



Welcome to the current issue of the **be your best** online report.

Backcopies of the **be your best** online report can be downloaded from my new website at www.icleadership.com.au/reports.htm

For Managers, Principals, Team Leaders and Internal Consultants

Author: Henry Blatman

Issue No 24: Power - Good use and Mis-use

Sent to subscribers periodically throughout the year.
Please pass on **be your best** to people in your network.
To change your email address, give feedback or be removed from this list please reply to this email address.

Word count for this issue: 1521 words
Approximate time to read: 6 minutes

Power - Good use and Mis-use

I recently attended a meeting of senior executives and heard one say that when he got back to his office he was going to sack one of his team members. He was very matter of fact and there was a hint of glee in his tone. He explained that the staff member had been given every opportunity to perform, so I took his 'mild excitement' to be coming from a place of exercising his 'power' as a senior manager.

This made me think about power in the workplace. It is something rarely mentioned but ever present. Perhaps it's not mentioned because people are not conscious of it, or maybe they don't like the sound of the word – it can conjure up images of 'evil', archetype bad guys from B-grade Hollywood films.

Power is an important concept to both acknowledge and understand – it's not all bad and it's not all good, but it is important.

What is power: the common definition is, "...to have the ability to do something; to act ...", (Macquarie Dictionary). It's obvious that by virtue of their position of authority in an organisation a CEO, manager or principal has powers to 'make things happen', (including the power to hire and fire). Power is manifested in other ways like expertise (knowledge) and personal power (a

presence or influence someone might have that is not necessarily related to their positional seniority in an organisation).

Power – Its good use in the workplace

When I think of power exercised at its best, I think of individuals like the late Fred Hollows, a pioneer in blindness prevention in third world countries. Fred Hollows used his passion, his energy, his expertise and personal power to leave an unprecedented legacy in the world – an exceptionally positive use of power.

When I see examples of good use of power in the workplace, it is often where power is shared – where a leader *empowers* others so that they learn and grow, while at the same time they still feel supported. This means there is more expertise developed which ultimately sees businesses grow and prosper.

An example of this is a manager who gives someone else the responsibility for managing a project, while at the same time lending that person the authority and support to ensure that it happens. This does often mean surrendering power – which is not something that everyone is comfortable doing.

The flipside is a manager who holds onto the task themselves (and then laments that nothing gets done around here), or delegates some of the tasks but doesn't share the big picture idea or all of the relevant information or fails to provide the required training or coaching needed to complete the tasks. These people are often surprised when things aren't done properly or if employees aren't displaying particular commitment or interest. Would you put skin in the game if you didn't understand the full picture or feel fully involved or trusted?

It does not have to be this way, it's simply a matter of understanding that relinquishing power and control – sharing some of the power – does generate more ideas, creativity, innovation and often much better solutions.

Misuse of power

I have heard some CEOs say, "They can do what I say or they can go." Or, "This is the way we do it around here so just knuckle down and get on with it!". Yes, decisions do need to be made and there is certainly a time and place for good, decisive leadership. However, there are also times when senior people 'throw around their power' for the having powers' own sake. To test if your use of power is self serving, it's good to stop and ask, "what is motivating me to make this decision/or take this action?" If you are unsure and one that will help develop a greater self understanding is to check is to run the thinking by a colleague or independent third person.

Fear as a power tactic is not a great way to solve problems. It's tantamount to school yard bullying. It is also refusing to firmly step into their roles as managers and leaders. What it says is, "I don't have time to spend with you or listen to you. It's my way or the highway." Alternatively, it could be a reaction to the anxiety and pressure of their role which is causing them to "dump" on their team members. Either way all this does is build a negative culture and have negative impacts on people and the business in the long run.

Senior people who misuse their power can encounter problems like: high staff turnover and staff displaying exactly the same negative and bullying behaviours to other staff, for example, information hoarding; lack of sharing of information and resources; or an 'I don't care' attitude or they will seek their own power by being snipers in the workplace.

Power means different things for different people

When you have people in power and authority, by definition you have those who do not have equal power and authority. Every person has their own reactions to and experience of people in power and authority. Each person comes with their own individual beliefs about themselves in relation to authority and power, and about those in positions of power. Think back to your school days, for example: were you one of the kids who respected and trusted your teachers and took their words as gospel, or were you one of the rebels with a 'you can't teach me anything attitude'? Or you may have been somewhere in between. Either way, you still have a default view (whether it's conscious for you or not) about power and authority, (I am not judging any of these stances: it's just something to take into account when dealing with different people).

All this may seem like 'psycho babble', however, it's not my intention to analyse you or your teams, rather, it is my intention to generate awareness about what you are faced with when leading a disparate group of people. You don't have to be a psychologist to be a great manager, but you do need to be very aware of the different needs of different people and most importantly – and the best place to start – is by being very aware of yourself, your role and what power means to you and how you use it. The more aware you are of yourself, (how and why you might react), the greater your ability to make choices and to see the behaviour of others in a different light (without judging or trying to make them more like you). This greater versatility will make you an even better leader.

Ways to increase your self awareness:

- Attend peer groups like the CEO Institute to build greater awareness of how you carry out your role and learn how others carry out theirs.
- Spend quality time with your family (no mobiles, no PCs or laptops) and ensure you come back fresh to your role after a weekend or holiday.
- Take a sabbatical – one firm of solicitors insists that each 10 years their partners take 6 weeks off to travel, study and recreate.
- Take time for reflection - go to the beach, the country, meditate or attend a training course. There is now significant scientific evidence proving the links between taking time out and ongoing health, productivity and happiness. The new maths ought to be activity + reflection = improved results (not just activity).
- Read and listen to tapes of other peoples experiences as leaders.
- Do something new to stretch your comfort zones and keep learning who you are as a leader (and follower).
- Engage a trusted coach or mentor who can act as a mirror and sounding board.

In summary - The Positive use of Power

Awareness of the power dynamics, (they will always be there), in a situation can make a huge difference to how you influence decisions and outcomes in your organisation, and how effectively you empower your staff. Once you have an awareness of your own views on power and authority, and how you use power you can maximise your effectiveness as a leader and diminish occasions of misuse and abuse. And bear in mind that most leaders who do misuse or abuse power are not necessarily doing so intentionally – they've probably never really stepped back and given it much thought. You need to ask yourself, 'what kind of leader do I want to be and am I matching up to that – what do I model for my team?' On this road, (the high one), to being a better leader and manager you will come across resistance of your own and also that of others because of your own makeup and past experiences when addressing power issues. Work through this resistance (don't avoid it), as the more you work through any complex issue, the greater your ability and capacity to lead and achieve results with others. Most importantly, you will be a powerful and empowering role model for the next generation of leaders in your organisation and others important in your life.

“Knowing yourself enables you to make choices about how you respond to people and situations. Deep knowledge about yourself enables you to be consistent, to present yourself authentically, as you are. We trust—and follow—people who are real, who are consistent, whose behavior, values, and beliefs are aligned. We trust people whom we do not constantly have to second-guess” - Unknown Author

© 2007 Henry Blatman, All rights reserved. You are free to use material from the ***be your best*** online report in whole or in part, as long as you include complete attribution, including live web site link. Please have the attribution read as follows:

"By Henry Blatman of ic leadership. Please visit Henry's web site at www.icleadership.com.au for additional articles and resources on developing better leadership in your business.

Henry Blatman
Leadership and Performance Coach
Ph: 61 3 9699 7771