



FINDING YOUR POWERPRINT: VALUING AND UTILIZING YOUR POWERS

Developing a robust sense of power that is available to you across the many, challenging contexts of your work and life begins with knowing and developing your various **powers**—with an “s.”

While power is often described in black and white terms—either one has it or doesn’t—power is actually a complex system, a collection of different powers based on things such as personality, life experiences, social status and position, physical and mental health, attachment to community and family, and even birth order. This complex system is a *Powerprint*: an intricate and completely individual mix of life experiences, traits, abilities, and social status that we bring with us into our roles of authority. It consists of various kinds of power:

> **Social Power** draws its value from social norms and settings. It includes social status, social identity, positional power, and informal power. Social power is partially earned and partially inherited. The different social powers are:

- **Social status.** Power exists within a global fabric. Society bestows advantage by virtue of social identity—attributes like race, gender, class, religion, nationality, ethnicity, education, physical and mental ability, and gender and sexual orientation. Social status plays a major role, though not the only role, in the opportunities and outcomes we have in life: education, income, employment, health, and life expectancy.
- **Position.** Positional power is the formal role we occupy in a group or organization such as a workplace, volunteer association, club, place of worship, or political group.
- **Informal or contextual.** We belong to many different groups, and while they may not have formal roles, they do have an unspoken, informal ranking system based on things like popularity, seniority, alliances, or expertise and skill. Our ranking comes from our ability to successfully align with the norms and values of the group.

> **Historical Power** refers to the sense of rank we internalized in childhood. We grow up in a context of power—in a family, school, neighborhood, community and society. Though growing up is often—but not always—a gain in rank, we’re still subject to the lingering effects of childhood. For some people, historical power is a set of advantages they carry forward, which stem from feeling supported, loved, and empowered. This may be reflected as a sense of confidence and security. Yet challenges and difficulties can also result in a set of advantages, such as resilience and determination from having



overcome obstacles. Other times, the sufferings in childhood still carry scars which diminish one’s sense of power and efficacy well into adulthood.

> **Personal Power** can be described colloquially as what we use to “get by” in life. It includes our ability to make and keep friends, negotiate conflict, promote our interests to our advantage, cope with challenge, learn from difficulties, bounce back from setbacks, and be sustained by a sense of purpose and meaning in life.

Personal power is both innate and developed. It derives from traits we’re born with, as well as experience—the skills and abilities we’ve developed over the course of a lifetime. Any life experience, any personality trait, can be a source of personal power; it depends on your ability to develop it and use it to your advantage.

ACTIVITY: CONSIDER YOUR POWERPRINT

Look at each category of power in **Column A** and read through the questions in **Column B** to help you consider your power. These questions are prompts, not a conclusive list, to help you think about the power you have.

In **Column C**, consider both the *Strengths* (assets, gifts, benefits) and *Opportunities* (challenges, liabilities, difficulties) of each power. Note the word “Opportunity”: Where things are difficult, you have the greatest opportunity to learn something new. It may feel hard, but it’s a big source of learning, and potential future strength.

Finally, in **Column D**, note down how you sense that strength and/or opportunity influencing you in your role of power today. What advantage do you notice and benefit from, and what liability or disadvantage may linger?

A. POWER	B. CONSIDER	C. STRENGTH / OPPORTUNITY	D. HOW DOES IT INFLUENCE YOU?
Social: Positional	What status does your position give you? How do you feel in that role?		
Social: Status	What ease or advantage do you enjoy and benefit from due to your social status? What difficulties and obstacles do you face by virtue of lower social status?		



Social: Informal	Do you feel valued or devalued in the groups you belong to? What skills, resources, abilities, or personality traits contribute to that feeling?		
Historic	What experiences did you have as a child that left you feeling weak or vulnerable? What experiences made you feel empowered, strong, and confident?		
Personal	What inner resources help you succeed at work, make friends, manage difficult moods, deal with difficult people, and cope with life's daily challenges?		

SUMMARIZE YOUR STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES

As you reflected on the powers above, you may have noticed both positive and negative experiences related to each power. You may also have observed **themes**—strengths and liabilities that recur, even though they stem from different sources of power. In the chart on the next page, summarize the themes that emerged related to your core strengths and opportunities.



<p>What strengths do you notice? What strengths, advantages, and abilities that show up, regardless of the power categories?</p>	
<p>What opportunities do you notice—challenges, weaknesses, or liabilities?</p>	
<p>What are your core strengths to leverage?</p>	
<p>What are some new powers or advantages you may not have realized, which you can better employ?</p>	
<p>What are the core areas of difficulty and liabilities to watch out for?</p>	