

### ● THE POWER SHIFT

## Role-based power versus personal power!



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I was invited by the CEO of a technology enterprise to help his direct reportees understand how they were using and demonstrating power in their execution of tasks.

A meeting with them revealed the lack of clarity between personal power and power as embodied in the role they played in the organisation. During a group conversation with them, it became abundantly clear that role imbued power was very different from what personal power signified.

The group listed the following ways in which they demonstrated role-based power and its implications:

1. **Coercive power:** This was power that they often used when they were impatient for results, short of time, unwilling to dialogue or urgently required outcomes. The power displayed tended to be punitive and was often employed when dealing with subordinates.

2. **Referred power:** This was power they enjoyed when a problem was referred to them by a colleague, a peer, their superior, especially when they were considered better placed to sort things out.

3. **Expert power:** This power they enjoyed when they were sought out for their superior knowledge or domain expertise.

4. **Reward power:** This was power they used to acknowledge good performance or offer appreciation and, in some cases, even material rewards, largely to subordinates.

5. **Legitimate power:** This was the power they enjoyed because of their position in the hierarchy.

#### THE SIX STAGES OF POWER

After they had listed the various forms of role power, I invited them to examine a model that I had learnt from reading Leon Vanderpol's book, 'A shift in being'. Vanderpol has identified six stages of personal power. They are:

1. Powerlessness.
2. Power of Association.
3. Power of Achievement.
4. Power of Reflection.
5. Power of Purpose.
6. Power of Wisdom.

The first three aspects of personal power are drawn from outside the individual and are external. A person feels Powerless when he feels inadequate,



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lacks conviction, experiences fear or when he feels less of who he actually is.

Powerlessness thus causes a person to feel a victim.

Power of Association comes from the company we keep and has little or no relevance to either role or position, yet it surely bears heavily on status.

Power of Achievement comes from an external definition of success which most often are standards that are either set for us or set by us for ourselves. Meeting and exceeding those benchmarks are seen as achievements.

All the three powers rely largely on external approval, endorsement and definition.

The three stages arise from what Vanderpol termed 'drama and situation' i.e., inherent in them is the quality of doing.

Our personal power helps us move to stage four, when we begin to reflect on 'who we are' and 'what can we offer from our being?' We start exploring our 'Purpose.'

When we experience the Power of Purpose and are committed to it, we graduate to the Power of Wisdom, which flows from an 'open heart.'

Unlike drama and situation, both of which bind us to living transactionally, Power of Reflection, Purpose and Wisdom expose us to choices and opportunities and may help us transform to a higher level of existence.

When the group began to examine their Personal Power they realised that while role is about 'doing', Personal Power is about 'being and becoming.'

They concluded that if they could separate role from Personal Power and know where they were coming from when interacting, whatever be the role, such as boss, father, son etc, they would be able to enhance their personal effectiveness and not be trapped in only either/or.

Personal power is evident and one does have to make a statement, while role-based power might need more often than not to be defended and explained.

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