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RESEARCH REPORT

POWER PRIMER

LIEUTENANT COLONEL J. CRAIG RAY

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AIR UNIVERSITY
UNITED STATES AIR FORCE
MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, ALABAMA

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AIR WAR COLLEGE
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POWER PRIMER

by

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A DEFENSE ANALYTICAL STUDY SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY
IN
FULFILLMENT OF THE CURRICULUM
REQUIREMENT

Advisor: Colonel Richard A. Steeves

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

TITLE: Power Primer

AUTHOR: J. Craig Ray, Lieutenant Colonel, USAF

Following an explanation of what power is and why it is necessary, the twelve sources of power are explained. As a person matures within an organization so does his use of power: power-giving, power-taking, and power-denying are the stages leading to the goal of power-sharing. Power is present in almost all organizations and is used by superiors, peers, and subordinates. Depending on the group, different power tactics are used much more often and are considered to be much more effective and more ethical than others. A knowledge of the personal traits most often found in powerful leaders can help you deal more effectively with these men and help you avoid the pitfalls and disadvantages these leaders often experience. Those in positions of power have certain responsibilities to their people, the organization, and those who will someday sit behind their desks. (1)



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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Colonel selectee J. Craig Ray was commissioned through OTS in 1969 after graduating from Marietta College in Ohio. He flew combat missions in Southeast Asia as a B-52G Navigator and was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for the December 1972 bombing of Hanoi. He has served as a Minuteman III Missile Combat Crew Commander and as an F-111E Weapons Systems Operator based in Europe. He has been assigned to the HQ USAFE staff at Ramstein Air Base, Germany, and to the Joint Staff in Washington, D.C. Colonel Ray received his M.B.A. from the University of Wyoming, is a graduate of the Armed Forces Staff College, and was a member of the Air War College class of 1989.

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I. INTRODUCTION

As your level of responsibility increases, so does your ability to influence--you have more power. It is important that senior leaders, both military and civilian, understand the derivation, development, and use of this ability. When coupled with an understanding of the personality traits frequently associated with senior leaders, it is apparent that there are certain pitfalls and disadvantages to be avoided as well as responsibilities to be accepted by those with power. This "Power Primer" will provide those on their way towards senior leadership a basic understanding of a very important management tool.

II. SOME BASIC DEFINITIONS--LET'S PUT

POWER IN PERSPECTIVE

After seeing many different definitions of power, I've decided that the most concise definition, valid across the entire spectrum, is the following: power is the ability to govern others' behavior despite their opposition. (5:45) It is simply the ability to get someone to do what you want by whatever means.

To many the term "power" has a negative connotation, but power itself is morally neutral. The possession of power is necessary for the execution of both good and bad plans.

The power drive accounts for ambition, competitiveness, and other qualities necessary for the emergence of leaders who are essential to the organization and functioning of any group. Without people willing to give orders and others willing to obey them, societies could not perform their essential internal functions or protect themselves against external threats. Bertrand Russell (1948) suggested that power in the social realm is analogous to energy in the physical realm. As with energy, the morality or immorality of power lies in the uses to which it is put. (6:338)

Authority is power based on the general agreement that a person or group has the right to give certain commands and those commands should be obeyed. Since social acceptance provides the basis for authority, any noncompliance is socially unacceptable. (11:99-100)

Politics is the use of power to make common decisions for a group. It always involves the use of power by one group over another and that power may take many forms. (11:6-7)

In a 9 December 1984 speech on "The Ethics of Power," Secretary of State George Schultz said that Americans mistakenly think of power and diplomacy as alternatives. Secretary Schultz believes they must go hand-in-hand, because power should be guided by a purpose and diplomacy not backed by strength is destined to be either ineffective or dangerous. According to Mr Schultz, "Our greatest challenge is to learn to use our power when it can do good. . . ." (9:13-15)

III. IS A BASIC UNDERSTANDING OF POWER REALLY
NECESSARY? ABSOLUTELY!

More and more we live, work, and play in an interdependent society that is part of an international community. Decisions can no longer be made in a vacuum and are seldom made by just one person. In today's environment, decisions are most often made by several people in positions of power, based on many, not so obvious, factors. When things of any magnitude are done, they are done by people who have power. (10:3) Power is a key ingredient for controlling resources, negotiating, establishing goals, and directing the energies of others toward those goals. Leaders who understand the practical uses of power can more efficiently plan for and act in all types of circumstances. (5:45)

Effective use of power in today's environment requires that a leader use a blend of managerial skill, psychological instinct, and persuasive ability to decide which decisions are critical and to build alliances and coalitions to get their ideas across. In the process, they often become better managers, more productive workers, and more persuasive decision-makers. (3:ix-xi)

IV. SOURCES OF POWER

Organizational Dynamics, Inc. (ODI) is an international management consulting and training firm whose clients include the US Air Force. They have identified five bases of social power which are used as the starting point for discussing leadership. The five kinds of power are:

1. Reward
2. Coercive
3. Referent
4. Expert
5. Legitimate (8:5-8)

The noted authorities in leadership research, Hershey and Blanchard, have defined seven bases of power. Their list includes the five sources listed by ODI plus the following two:

6. Information
7. Connection (2:16-17)

After 21 years at the Research Institute of America, Thomas L. Quick published a book on power in 1988 that identified and defined 12 sources of power. According to Quick, these 12 sources exist in virtually every organization structure--even one as bureaucratic as the military. Although each source is distinguishable, they are not entirely separate, but rather are interrelated in many cases. Often one source must be established before another can be built upon that base.

Quick's list includes all seven previously identified sources, and they will be identified by parentheses.

1. Competence (Expert)

- You must be good at what you do.
- This is the key to any power base.
- You can build a power base without "competence," but it won't last long. (10:44-45)

2. Personal (Referent)

- You must project power in the way you carry yourself, speak, and relate to those around you.
- Confidence is a key element.
- Speech, posture, and dress all help convey the image.
 - Write naturally in a style similar to your speaking style.
 - Be visible; let the organization know who you are. (10:51-61)

3. Assigned/Delegated (Legitimate)

- This is the authority and responsibility that has been granted from those above. (10:43)

4. Associative (Connection)

- This power comes from your association with powerful people or being identified with them.
- It should be drawn from multiple sources.
- It should be combined with other sources of power.
- It is especially useful while building your own power.

- Identify the power centers in your organization.
- Remember this is borrowed power. (10:71-74)

5. Resources (Information)

- You have resources (information) that others need and want.
- You must be able to market those resources. (10:79-82)

6. Alliance

- Alliance is power derived from allies within the organization who agree to join in a coalition with you.
- It is an informal arrangement designed to foster the well-being of the organization.
- It operates openly.
- It is an ongoing process. (10:82-83)

7. Reward

- You can give others something that they value.
- It can be as simple as praise.
- You should be discriminating--the reward must be based on real achievement. (10:89-94)

8. Professional

- This includes both credentials in your field and the respect of your peers.
- Both impress co-workers.
- Don't neglect your primary duties while pursuing outside accreditation. (10:94-104)

9. Availability

- Availability is being in the right place at the right time.
- It is periodic, but you must be ready to exploit the opportunity.
- It is having the right qualifications when someone recognizes a need. (10:105-106)

10. Autocratic (Coercive)

- This power comes from being unquestionably in charge. (10:44)

11. Charismatic/Visionary

- Your aura or vision inspires people to follow.
- You have the ability to get others to share your vision. (10:110-111)

12. Position

- Power is given your position on the organizational chart. (10:44)

In almost every organization there is unused power available in one of these 12 areas. By being aware of these various sources of power, you can determine when and how to expand your personal power base.

V. THE STAGES OF POWER DEVELOPMENT

As an individual's power base grows and develops, it typically passes through three separate stages before reaching the final stage of power sharing.

1. Power-Giving

- This initial stage is typified by giving in or yielding to another's point of view. This is done for a variety of reasons--ignorance, wanting to identify with another's power, empathizing with someone else, or yielding to another's assertion of power.
- It can be harmful when adopting another's point of view results in putting their priorities ahead of those charged to you.
- Power-giving is typically found when dealing with young, impressionable, less secure workers.

(4:199)

2. Power-Taking

- In this very common stage, an individual views the world only from his own point of view.
- This is a very competitive period because an individual in this stage is usually very self-confident and unwilling to consider different points of reference. (4:200)

3. Power-Denying

- This third stage is very difficult to identify because here individuals keep their objectives hidden.
- Power-denying enables an individual to maintain his viewpoint without getting involved in a dispute with a power-taker.
- People in this stage impede organizational progress because they stand between good ideas and implementation. They frequently object to form, not substance. (4:201)

4. Power-Sharing

- This is the goal. It involves using portions of the three previous stages--power-giving to see an issue from a different perspective; power-taking to present your point of view clearly enough for others to understand why you hold that viewpoint; and power-denying to avoid being dominated without causing a confrontation.
- Power-sharing is certainly desirable, but not normally achievable until the individual has experienced each of the three more competitive stages. (4:203-204)

An individual's development of a power base is a maturing process that takes time and experience.

VI. USES OF POWER

Power plays a significant role in a wide range of organizational situations. It is a recurring feature in most organizational interactions, is used by all employees at all levels, and is essential for pursuing and achieving organizational goals. (5:45)

A 1985 study by G. W. Fairholm showed that power tactics are used in all organizations and that these power tactics are used by subordinates, peers, and supervisors. It is interesting to note that power is used just as often in situations involving people on equal or higher levels as it is with people on lower levels. What does vary is the tactic. Although used at every level, different tactics are used with different levels. (5:45-47)

A review of Fairholm's study shows us what power tactics are used most often when dealing with superiors, peers, and subordinates.

POWER TACTICS WITH SUPERIORS

| Tactic | How Effective? | | Is It Ethical? | | | When Used? | |
|--------------------------------|------------------|-------------------------|----------------|----|---------|------------|----------------------|
| | Overall (rank)** | With Superiors (rank)** | Yes | No | Opinion | Initially | Following Resistance |
| 1. Using a proactive strategy* | 5 | 2 | X | | | X | |
| 2. Using outside experts | 9 | 3 | | X | | | X |
| 3. Displaying charisma | 4 | 1 | X | | | X | |
| 4. Rationalizing | 13 | 6 | | X | | | X |
| 5. Using ambiguity | 12 | 5 | X | | | X | |
| 6. Building a favorable image | 10 | 4 | X | | | X | |

* Listed according to frequency of use.

** Ranked according to relative degree of effectiveness

- The six tactics identified are those used most often.
- All are subtle tactics--none are blatant or formal.
- A proactive strategy is used most often, but
- Charisma is considered the most effective.
- Tactics are considered ethical, but using outside experts and rationalizing is uncomfortable.
- When initially approaching superiors, ethical tactics are used.
- If resistance is encountered, then more questionable tactics are used. (5:47-48)

POWER TACTICS WITH PEERS

| Tactic | How Effective? | | Is It Ethical? | | | When Used? | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|-------------------------|----------------|----|---------|------------|----------------------|
| | Overall (rank)** | With Superiors (rank)** | Yes | No | Opinion | Initially | Following Resistance |
| 1. Using "quid pro quo"* | 15 | 6 | | | X | X | |
| 2. Selectively allocating resources | 1 | 1 | X | | | X | |
| 3. Forming coalitions | 7 | 2 | X | | | | X |
| 4. Coopting opposition members | 8 | 3 | X | | | | X |
| 5. Incurring obligation | 20 | 8 | | X | | | X |
| 6. Using a surrogate | 11 | 5 | | | X | | X |
| 7. Controlling the agenda | 18 | 7 | | X | | | X |
| 8. Practicing brinkmanship | 22+ | 9+ | | X | | | X |
| 9. Building favorable image | 10 | 4 | X | | | X | |

* Listed according to frequency of use

** Ranked according to relative degree of effectiveness

+ Not effective

- Peers interact with each other most often by exchanging information and materials.
- Controlling resources is the tactic used most often to gain an advantage with peers.

- The tactic used most often, practicing brinksmanship, is the most ineffective and unethical.
 - The majority of peer-oriented tactics are used as reactions to resistance, not as initial approaches.
- (5:48-49)

POWER TACTICS WITH SUBORDINATES

| Tactic | How Effective? | | Is It Ethical? | | | When Used? | |
|---|------------------|-------------------------|----------------|----|------------|------------|----------------------|
| | Overall (rank)** | With Superiors (rank)** | Yes | No | No Opinion | Initially | Following Resistance |
| 1. Training and orientating others* | 3 | 2 | X | | | X | |
| 2. Developing others | 2 | 1 | X | | | X | |
| 3. Selectively dispensing rewards and punishments | 21+ | 9+ | | X | | | X |
| 4. Controlling decision criteria | 16 | 5 | X | | | X | |
| 5. Legitimizing control | 14 | 4 | | | X | | X |
| 6. Controlling organizational placements | 19 | 7 | | X | | X | |
| 7. Using symbols | 17 | 6 | | X | | X | |
| 8. Using rituals | 6 | 3 | X | | | X | |
| 9. Incurring obligation | 20 | 8 | | X | | | X |

* Listed according to frequency of use.

** Ranked according to relative degree of effectiveness

+ Not effective

- Emphasis is on traditional organizational approaches.
- It is characterized by displays of authority.
- The tactics used most often and considered the most effective, developing others and training and orienting others, are actually power-sharing techniques. By giving power to others, you actually get more powerful supporters. (5:48-49)

To obtain their objectives, people in all organizations use power. What tactic is used is dependent on the relationship between the individuals involved. By being aware of what tactics are used by what groups, a senior leader is in a better position to influence and avoid being influenced.

VII. CHARACTERISTICS OF POWERFUL LEADERS

An awareness of the personal traits most often found in powerful senior leaders can be very useful. On your way to senior leadership, you will be more apt to understand the leaders you encounter, and as a senior leader you can better manage the perception that others have of you.

Leadership. Men at the top of their various professions wouldn't be there if they didn't have a basic desire to lead. (6:338)

Toughness. The road to the top isn't usually an easy one; there are many defeats and setbacks along the way. To survive and keep going requires toughness.

This also means an ability to apply pressure to others when necessary; this equates to a low need for group affiliation. Most powerful men do not have a strong need to love or be loved--they stand aloof. (6:338)

Persuasiveness. An ability to persuade others is also an essential and common trait. It is important to be able to win and hold followers. A common spin-off is the simultaneous convincing of yourself--potentially dangerous if it results in being close-minded. (6:338)

Optimism. This ability to maintain conviction and drive in the face of adversity is what keeps powerful men pressing forward. (6:339)

Suspicious. When every situation is defined as one of the four stages of power (giving, taking, denying, or sharing), then to be suspicious of others is survival.

Powerful leaders know the value of controlling information, even if it means being deceitful. This makes them suspicious of those who might use similar tactics with them. (6:339)

Competitiveness. Characteristic of bureaucrats is the desire to increase the size and power of the departments they control. Competition within the military is especially keen because individuals who choose military careers typically have strong power drives. (6:339)

Ability To Handle Stress. Finally, because of the many pressures that must be dealt with during their climb to the top, senior leaders could not have reached those positions unless they could keep sound judgment under stress. (6:341)

VIII. PITFALLS TO BE AVOIDED

It is just as useful to be aware of the undesirable traits that are often associated with powerful men in leadership positions. The list certainly isn't complete; it touches only those pitfalls most frequently found.

Rage. Those with a strong drive for power inevitably encounter others with similar drives. The result is frustration, and frustration leads to rage. Defiance is especially difficult for powerful men to deal with. (6:341)

Fear. This is not fear as a perception of physical danger, but fear of the loss of power. This type of fear often leads to serious mistakes in judgment. (6:341)

Obstinacy. More leaders have had to relinquish their power because of pursuing a wrong course of action in the face of mounting evidence that it is indeed wrong than from errors in judgment. History is full of examples of fallen leaders who were too obstinate to see the obvious. (6:341)

Support of Followers. Leaders get support from their followers; and to further their own positions of power, followers tell the leader what they think he wants to hear. (6:341)

Grandiosity. After a series of successes and/or a rapid rise to power, leaders sometimes begin to believe they are infallible and invincible. The result is often that they overextend themselves. (6:341)

IX. THE DISADVANTAGES OF BEING POWERFUL

Although life at the top of the power structure looks very appealing, because of the various amenities associated with these positions, there are disadvantages. Don't be disillusioned; know what to expect.

Isolation. The distance between executives and those below is great. The result is that senior leaders have a hard time finding out what is really going on in the organization. Nobody likes to give the boss bad news, so they don't. (1:36)

Fishbowl Living. Absolutely every act is scrutinized and interpreted. The senior leader gives up a large portion of his private life. (1:36)

Limited Job Security. The consequences of falling out of favor are severe. Also, there is very little latitude for making mistakes, even small ones, when you are a senior leader. A common off-shoot is that those at the top frequently worry more about what they have to lose instead of what they are trying to do for the organization. (1:36)

X. THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF HAVING AND USING POWER

If we accept the premise that power is morally neutral, and if we agree with the 41st President of the United States, whose first words following his taking of the Oath of Office on 20 January 1989 were to pray for help "to use power to help people, for there is but one just use of power--to help people", then there are certain responsibilities coincident with being powerful.

Taking care of our employees must be one of the foremost responsibilities. In any organization, military or civilian, taking care of employees has a direct effect on both productivity and profits. This area of responsibility must be attended to with conviction; otherwise, the efforts will appear to be superficial and the effects diminished. A noted business consultant and author says:

The leaders who articulated and practiced philosophies of benevolence toward their employees were moved by deep caring and a sense of personal responsibility. They did not take care of their employees primarily because they thought it was good business to do so; rather, it became good business because they did it with heart. (7:xii)

Being powerful does not necessarily mean a leader needs to be autocratic. Too much control has the unintended side effect of increasing people's feelings of dependency. (1:31) This, in turn, stifles self-expression. Those in power have a responsibility to motivate and energize those

working for them; and an essential aspect of this is creating an atmosphere that fosters self-expression. (1:26)

Regardless of the organization involved, one of the most important responsibilities of those in powerful positions is to serve the organization first and put personal advancement second. (1:80) The advantages are:

- We commit to the pursuit of substance over form. (1:81)
- By focusing on making a contribution, we don't waste time and effort fighting the common control and territory battles. (1:82)
- We tell the organization exactly what we believe in and where we stand. It is much easier to hold onto our integrity. (1:84)
- We tend to make a positive impact on others. (1:84)
- We learn much more about the activity in which we are engaged (competence power increases). (1:86)

By putting the organization first, a senior leader conveys a sense of vision, sets an example for others to follow, conserves time and energy, and actually increases his various sources of power. (1:89)

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, those leaders in powerful positions have a responsibility to fulfill the role of the mentor. Like leadership, the use of power is a combination of learning and experience. To ensure that future leaders understand and use their power to benefit others,

every manager, supervisor, and leader must be a mentor for his or her subordinates. (1:250) Yes, it does take some time and effort; but, basically, being a mentor is easy--just be a living example of everything you teach. (1:251)

XI. NOW WE KNOW MORE ABOUT POWER THAN WE
EVER WANTED TO--SO WHAT?

Dr Barton I. Michelson, an Air War College faculty member, teaches a course about "Executive Power and Influence" in which two key assumptions provide the framework for the course:

1. Power is a positive force in exercising executive leadership.
2. Power-oriented commanders tend to be more effective leaders.

If you accept these two assumptions, as I do, then now is the time to ask yourself some of the same questions that Dr Michelson asks his students to consider:

- Do you have the capacity to acquire and maintain power-oriented behavior?
- Do you have the skills necessary to develop the appropriate power bases?
- What changes in your current profile are required to more effectively use power?

Now is the time to consider all aspects of power (including sources, uses, and impacts) so you'll be better prepared to lead your new organization more effectively. This is the time to develop your individual strategy to integrate your power

orientation with your style of leadership so you are consistent in your actions.

Inherent to this process is a review of the 12 sources of power. The advantage is twofold; you'll know when and how to use each of the various sources of power, and you'll know when to allow others to use a particular source of power with you. Additionally, don't forget how important personal (or referent) power is. Everytime you exercise power, or allow it to be used by someone else, it affects your personal power. Developing personal power is a quality critical to being an effective leader.

By reviewing the four stages of power development (giving, taking, denying, and sharing), you'll be able to identify where you are in the process. If you're not at the sharing stage of power development, which should be your goal, you'll be able to decide if you can get there and be comfortable. If you are there, you'll be able to identify those who are at different stages of power development and be able to temporarily move to a different stage yourself, if the situation requires it. A knowledge of the various stages will also help you avoid being manipulated by others.

Regardless of your rank or position in the organization, you will always have superiors, peers, and subordinates. As a result, you will constantly be using various power tactics when dealing with others, while they will be using similar tactics

with you. Since different power tactics have been identified as being used more often and more effectively with certain groups, an understanding of these tactics will help you influence others--which is what power is all about--and should help you be aware of when others are using these tactics to influence you.

As you consider your ability to acquire and use power, you should compare your personality traits against those most often found in powerful senior leaders. If you don't have many of the commonly found traits, can you comfortably change and do you want to change? If the answer is no, you can still be a powerful leader, but the odds are not in your favor.

By being aware of the pitfalls most often found in powerful men, you can hopefully avoid being so overcome with your power that you cease working for the good of the organization. Once power becomes a goal in itself, or you start believing you can't be wrong, or your subordinates begin telling you what they think you want to hear, you are well on your way to abusing your power and becoming ineffective as a leader.

If you are not willing to accept the disadvantages that accompany life at the top of the power spectrum (such as isolation, fishbowl living, and limited job security), now is the time to find out. Consider the disadvantages as you question your ability to acquire and maintain power-oriented behavior.

Finally, as you consider the various aspects of power and your capability to acquire, maintain, and use power,

remember that there are certain inherent responsibilities. A good leader will never forget that the organization comes first. You should take care of your employees and help prepare the group to accept greater responsibility and independence. As you move the group closer to independence, the greater the opportunities for creativity, innovation, and flexibility. To use power effectively, it must be exercised with care and responsibility, which requires an understanding of what power is and how to use it.

XII. CONCLUSION

Power, the ability to control others' behavior despite their opposition, plays an important role in almost all organizations. A basic understanding of why power is necessary, where it comes from, how it develops, and what power tactics are most often used in various situations can help leaders achieve their goals. An understanding of the characteristics often found in powerful leaders can help those on their way to powerful leadership positions to avoid some common pitfalls and disadvantages that come with having power. Once in these leadership positions, powerful men have a responsibility to look after their people, pursue organizational over personal goals, act as a mentor for their subordinates, and be a living example of what they teach. If power is to be used to help people, which according to President Bush is the only just use of power, then it is in a leader's best interest to understand the capability he has available.

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