

Want To Be A Powerful Business Or Political Leader? Better Get Out Of Your Own Way!

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Modesty is fine once your accomplishments are well-recognized but not early in your career. He has since then redone his profile and started exhibiting a more confident, powerful-appearing persona that influenced how others saw him.



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21 January, 2021 by Dr M Muneer , Jeffrey Pfeffer

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Whenever people make statements about wanting to usher in meaningful changes to the trajectory of their lives, their organisations or the world, they always converge on one topic: *Power*.

Power is a fundamental dimension of organisational and social life. Yet, as Rosabeth Kanter described years ago, power is a topic that makes people uncomfortable – one that they sometimes shy away from. Is this a reason that so many otherwise promising careers get derailed by political setbacks?

Understand that power is one of the most important social forces. Regardless of any momentary discomfort, it is essential for accomplishing any chance. Learning, after all, often involves challenging assumptions and taking people out of their comfort zones.

Power shouldn't make us uncomfortable. It's foundational to success at work – for CEOs, political leaders, managers and new recruits, alike. In fact, research by a Florida State professor shows that possessing political skill – the ability to develop and wield power effectively – led to better performance, employee support, and dimensions of success including compensation, promotion, and career and life satisfaction

Having worked with a multitude of people from around the globe, we can tell you that the people themselves are often their own biggest barrier to achieving the power and the positions that they seek. We believe power is very important to the success of people at work, politics or personal life.

Here are four things you can do to unleash yourself and become the more powerful person living inside you:

1. Pay Attention to How You Define Yourself. We know of an IIT gold medalist who went to Stanford to do his masters in AI and had landed a topnotch job but his LinkedIn profile and CV were very matter-of-fact. He felt he could have done more courses at Stanford and that he was not much of an expert in his chosen field despite the fact that he was chosen as a research assistant in his first term itself by one of the top professors for a coveted project. He also had two patents under his belt before taking up a cushy job at a global blue chip.

One of us probed why he didn't feel the need to talk boldly about his achievements and it appeared he was misled by the notion



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of modesty, given his Indian middleclass background. Modesty is fine once your accomplishments are well-recognised but not early in your career. He has since then redone his profile and started exhibiting a more confident, powerful-appearing persona that influenced how others saw him.

Those who believe modesty is a virtue often self-deprecate, fail to promote their accomplishments and act in ways that give away their power. Don't be one of those people. If you do not think you are up to the task or qualified, others will pick it up. Don't self-handicap yourself by being unwilling to lean into your many skills.

We asked a spokesperson of India's Congress Party what [Rahul Gandhi](#) defined himself as. We could not figure out given his reluctant entry to politics, refusal to accountability, the way he articulated his points and the overall lack of consistent stance on political strategy. However, there has been no response from the party, arguably because they are as clueless as most Indians are. If only he had brought out the real powerful persona that hides inside him – For instance, he is one of the most voracious readers in Indian politics, is born into a powerful family and has no burden of corruption personally. But then what Obama observed about him in his book may be still valid – an eager-to-please 55-year old student?

2. Don't Accept Other-Imposed Constraints. We know closely at least three women leaders who broke the glass ceiling to run their respective global conglomerates at young age. Their common quality is their absolute unwillingness to conform to gender-norm expectations – or to let others impose constraints on who they are and what they can (and will) do.

As one of them puts in a recent email: "I don't choose to be relegated to a lower status role. I have no problem challenging people or making them rethink their assumptions. There are many examples – you are a woman or you are a surgeon. I don't feel like I have to "stay in my lane." The head honcho who hired me asked me, 'Do you not see the boundaries between disciplines?' I replied, 'No, why should I?'"

This leader is currently running an adaptive drug design study for COVID-19 although she is a breast cancer surgeon. If you have something you think you can contribute to a decision, refuse to let others define you out of it.

3. Stop Worrying About Being Liked. People worry too much about being liked. Look at most leaders you see around you today. If you want to be liked, get a dog. A dog will love you unconditionally.

Some elected leaders like Trump and Modi are not worried about alienating some folks for their power although Modi seems to be concerned about being liked by the world leaders, going by his actions.

On the other hand, in enterprises, you are not hired to win a popularity contest. Your responsibility is to get things done and make the enterprise successful. Many CEOs of startups including those of Zomato and Tesla never feared taking hard decisions and had been publicly vocal about not being worried to be disliked by many.

We have seen in a study that when people's outcomes – their rewards, their success – depended on the overall success of the group, they were willing to prioritise competence over sociability (niceness) in choosing people to work with. Fundamentally, people love to be part of a winning effort. Your first responsibility as a leader is to produce success, not to be loved – or loveable.

4. Don't Let Unfairness Become an Excuse. There are at least two ways to respond to any unjustness – gender- and race/caste-based discrimination, for instance – that remains all too pervasive. One is to use being unfairly treated as an excuse. Instead, reframe things in ways that tell you what to do. If being an "only" makes you stand out, use that uniqueness to your advantage.

It may be comfortable to self-handicap and to make excuses – but it diminishes the likelihood of achieving power. Power is leverage – including leverage to change things for the better. Power accelerates careers, permits the accomplishment of great, bold things and increases life satisfaction.

It's crucial to understand that one of the biggest barriers to building and using power is our own feelings – and our reluctance to build and use influence. Remember, the first rule of power is to get out of your own way. The most powerful people describe themselves as fearless, shameless, bold, and brave. They have gotten out of their own way by losing the scripts that hold them back, and you can, too

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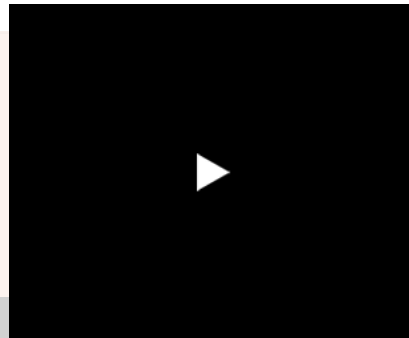
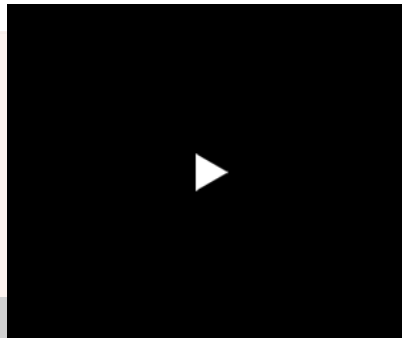
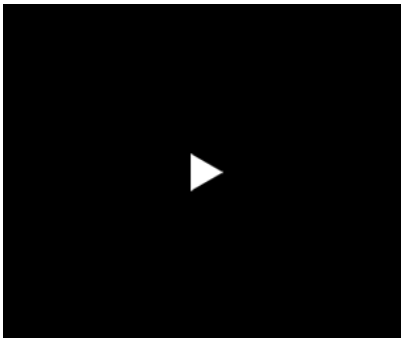
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