



POWER: Why Some People Have It & Others Don't

by Jeffrey Pfeffer



Overview

Power is necessary in all aspects of life. Many people hold themselves back from achieving power to avoid the pain of failure. And yet power is not something out of reach for anybody: it can be learned like any other skill. This book discusses specific ways to grow and maintain power in any organization, but it also warns of the addictive nature of power, and how you must constantly look over your shoulder in life.

"You can compete & even triumph in organizations of all types, large & small, public or private sector, if you understand the principles of power."

Introduction. Be Prepared for Power

Power is attractive to many people, for several reasons:

- It can lead to a longer, happier life. Research has consistently shown that influence can predict the risk of heart disease. In several cases, *influence* predicted mortality rates more than factors such as one's psychological state, smoking, and obesity.
- Power can bring you wealth and status. Writing books, doing speaking tours, and remaining in the public eye can lead to a hefty paycheck.
- With an influential status, you are more likely to see the changes you want, and to feel the pride of implementing and accomplishing them.

Power takes more than just skill; it takes knowing how to use your skills to your advantage. While planning ahead and making sacrifices can work in your favor, *wanting* power will make all the difference; you will never gain that edge if you do not hunt it down. Studies on business managers showed that:

- Managers who remained focused on power were more successful than others who focused on likeability or personal triumph.
- Managers who focused on power could influence others and accomplish their own tasks more quickly than others.

- Managers with more political prowess were rated as better performers and stronger leaders.

Once there, maintaining a position of power can be difficult. Positions of power are limited and the competition is fierce. The rules are not written out explicitly, and quite frequently "playing by the rules" will not advance you to a position of power.

Melvin Lerner coined the "just-world hypothesis", the idea that the world acts fairly and predictably. But the world is *not* inherently fair. People in positions of power are not necessarily "good" or "deserving" of their positions. Erroneously believing that the world is fair makes you simply accept your position, and prevents you from fighting for more. It can hinder you from learning from those in power and will make you stagnate. The biggest obstacle to power is yourself:

- Many shun ambition since they believe it will require hard work (since the just-world hypothesis implies that hard work is rewarded). Yet it is delusional to believe doing "what you're supposed to" will lead to power. Work *smarter*, not harder.
- People quite frequently hinder themselves on purpose to avoid the pain of failure. Avoiding failure (typically by never trying) can pad your ego, but will never bring you power.

Chapter 1. It Takes More Than Performance

Performance is not an accurate predictor of remaining in a position of power, as research shows that poor performance does not correlate to being fired.

- Employee performance rankings were most correlated with how active their supervisors were during the hiring process.
- Salaries were more dependent on age, time, education, race, and gender than performance.

In fact, job performance might actually *hinder* your ability to be promoted. Those in power above you are more advantaged if you do your job well and remain in

