



POWER TRIP

By CAT THOMPSON

EXPLORATIONS ON THE TRUE NATURE OF PERSONAL POWER: WHERE IT COMES FROM, HOW IT WORKS AND HOW TO WIELD IT WELL.

as powerful. But many of us also connect the idea of power with corruption and abuse. The term “power hungry” makes us wince for good reason: We have all seen examples of people whose lives were consumed with the quest for power, and who used it badly once they got it.

On the other hand, feeling powerless is no fun. Refusing to claim or be good stewards of our personal power prevents us from offering our best and often leads us into compromising situations where we end up feeling like a victim.

So, is being powerful a good thing? It depends on how you define power, how you get it and how you use it. Wanting power over other people — to be able to force or bend people to one’s will for one’s own gain — is very different than choosing to become more conscious, accomplished and powerful in one’s own right.

The dictionary defines power in the following ways: 1. the ability, skill or capacity to do something, 2. physical force or strength, 3. control and influence over other

Most people enjoy the feeling of power. To know you can accomplish anything you set out to do, to be respected and admired by your peers, to feel strong and free and invincible — these are some of the experiences we define

people and their actions, 4. the ability to influence people’s judgment or emotions, and 5. somebody who has political or financial influence.

There are actually more definitions than that, but I’ll stick with these in this article, which will address the following four questions:

1. WHAT IS POWER?
2. WHY DO WE WANT IT?
3. HOW CAN WE GET IT?
4. WHAT DO WE DO WITH IT ONCE WE HAVE IT?

THE MEANING OF POWER

The dictionary definitions of power fall into two types: One set describes the ability to get something done — to wield one’s own skill, capacity, faculty, physical force or strength. The other set has to do with control over others — authority, and the ability to rule over, influence or apply force to other people.

To get a deeper understanding of these two types of power, I consulted David R. Hawkins’s book *Power vs. Force* (Hay House, 2002). Hawkins defines “power” as a distinctly *positive* and *constructive* ability; he categorizes the use of control, manipulation and authority over others as “force.”

“Power,” writes Hawkins, “is always associated with what supports the significance of life itself. Power appeals to what uplifts, dignifies and ennobles.”

True power, according to Hawkins, is self-evident and comes from within; it is inherently ethical and life-supporting. It is influential because it holds a natural appeal; it attracts

the very best in others. It is, in effect, a rising tide that raises all boats.

Force, on the other hand, must co-opt power from other sources in order to serve its means (which may not be terribly noble). Force usually serves to achieve gain for one party at the expense of another. By nature, force wielded by one person takes power away from someone else. "Force must always be justified," explains Hawkins. "Force is associated with the partial, power with the whole ... Power gives life and energy — force takes these away."

It is important to understand the difference between these two applications of energy, because, as Hawkins points out, force can never lead one to true power or happiness. In fact, the use of force naturally diminishes one's true personal power.

WHY WE WANT POWER

This leads us to the second question: Why do we want power — either kind? The ability to control others' actions, to wield political or financial power — these may seem to be skills worth having.

Yet if you look closely at those who are "powerful" only because they have the authority to use force, chances are you will not find a truly peaceful and happy person in the bunch. These individuals are more often feared than respected, because over time this type of power tends to bring out the worst in people. You know the old saying: "Absolute power corrupts absolutely."



True power, on the other hand, does not rely on controlling or forcing anything, yet it can be incredibly influential. Rather than corrupting, it tends to inspire. True power, in my opinion, is the key to success and enjoyment in all areas of life.

A truly powerful person generally possesses the following characteristics:

- **AUTHENTICITY.** They are what they appear to be; they're good to their word; they're not putting on an act to please or impress anyone else.
- **DEEP KNOWLEDGE OF SELF.** They are aware of their strengths and weaknesses; they know what makes them tick, and what makes them vulnerable.
- **ABILITY TO MAINTAIN BOUNDARIES.** They perceive where their own needs start and stop; they understand when it's appropriate to give, and when it's not.
- **GROUNDEDNESS.** They are not easily swayed, or pushed off center by manipulation, fantasies or scare tactics. They are focused and not easily distracted.
- **DIRECTNESS.** They speak their mind; they say what they mean and mean what they say — in clear, simple language.
- **COMPASSION AND EMPATHY.** They are kind, forgiving and generous toward themselves, which allows them to be kind, forgiving and generous toward others.
- **INTEREST IN THE GOOD OF THE WHOLE.** They get the greatest pleasure out of accomplishments that serve others and make the world a better place.
- **PURPOSEFULNESS:** They have a clear plan, are driven by a sense of mission and consistently direct their energy in pursuit of that plan.

true power

All of the attributes above, if combined, signal a person with true power. If that seems like an appealing picture, that's because it is: One of the first things you may notice about a person with true power is that you like them! You'll probably want to get to know them better.

Because truly powerful people are such good stewards of their own energy, and because other people (particularly powerful people) are naturally inclined to join forces with them and help them, they are generally able to accomplish anything they set out to do.

People who do not understand or are not in full possession of their own true power, however, are often drawn to forceful types, and wind up serving them in hopes of increasing their personal power. This rarely works to anyone's advantage.

It comes down to this: True power always seems to give off light and life, while the other type of power — force — seems to diminish it.

A LESSON IN FORCE

I learned a painful lesson about power and force in my own life when I became a producer in the film business. Prior to that, when I was a location scout and part of the crew, my relationships with other crew members were based on our commonalities — whether we liked each other, whether we shared similar ideas, whether we had fun together — the usual kind of workplace camaraderie.

When I became a producer and started hiring these same people, however, our behaviors changed. Because I suddenly had the power to give or withhold a job, many of →

these people were either afraid or hesitant to tell me if I was being a jerk. It was easy and secretly satisfying to use my position to grant or withhold favors. But as time progressed, I found (to my horror) that I was becoming a tyrant. The more tyrannical I became, the less people were willing to stand up and tell me I was behaving badly. In desperation, I tried to surround myself with strong and powerful people who would stop my tyranny — people who could hold their ground and thus help me wield my power well.

It was one of the greatest lessons of my life: I learned firsthand that tyrants are easily created when other people give up their personal power. If individuals feel helpless or afraid to set boundaries with tyrannical authority figures, the tyranny tends to grow. Tyrants may start out enjoying the power they feel they have over others, but often they end up isolated, angry and hurt, which in turn fuels more tyranny.

If employees were encouraged to set and hold firm boundaries in the workplace, the patterns of force there would diminish considerably. Very likely, professional environments would reflect a better balance of emotional stability and mutual cooperation.

HOW TO GET IT

So now that we have a picture of what true power can look like, how do we go about getting it? Based on the characteristics described above, I would suggest the following exercises:

- **BE AUTHENTIC.** Speak your truth (realizing that it may only be true for you); develop your integrity.
- **SAY WHAT YOU MEAN AND MEAN WHAT YOU SAY.** Practice using direct and honest language. Do not use a dozen words when three will do.
- **FOLLOW YOUR BLISS.** Your joy will lead you to your higher purpose, and will also contribute to the well-being of other people.
- **BE KIND AND COMPASSIONATE TO YOURSELF.** Once you can do that, compassion for others is effortless.
- **LEARN TO SET GOOD BOUNDARIES.** If your energy is unfocused, you won't be able to direct it with enough intensity and focus to accomplish much.
- **WATCH YOURSELF AND YOUR PATTERNS,** and get honest with yourself. Know what pushes you off center, what pulls you out of integrity and what you need to do to get back into it.

Now, I don't mean to pretend that these seven points are simple behaviors we can just wake up and do every single day. This is where the effort comes in. But part of what I've learned about true power is that we do not value things that come to us too easily. Therefore, if we are truly motivated to be authentically powerful, we will need to apply some effort into making that happen. The more integrity and consistency we put into making changes to better ourselves, the sweeter our journey becomes.

It is also important to realize that true power rarely comes to anyone early in life. That's because we spend our first few decades learning about how the world works, who we are, what our purpose is here and how we respond and react to the world. Patience with this process is vitally important to developing true power.

NOW WHAT?

OK, let's say you've been working hard on yourself. You've cleaned up your language, you're pursuing work that you love, you've learned to be kinder to yourself and you've become more self-aware. What you will notice is that there is a direct relationship between strength of character and true power. The more you like yourself, the more power you will attract. The more capable you are at handling that power with integrity, the more power will be drawn to you, and so on. It becomes a loop that supports itself.

The truly amazing thing about having power and attracting more of it is that by the time you get to the place where the loop is self-sustaining, there is no question about what you are going to do with your power. You will know! You will be using it to achieve the dreams that bring you great joy and satisfaction. And as you move through life with passion and purpose, compassion and authenticity, you affect and influence all those around you. You set an example that inspires others. Now *that* is powerful! ●

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Power Broker or Tyrant?

If you're not sure how well you're handling your power, check this chart for clues.

POWERFUL PEOPLE ...	TYRANTS ...
treat others equally and by fair rules.	use influence over others to control or manipulate or make exceptions.
do not allow outside stimuli to influence how others are treated.	allow whims and personal emotions to influence how others are treated.
demand what can realistically be delivered while encouraging a high standard.	make unrealistic demands that others know are unlikely to be met.
inspire others to give their best.	scare, intimidate or manipulate others into giving more than they'd like.
serve life-respecting causes.	are self-serving or glory seeking.