

UPDATE

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Power in the Workplace: How it Can or Cannot be Effective

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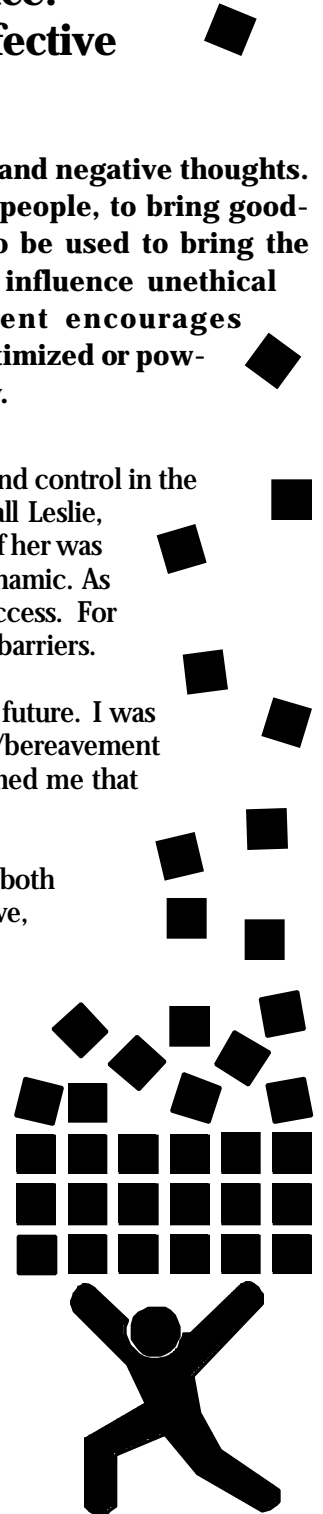
Power! That little word is packed full of positive and negative thoughts. Power in a positive sense; can be used to influence people, to bring goodness and justice into the lives of others. It can also be used to bring the selfish egocentrism of one or more individuals to influence unethical behaviors or to victimize others. Empowerment encourages assertiveness in one or more individuals who feel victimized or powerless to achieve good for themselves or their family.

The following example illustrates the misuse of power and control in the work setting. I met my new co-worker, a woman I will call Leslie, during a career change to hospice care. My first perception of her was as someone who is confident, assertive to aggressive, and dynamic. As an African American, she knew the rough, tough road of success. For every achievement, she had to work hard to reduce cultural barriers.

We introduced ourselves by discussing our goals for the future. I was enrolled in the master's program and desired to study grief/bereavement issues. She was in the BSN completion program. She informed me that this career in hospice care was her life.

Leslie and I were alike in many ways. She and I were both spiritual, desiring to focus the care of our clients through love, dignity, and prayer. We both felt a strong desire to make the program work, assisting the program to expand its services. We were also committed to our schooling, to scholarly growth and to bring our best to the program. Leslie and I decided to work in hospice as the ultimate expression of giving. I think we both needed emotional strokes that went with this work, the desire that we were doing all we could for another person. We both had children and a husband, and knew we needed to schedule time with our families. We were different in that we brought into the work setting different perceptions and ways of viewing the process of caring for our clients. My strengths were in program planning and creating tools or other reports on the computer. Her strengths were in speaking; she articulated the care of her clients to other health professionals extremely well. I assisted her in writing and she assisted me in the generation of ideas.

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So, what went wrong? Our goals, similarities and differences complemented each other. It seems to me that the need for power disrupted our teamwork. Envy set our relationship into a competitive cycle, the need to be better than the other, to win. It began in the first week we worked together, when Leslie closed our office door and stated she wanted to talk to me privately. She gave me an account of problems that she had endured while working with the management in the program. She also informed me that she was upset that I was working with her. She discussed our culture and how hard it has been for her to achieve success. Leslie said that she was jealous of my abilities, my work in the master's program and that she feared I would take her job away. She also stated that school was difficult for her and she was not sure if she would ever achieve a master's degree. I reassured her that my purpose was not to take her job away and she did not have to worry. I really meant that. Yet, as the years went on, the talks behind the closed door continued. She needed reassurance that I was not going to shine, appear better than she was. The need to win, to be better than I took precedent and by it I felt stifled, paralyzed at times.

Initially I responded by pulling back. I tried to maintain this careful balance of cultural sensitivity versus my own desire for visibility, I could not shine, but would let her take the glory. I felt compassion for her and wanted to help her. I could not imagine what she must have gone through. It was not long though before I began to feel manipulated, unappreciated, and envious. She criticized my approach with my clients, thinking it was wrong; it was not wrong but only different from hers. I wanted visibility also, and to have credibility with the community. Our work together faltered and times became unproductive. Thankfully, our clients did not suffer, but we were miserable.

Other considerations that influenced the tension between us were based on the system, i.e., how our positions and roles were arranged by management. The program was small and fiscally could only support two to three nurses. I was the part-time clinical nurse specialist and she was a full-time nurse clinician. Although my position status was higher, she received the status of seniority and consistency care. In addition, there were many months that she and I were the only staff that worked for our clients, that included 24 hour a day on call; that also increased our stress.

Our program then, underwent a vast change in management. We worked with the new management to develop ways to make the program more cost-effective and

more efficiently staffed. I supported the drastic change that would make the program more financially sound through a merger. The results of my research on parental bereavement also supported the merger through increased quality of service. Although I received a research award for my thesis, neither Leslie nor the new management recognized it for the contribution that it made to the program. Leslie did not want the program to change.

Due to fiscal considerations, management decided not to support the merger. We knew that if this merger would occur, one of us would have to go. The program did not need two experts in hospice. I knew it would be me. It did not matter what strengths we brought to the program. What mattered most, according to management, was who had the most dedication to the program. And, to be honest, I withdrew. I burned out and gave up! I loved working with the clients but I was tired of the conflict. In addition, out of financial necessity, I needed to increase my hours. I was offered a half-time position at a college. When I informed the team that I would work both this program and the college, they informed me that I was not dedicated. It took me a few months to let go. I needed guidance and went to the EAP for assistance. With their support and assistance, I was able to let go of the work that I loved and I resigned.

Power will work when it is brought in as a positive force to influence people, to bring goodness and justice into the lives of others.

What lesson in life did I receive through this conflict in power? A colleague summed it up in this way. The success of a clinical nurse specialist (CNS) is to build or support a program in such a way that she is no longer needed. That should be the goal of any CNS. Did that happen here? I hope so! In today's society, where egocentric views of "me" and "I" are so intertwined in what we do, this selfless goal appears ludicrous. Yet, it is for the ultimate good that one can give to an individual or program. In effect, despite the conflicts, I think I empowered Leslie in ways she did not realize. And there was much I learned from her culturally, professionally, and personally. Who won? We both did.

Two years following my resignation, I began working here at the University. The summer before my first semester received a telephone call from the hospice program asking if I would return to work. The current manager stated that Leslie was ill and would be off for an insurmountable time and apologized, informing her that I have a new career and life. But, I felt wonderful knowing that she respected my work and requested me back.

The faculty that I work with currently at the University works well together. We planned a new curriculum for a community-based clinical in our Senior 1 level in the

College of Nursing. Our focus for this curriculum was to give the students a meaningful clinical experience while providing service to the community. We are proud of our efforts and overall, have demonstrated professionalism, collegiality, and appreciation for all members' input.

As I worked with my clinical students at the Good Samaritan Free Health Clinic in Fond du Lac this week, we received some wisdom from an elderly, retired physician. This man, Dr. Pennings, volunteers his time frequently at this free clinic to low income non-insured families in the community. It was an exciting evening as we observed the interaction between the health professional volunteers and the clients that they served. Dr. Pennings stated, "Look at all the diverse workers here and how well they work to-

gether. If any one of these workers requested credit for him/herself, this couldn't work." And I told him he was absolutely right!

Power will work when it is brought in as a positive force to influence people, to bring goodness and justice into the lives of others. It is essential and right then, to focus our attention on the success of our program and clients. The focus cannot be on "me" and my needs but rather recognizing the capacity of the team and appreciating each other's input and work. To enjoy our differences and use them, as assets to complement our work will bring far more efficiency into the workplace while reducing the stress created through conflict.

Comments on Power and Change

By Susan Barbour, Ed.D.

What makes it possible for change to occur? The ability to bring about change, either internal or external, requires motivation and ability to change. Force or power is involved so that there is momentum. Turning to Webster's Dictionary, "power" is defined as "the ability to do, act or produce." It represents a person's ability to put forth, be productive, and move in a new direction. By the fourth dictionary definition, however, the meaning shifts to: "the ability to control others; authority, sway, influence." In fact, power, more often than not, has the connotation of acting on another or acting on your own behalf at the expense of the other. Power is defined along a continuum of force, strength and influence to exert "power-over" another or control of others. By necessity, a "power-over" position, one more of domination does not facilitate communication or engage the parties in mutual exchange and resolve. Notice, I am emphasizing that power 1) is often not mutual, and 2) in not being mutual, it really does not encourage resolve because it is more based on coercion rather than on movement spontaneously arising from a working relationship.

Addressing the concept of "power-over" another, Jeanne Baker Miller, M.D. at the Stone Center for Developmental Services and Studies in Wellesley, MA., suggests that power is "the capacity to produce change" (p.2) making something happen where an individual or a group is able to move from point A to point B. She challenges the notion of "power-over." Power as authority, whether that "authority" figure is a man or a woman, is intimately tied to a top-down notion of power-over instead of power-with. Power, does not mean coercing although when you have it you are responsible. Rather change has to do with creating movement, direction and flow. Empowerment is relational and involves the ability to mutually effect others so that both you and the other are involved in change. It can include internal change of mind, perspective or emotions and, as we know, such changes are quite powerful. These changes can "create movement in an interpersonal field as well as acting in larger realms such as economic, social or political arenas." (Miller, 1982, p.2)

Conflict is inevitable in the process of power-with. It is often the case however that when conflict arises, instead of enhancing communication, we get skittish, don't want to create a problem or be hurt and we close off. To compensate we try to circumvent the difficulty and then resort to power-over the other in an attempt to control the other person. Rather than the energy of two working together and harnessing the diversity of ideas and experience, when one person controls another, the energy is reduced and so is morale. Power-with requires that both people are willing to put themselves on the line, tolerate the vulnerability of doing so, and both are willing to be affected. Our corporate world has been implementing "teamwork" but in fact, teamwork does not occur unless both parties are prepared to act and react in a genuine and respectful manner. Power is harnessed by the ability to be available and engage others in the work you share.

Reference: Miller, Jean Baker. (1982). "Women and Power." Stone Center for Developmental Services and Studies of Wellesley College.



BEATING THE CLOCK

If you always feel you have far too much to do and too little time, try this time-management trick:

Categorize every activity you must do as either

A – top priority, do right away;

B – medium priority, should be done fairly soon; or

C – lowest priority, can wait indefinitely.

Spend your time on the As and Bs.

To: Department Chairs, Supervisors, Directors and Team Leaders:

Each Department Chair, Supervisor, Director and Team Leader should have received a copy of the newly published EAP Document entitled: "Tips on Recognizing and Dealing with Employees in Distress." This is a reference resource. It will also be available on line on the EAP website at: <http://www.uwosh.edu/eap/>

Additional copies are available by request. Call Barb Kargus at 424-1078. If you would like EAP staff members to facilitate a work-group or departmental discussion on the information in the document, call Susan Barbour, (424-1078).

Website Resource:

The United Way of the Fox Cities has a website that offers information and a comprehensive list of regional resources from sexual abuse services to youth groups. Check it out. The address is: <http://www.athenet.net/~uwfoxcit/i&r.cgi>

UPCOMING

Brown Bag Seminars

Thursday, March 23rd

Meditation: Instant Tranquility

Paula Hayford

Reeve Union 221

Meditation has become a valuable tool for finding a peaceful oasis of relaxation and stress relief in a demanding fast paced world. It is simply the process of cultivating the ability to focus on the present, without getting distracted by the past or the future. Learn the benefits and methods of meditation.

Thursday, April 20th

Through the Eyes of a Loved One with Memory Impairment

Joscelyn Deanovich

Reeve Union 221

If you have a loved one who has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease or some other form of dementia, this informational seminar will be beneficial to you. It will focus on understanding the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease and how to communicate effectively with older adults with memory impairment.

Wednesday, May 10th

Neck and Shoulder Tension

Shirley Perzentka, CMT, Massage Therapist
Reeve Union 221

This seminar is a relaxing experiential hour. We will start with a few minutes of gentle movement, I will demonstrate a few quick and simple techniques to massage neck and shoulder areas, then you will practice on each other. Dress casually. Demonstrations done seated in a chair.

NEW COLUMN

Letters to the Editor

EAP Update invites comments related to EAP articles of interest to employees, or relevant to the University community. Space limitations may prevent all letters from being published, however, every effort will be made to accommodate submissions.

Letters must be constructive, civil, and present a serious discussion of your point of view and suggestions. EAP staff retain the sole right to edit provocative, inflammatory, and devaluing usage or refuse publication that would fuel controversy in a counterproductive manner. Submit letters of 250 words or less in Microsoft Word to Barbour@uwosh.edu or by campus mail to 201 Dempsey Hall. Anonymous letters will not be published.



EAP Update Publication Change

Beginning with this volume the EAP Update, Volume 4, the EAP Update will publish three, not four, yearly issues. The summer issue will no longer be published.

EAP Update Staff:

For further information contact
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Susan E. Barbour, Ed.D., EAP Director

IRC – Layout

Document Services – Duplication

