

Ten Types of Power

Several types of power can influence the outcome of a negotiation. We emphasize the word “can,” because if you have power but don’t use it, the power adds no value to the negotiation.

1. **Position.** Some measure of power is conferred on the basis of one’s formal position in an organization. For example, a marketing manager can influence the decisions that affect the marketing department. However, the marketing manager has little power to influence the decisions that affect the finance department.

2. **Knowledge or expertise.** People who have knowledge or expertise can wield tremendous power. Of course, knowledge in itself is not powerful. It is the use of knowledge and expertise that confers power. Thus, you could be an incredibly bright person and still be powerless.

3. **Character or ethics.** The more trustworthy individuals are, the more power they have in negotiations. The big issue here is whether they do what they say they are going to do—even when they no longer feel like doing it.

4. **Rewards.** People who are able to bestow rewards or perceived rewards hold power. Supervisors, with their ability to give raises, hold power over employees. Money can have power. But money, like anything else, holds very little power if it is not distributed.

5. **Punishment.** Those who have the ability to create a negative outcome for a counterpart have the power of punishment. Managers who have the authority to reprimand and fire employees hold this type of power. State troopers and highway patrol officers who have the ability to give out speeding tickets also have this power.

6. **Gender.** Dealing with someone of the opposite sex can confer power. We have videotaped many negotiation case studies in which the turning point came when a woman casually touched a man’s hand or arm to make her point.

7. **Powerlessness.** In some instances, giving up all power can be very powerful. If a kidnapper threatens a hostage with death enough times, the hostage may just challenge the kidnapper to go ahead and kill him. At the point that the hostage gives up power, or control over his own death, the kidnapper actually loses power.

8. **Charisma or personal power.** When we ask participants in our seminars for examples of leaders who have had charisma or personal power, invariably the names of Mother Teresa, John F. Kennedy, and Ronald Reagan come up. When we ask, "What do all three of these leaders have in common?" participants usually respond, "Passion and confidence in what they believe in."

9. **Lack of interest or desire.** In negotiations, as in many other areas of life, the side with the least interest in what is being negotiated holds the most power. If you are buying a house and you really do not care if you purchase the house you are currently negotiating for or the one down the street, you will most likely hold more power in the negotiation—unless, of course, the sellers could care less if they sell the house today or live in it for another ten years!

10. **Craziness.** This may sound funny, but bizarre or irrational behavior can confer a tremendous amount of power. Every organization has someone who blows up or behaves irrationally when confronted with problems. Those who have been exposed to this type of behavior tend to avoid such individuals. As a result, these individuals are not given many tasks to accomplish because others are afraid to ask them.