

The Power in Cooperation

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Addressing the same topic multiple times might seem redundant and tedious if not for the opportunity to explore a topic in more depth and from different perspectives. Fortunately,

words like “cooperativeness” have nuance, allowing the discussion to take unexpected directions. In this case, I want to discuss the power within a “cooperative” relationship.

“Cooperation is always more powerful than competition.” - Bob Proctor

Whenever two or more people engage in a process or complete a project together, the relationships among those involved depend on their relative power, whether formally recognized or not. In very rare circumstances, the status, authority and responsibilities would be shared equally to balance the power, as in an equal partnership.

More likely, however, a hierarchy exists in which people occupy different positions and fulfill different roles. The person at the very top of any hierarchy, in the “leader” position, holds the ultimate responsibility for the success or failure of the entire team. Not everyone wants or can manage the responsibilities of leadership, and no one can

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lead without followers (team members), even if it's just one other person.

The power dynamics in any relationship will impact your efforts and results.

For every personal and professional relationship you have, who has the power? As proposed by famous social psychologists French and Raven,* a person's ability to influence and control others derives from one or more bases of power:

Legitimate - holds a position or title

Coercive - issues punishments

Reward - gives rewards

Expert - has valued experience and skills

Referent - relies on likability and respect

Informational - controls information

Is the most important and influential person serving in a leadership role, and if not, why not?

“Leadership is based on inspiration, not domination; on cooperation, not intimidation.” - William Arthur Wood

How does a leader achieve cooperation? What bases of power get used and how effective are they? Everyone has a role to play, even when doing the bare minimum like being informed or showing up. Consider these three sentences in the first-person voice:

1. I cooperated.
2. I cooperated on the project.
3. I cooperated with my team on the project.

These sentences suggest different roles, but none clarify what you actually did, and whether you did it willingly. That's because cooperation can be achieved in different ways, ranging from collaboration (working together) to coercion (forcing someone to assist, comply or obey).

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How do you best communicate your “cooperativeness” to others who don’t know you personally or professionally? Previously, I suggested using active verbs to more accurately describe yourself and your experiences when participating in interviews or writing your resume or bio. In a future column, I’ll provide more advice, but in the meanwhile, this list of “[Power Phrases to Build Your Resume](#)” (from Indiana University Southeast) makes expanding our vocabulary much easier.

*Read more about [the bases of power proposed by John R. P. French and Bertram H. Raven.](#)

If you’d like to share your experience and be featured in a future column, please email me at jaime@precisionnails.com.

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