

Power and Influence

Decipher the language of leadership.



by Judith E. Glaser

POWER IN THE WORKPLACE has traditionally been defined as force, dominance, assertiveness, strength, invincibility, and authority.

As we observe others rise to higher levels of leadership, we ask ourselves “How do they do it?” Our observations can easily lead us to conclude that the most powerful (most dominant) make it to the top and that the rule of thumb is that to rise to a leadership position, we must bring into play our behaviors of force, dominance aggression and strength.

However, power and leadership are being redefined. No longer are we comfortable equating leadership with force, and power with dominance. In forward-thinking corporations, power is shifting from *I-Centric* to *We-Centric*, and this shift requires a commitment and a plan of action.

Throughout history, leadership has been critical to performance, to success, and to the greater good. The “leader” is often perceived as a solitary, charismatic figure, similar to a movie star. People behind the scenes are often not acknowledged, despite the fact that all play critical roles!

Who of us wants to be the actor on stage and who wants to be behind the scenes? Who of us sees ourselves leading initiatives to successful conclusions? We each must choose our roles.

The distinction between the leader and others is not a gender distinction. Women can rise to leadership positions, as long as they understand how.

In the movie *9 to 5*, administrative assistants are initially intimidated by their boss’s arrogance and allow him to take credit for work they accomplished. The women finally ban together to create a force he is unable to reckon with. They take over their workplace and create an environment in which they and others thrive.

In *Working Girl*, Melanie Griffith plays an administrative assistant to a female boss, who steals her ideas and presents them to impress a business partner. When her boss falls on a ski

slope, Melanie moves into position to represent *her idea* in her most charming, tactful way, *and* to show her boss’s true deceptive colors in a public forum.

All of us, both men and women, face similar challenges every day: How to bring our leadership ideas, voice and talents into the world without stepping all over others? How to exercise our talents in a world with other talented executives through fair and honest interactions and dynamics, without one-upping, stepping all over each others’ toes, deceptively undermining, intimidating, taking credit from other’s success, or self-promoting.



Dominance and Submission

In the climb up the ladder of leadership, we need to find ways to move up to the next level. How we influence others along the way will determine how we climb. How do we use our power and influence in ways that create support around us?

Learn how to positively influence. The meaning of *influence* ranges from the dominant and authoritative, to the more important and significant. At one end, it is being influential because of “fear.” At the other end, it is being influential out of recognized importance, significance, and contribution to the greater good. To be recognized as important—to have others see our talents and reward us—is the challenge that we all face in the *rise to the top*.

How can women get recognized? Why do women have more difficulty making it to the top? Women have as much ambition as men. On the rise to the top, however, women tend to experience more obstacles along the way, and over time their ambition is

diluted, obfuscated, and mitigated. We give-up and give-in—since fighting for what we want gets exhausting. When the obstacles feel like they are too big to overcome, we look for other avenues to fulfill our dreams. We leave and tell ourselves it’s just not worth it.

Men get rewarded and chosen more often because men have a more dominant voice. Women start careers with the same level of ambition, yet encounter forces that challenge their strength and tenacity to make it to the top. One challenge comes from the hardwiring differences of men and women—how each responds when something they desire is taken away.

Men and women respond differently when they face the loss of a desired object—a job, a car, a paycheck, a promotion, or a project. When something men desire is taken away, they tend to become more aggressive and go after what they want. Males are more dominant and will go into fight behaviors more easily and quickly than females.

Females are more submissive in the face of loss. They may respond by crying, calling for someone to come to them. The female instinct is bonding. Rather than turning to their aggressive responses, women are more inclined, when a desired object is removed, to want others to comfort them. The pejorative labels of *submissive*, *acquiescing*, *unassertive*, *deferential*, and *mEEK* are often given to women.

These are both truths and stereotypes, yet we are influenced by these beliefs. The challenge of women rising to positions of importance remains our power-puzzle to be worked out.

Here are some guidelines: Create a feedback-rich culture to establish healthy relationships. Make beliefs transparent. Create communication signals to move forward together in a healthy way.

Shift from an I-Centric to We-Centric behavior and mindset. Emotional IQ: Self-awareness and self-management. Collaborative IQ: Ability to build mutually beneficial relationships with others. Innovative IQ: Making the future health and success of the enterprise the center of attention

Avoid potential de-railers: Failure to manage your bio-reactive behaviors; failure to build mutual relationships with others; and making *you* the center of attention. **LE**

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