of making people act with fewer words and more nonverbal communication.

It's even more dominant if you don't even look at the person and you do it curtly and bluntly (again from the movie Spread):

https://youtu.be/qXhrhC2l_DQ

The "cold-blooded dominant style" we saw in the archetypes of dominance relies heavily on commands without any verbal acknowledgment.

PRO Tip: It's extreme, use for extreme cases only

I recommend you avoid this one when dealing with other adults because it's *too* dominant. It makes people on the receiving end feel

objectified and demeaned.

However, when the situation really calls for it, it's very powerful.

1.7. Assign Tasks

People with power task others.

They do it when they have formal authority, of course, and they will often task people even when *lacking* formal authority.

If tasking is too direct, it can be annoying even when formal authority is in place.

If there is no formal authority, tasking is a typical example of an "overpowering individual".

Beating Taskers:

Always second guess and analyze a command.

Ask yourself: is he in a position to assign tasks?

You will over-analyze in the beginning, granted.

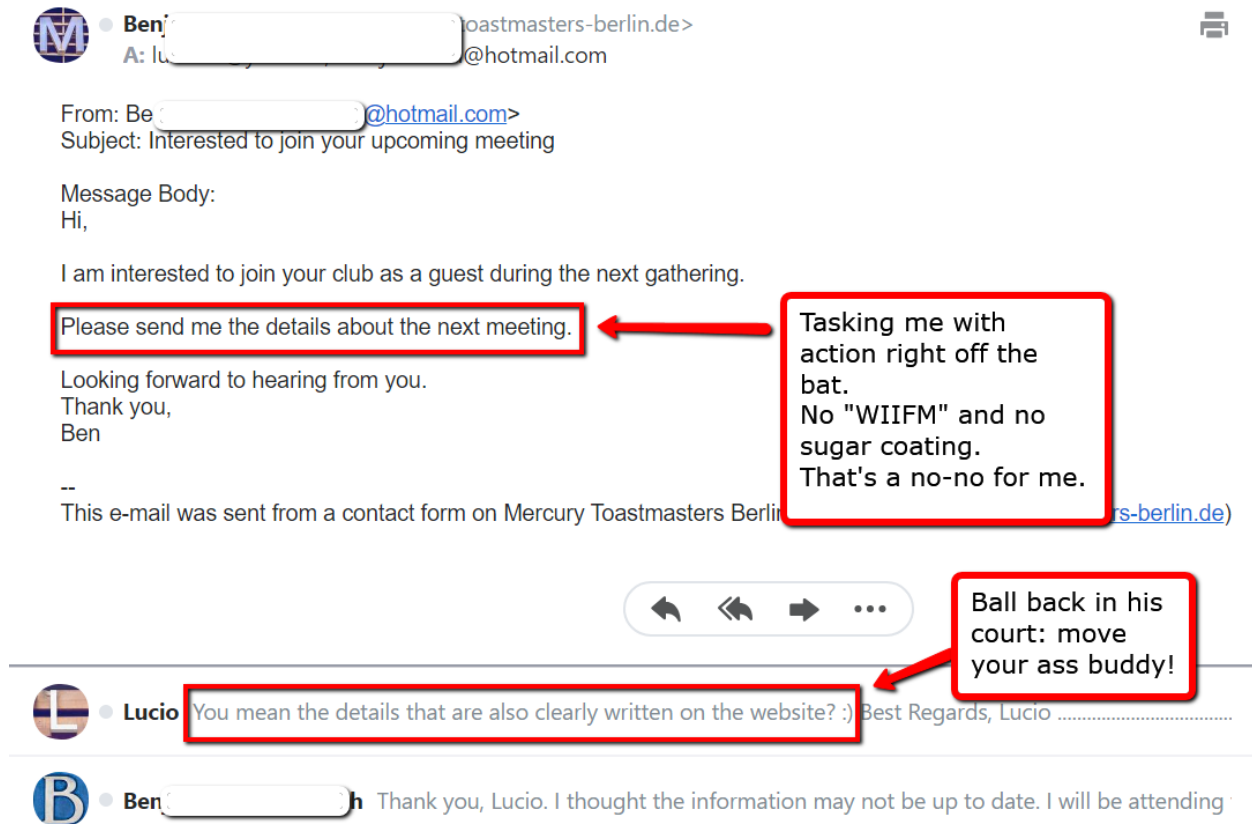
But over time it will become natural for you to discern between fair requests and unfair requests from people who have either no authority over you or who cannot ask you to do what they're asking.

Make it a point to challenge and reject all tasks from people who have no authority and/or assign tasks in a curt and non-respectful way.

Example:

Below is an example, of a guy reaching out to me to join

Toastmasters, a volunteer-based organization of which I was the president. People are welcome but they have no call in assigning me tasks as if they were ordering around a butler:



When you take a stand against tasking most people realize they were being out of order and will naturally get into more respectful behavior. And they'll respect you more afterward.

PRO Tip: Be less blunt if you're too direct, do more if you're too submissive

More submissive people are afraid of assigning tasks even when they know the best course of action or when they have actual authority. And, of course, they are afraid of pushing back against tasking.

If you're more on the submissive end, you will have to force yourself to assign more tasks and refuse more tasks.

If you are more on the dominant side, you need to start noticing when people push back on your tasks or they execute them but with growing resentment -poor execution is often a sign of growing resentments.

#2. Exerting Social Pressure

Dominant men create social tension to make more submissive individuals comply, crack, speak or act the way they want.

Auch as, they use social pressure a tool for nonverbal compliance: they make you act without telling you explicitly to act.

But sometimes they create that tension without an actual reason, just for the fun of wielding power and seeing you squeak (and to show who's in charge).

1.1. Social Aggression

A rather dramatic example of creating tension at will is the famous "how am I funny" scene in Goodfellas (Tommy being another example of a meathead).

Tommy uses intimidatory looks, loud voice, aggressive tonality, pregnant pauses and full frontal body language, which is another sign of aggressive nonverbal-.

Overall, his social pressure here is basically an unstated threat of imminent violence.

<https://youtu.be/E84VqqCPI7w>

PRO Tip: If you have the power and courage to do it and if it's well deserved, this can be dynamite

Sometimes you need to draw a powerful line in the sand.

And this type of social pressure is dynamite and people will remember it for a lifetime. It doesn't have to be as aggressive as the example above. Lots of pauses and a serious expression will do.

Also perfect in relationships when a partner has crossed an important boundary.

1.2. Inquisitive Look

This is aimed at making you speak and justify yourself without saying a word.

Denzel Washington uses this one often, including a few times in the movie Training Days (later we'll have a quiz with him doing it in real life -and backfiring-).

Here is an example from an ex-girlfriend of mine before we became a couple:

Me: What about Enrico

Her: (looking tense) Enrico, what do you mean

Me: Enrico, don't you remember?

Her: (getting worried) No... Did I say Enrico in my sleep?

Me: (ignoring: wasn't even going to entertain the possibility of jealousy) Enrico, don't you remember what is it.

Her: (more and more worried) OMG, I don't know if I said it in my sleep, I have no idea who is Enrico

*Me: (sideways glance, pursed lips, slightly corrugated eyebrows: **this is the inquisitive look**)*

Her: ... I'm sorry, I don't know what's gotten into me, I really have no idea how Enrico is, really Luc...

Me: Enrico is the name of the breakfast menu we had last time

Her: Ooooh ahaha true, OMG I was thinking I said it while sleeping, I'm sorry! Ahaha yes I would love an Enrico ahah

I didn't start with the aim of creating tension, but she put herself under pressure.

And that exchange told me a lot about where we stood (such as: she was more into me than I thought and I was more in the dominant position than I even thought).

Indeed the dynamics of who suffers the most under social tension are an important indicator of who is in charge in a relationship.

PRO Tip: Do it, it's a high quality, non overly aggressive way of showing power

This is a very powerful technique which can be used in a friendly and joking way as well.

Remember this: When you can be dominant while half-joking and while still being friendly, it's pure gold.

Dominance thorough jokes and friendliness has a lot of upside with little downside. So I highly recommend you learn to use more nonverbal signs of dominance and learn to deliver them with a smile, a joke, or an overall friendly and caring demeanor.

Examples to follow.

#3. Judging

Remember the “judge role” of the first lesson?

Here it is again.

Dominant people impose their frames and set themselves up as judges.

Judges of behavior, performance and, even more powerful, whole personalities.

The judge dispenses rewards for pleasing him (compliments, encouragement, happiness etc.), and punishment for displeasing him (criticism, emotional distance, disapproval, social punishments etc.)

Beating judges:

It all starts with awareness.

Ask yourself: do I care too much about this person's opinions? Am I saying or doing things in order to gain this person's approval? If that's the case, you might be under the spell of a judge.

From a technical point of view, avoid going on the defensive or explaining yourself.

For example, if someone asks you "how can I trust you", you start jumping through their hoops and elect them as your judge when you start explaining and providing proofs.

Respond with a statement instead of providing proofs (ie.: "I am straight shooter, that's who I am), or ask questions back on them. [The scene between Scarface and Sosa](#) is a dramatic example of Scarface rejecting Sosa's judge powers.

Never Allow People to Become Your Judges!

Not allowing others to become your judge is one of the biggest social conquests you can achieve, and it's truly liberating.

People the whole world over who seek freedom rarely understand that **freedom starts by throwing off the joke of the judges of this world.**

On the other hand, knowing how to become the judge in your social exchanges is a crucial factor in becoming a socially powerful individual.

I recommend you take a "positively judgmental" attitude even when you are not openly showing it.
High-quality individuals *have to* be more judgmental to better invest their time and effort.

1.1. Indirect Social Punishment

Punishment flows from the dominant party to the dominated one.

There are many ways of inflicting social punishment, ranging from throwing under the bus to ignoring to outright telling them what they said is stupid.

Sarcasm is also an example of social punishment:

<https://youtu.be/2hNqB4PDAoY>

PRO Tip: Unless you're having fun, avoid it, it's slightly passive-aggressive

Only deliver social punishment when you truly can't go direct or you want to poke fun at the target.

Otherwise, either be direct or avoid taking part.

And keep in mind the rule of thumb: high-quality individuals don't push people down but pull people *up*.

1.2. Disapproval

Disapproval is a powerful tool that keeps the submissive party bending over backwards to please the dominant one. We've already seen that one of the most powerful words in the English language are:

I am disappointed

Disapproval can also be conveyed with facial expressions. Here are some of them:

https://youtu.be/gFD_GJI8vSA

1.3. Seductive Punishment

Seductive punishment is a form of sexual domination.

The same dynamic of punishment flowing from dominant to dominated is also found in seduction.

Men who joke about punishing their women are setting up a “dominant-dominated” relationship which is often the precursor to sex -or is the sign of an already existing sexual relationship-.

Men can consider jokingly spanking their girlfriends.
When she accepts it, it's a strong sign she accepts his leadership.
When she jokingly punish them back, she is communicating the expectation of a more egalitarian relationship, or playfully showing that she isn't (yet) fully submitting.

Here is an example of joking with a successful aggressor/victim dynamic from the movie “Lo Zio Indegno”:

<https://youtu.be/s3V0Tg73YIQ>

#4. More Nonverbals

Remember the law of social effort, with power being held by those who spend less effort in the interaction?

Well, that applies in communication as well.
And socially powerful people use fewer words and more nonverbal.

Some of the most dominant styles of dominance leverage nonverbal body language and facial expressions to make others act and react without saying a single word.

4.1. Facial Expressions

An example from Crazy Stupid Love:

<https://youtu.be/9vSKyFA5F9Y>

He doesn't say "of course that would work on you".
Convincing people with words is cheap (and ineffective).
Use nonverbal instead.

4.2. Hand Gestures

Hand gestures can be used either to defend the right of speaking (imagine raising your index finger like as if to say one moment) or to make someone else speak.

Very, very powerful.

Here is an example from Judge Judy:

<https://youtu.be/7aTx83ta4-E>

Asking questions and having people answer is dominant. But making others speak and move without a single word is much more powerful.

4.3. Hand-Tapping

In the lesson on verbal expressions of dominance, we will see that dominant men manage the tempo of the conversation.

But there are several nonverbal signals to dictate the tempo as well.

When dominant men invite others to speak more quickly for example, they communicate they don't want to waste their precious time (with

you).

One of these hand gestures is tapping hands on the table, which is a very dominant, bossy and a slightly rude way of telling people “hurry”.

A very confrontational way of doing it, [from The View](#).

And a less confrontational but more powerful and in control style from the then president George Bush:

<https://youtu.be/gAqYPA6Rsa8>

The hand tapping can also happen on the person’s body, and depending on the tone it can be either a demeaning or a type of babying behavior.

For the latter, imagine a dominant man whose woman has been droning about her bad boss for the last 5 minutes, but he is adamant of ending it.

He taps on her side and says “come on baby, wrap it up and let’s get going or we’ll be late”.

Beating Hand-Tapping:

If someone does it to you, keep speaking while you touch their arm and look at them, as if to say “one moment”.

Then if you were indeed wasting time, cut to the chase.

4.4. Facial Expressions of Social Power

Watch out for this one.

Depending on the context facial expressions can be passive aggressive instead of dominant.

What’s the difference between dominant and passive aggressive, then?

It's a sign of dominance when talking directly and openly would be out of place, not possible or way too confrontational.

Basically, think of it like this: it's dominant when in a situation where most people would have done nothing, the socially powerful individual *still* allows himself to pass judgment.

Look at De Niro passing nonverbal judgment with his future son in law:

<https://youtu.be/JJL0CPY6IHl>

Saying something in that situation would have been way too confrontational considering that he is his daughter's BF. But he still sends out a message of disapproval. His expression right before sipping communicates "hmmm I smell bullshit".

Should You Train Facial Expressions?

Most people use way too little nonverbal and have no idea how to use their facial expressions.

Is it important to learn?

If you want to become very socially skilled it is, yes. Many high-quality people and every single socialite use facial expressions very well.

Joining an acting class is a good way of increasing your nonverbal repertoire. But you can also simply from now on focus more on the expressions people do and mimic them.

Facial expressions, like touching, are also partly cultural. On average, "warmer" cultures use more facial expressions.

#5. Touching

Different ways of touching convey different levels of dominance.

Not all type of touching is dominant and/or high quality.

Back slapping or light punches on the shoulder while laughing and drinking, for example, tend to be very juvenile.

Here are some more dominant touches:

5.1. Parent-Style Touches

As we have mentioned on the basics of power, when one individual takes a parent role, it often pushes the other party into a “baby” role.

And of course, the parent is the most dominant figure.

Signs of parent-style touches include:

patting on the head

cheek pinching

face touching

Here is an example of cheek pinching, which a professor used on a classmate of mine:

<https://youtu.be/CbJJVV2LRXI>

This one is very good for a man to do to a woman because it places him as the dominant father figure while still showing a caring attitude (next lesson we will see the perfect words to go with it).

Most of the times when people touch your face they are communicating they're in charge.

But it can also be used in a friendly way, to communicate you are taking care of someone (bosses in mafia movies often use it):

<https://youtu.be/idP5-vtkhBE>

5.2. Temple Kissing

This is very good in intimate relationships.
Rarely so in man-to-man interactions:

<https://youtu.be/io5--6KDNH0>

Way too overbearing to do to another man.

5.3. Power Hug

Example of Mike Epps in “Janky Promoters”

<https://youtu.be/V4aKy9tOsPY>

PRO Tip: Avoid it, it's juvenile and unattractive

Avoid this one if you're older than 20 YO and sober. As a matter of fact, avoid it even when you're drunk: it's rather juvenile and it's extremely annoying.

It's also easy to remove your arm and make you look as overly aggressive.

Women should always avoid it.

#6. Aggression, Disrespect, & Punishment

The dark side of dominance shows when powerful individuals punish, aggress, intimidate, or disrespect.

6.1. Making You Wait (or Not Waiting For You)

Making others wait is one of the most common power moves. And not waiting for them is its other side of the coin, which is more disrespectful and more dominance because it's done in the open.

It's particularly bad for your reputation when it's done publicly, as Trump does here with president of Finland:

<https://youtu.be/FI6w90F9yAs>

Trump communicates here he does not consider the Finnish president worth of respect. If the Finnish president wanted to limit the damage he should have left right after Trump so as to minimize the delay. If he wanted to play a power move, he should have stayed for more questions -huge power move, and that would have definitely irritated Trump-.

6.2. Face Slapping

Face slapping can be friendly ([Henry getting pinched](#)) or it can be more threatening as if to say "watch out":

<https://youtu.be/kXKy71JWpVU>

A slap in the face among male adults is very emasculating and it's one of the biggest signs of a dominant/submissive relationship.

6.3. Invading Your Space

Physically invading someone's space, like putting one's face very close to yours or getting extremely close to you is a major sign of someone who is trying to dominate you or threaten you (we will see an example later).

6.4. Touching or Taking Your Property

Dominant men allow themselves to touch or take other people's property.

It's as if to say "you belong to me (and so does your stuff)". And the moment you let them take and touch your property at will you are basically communicating you approve of that power relationship.

Beating property invasions:

Either you don't let them touch your stuff or you can be more liberal about "property" and act the same way towards *their* property.

You might not be comfortable doing it, but do it anyway.

If they complain about you touching their property, that's also great: you created a precedent and when they will use your stuff you will have more power to say "nono buddy".

6.5. Territory Defense

Most people have a natural understanding of "personal territory".

The most submissive people though don't act on personal space's encroachment.

The most dominant individuals instead do so very openly.

Here is an example from the movie Boiler Room:

<https://youtu.be/JfIKzReNDF4>

If people are entering your territory too freely, that might be a sign they are either hippie-style guys (cool) or that they don't respect you enough (not cool).

Try to do the same towards their territory and see how they react.