**Relationship, Person, and Message Power**

12.2 Describe the types of power that reside in the relationship, in the person, and in the message and some of the ways to resist influence. For convenience we can consider these strategies under three headings that are particularly appropriate to an interpersonal communication analysis of power: (1) power in the relationship, (2) power in the person, and (3) power in the message. In the final section in this part of the chapter, we address the issue of resisting power and influence, or what is commonly called compliance-gaining.

**Power in the Relationship**

The bases of relationship power, research shows, can be conveniently classified into six types: referent, legitimate, expert, information or persuasion, reward, and coercive (French & Raven, 1968; Raven, Centers, & Rodrigues, 1975; Raven, Schwarzwald, & Koslowsky, 1998). Each of these types of power offers a way of exerting influence or gaining compliance. Before reading about these types of power, consider your interpersonal power by responding to the following statements. Respond on a 10-point scale in terms of how accurately each statement describes you (10 = very accurate).

\_\_\_\_ 1. People wish to be like me or to be identified with me. For example, high school football players may admire the former professional football player who is now their coach and may want to be like him. \_\_\_\_ 2. My position is such that I often have to tell others what to do. For example, a mother’s position demands that she tell her children what to do, a manager’s position demands that he or she tell employees what to do, and so on.

\_\_\_\_ 3. Other people realize that I have expertise in certain areas of knowledge. For example, a doctor has expertise in medicine, so others turn to the doctor to tell them what to do. Someone knowledgeable about computers similarly possesses expertise.

\_\_\_\_ 4. People realize that I possess the communication ability to present an argument logically and persuasively. For example, a competent and persuasive leader will be given greater power than one less competent.

\_\_\_\_ 5. People see me as having the ability to give them what they want. For example, employers have the ability to give their employees higher pay, longer vacations, and better working conditions.

\_\_\_\_ 6. People see me as having the ability to administer punishment or to withhold things they want. For example, employers have the ability to reduce voluntary overtime, to shorten vacation time, or to fail to improve working conditions.

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These statements refer to the six major types of power discussed in this section. Low scores (say, 1s, 2s, and 3s) indicate your belief that you possess little of the types of power indicated; high scores (8s, 9s, and 10s) indicate your belief that you possess a great deal of those types of power. Referent Power If you can establish referent power over others (item 1 in the self-test) and make others wish to be like you or to be identified with you, you’ll more easily gain their compliance. Referent power is the kind of power an older brother may have over a younger brother because the younger brother wants to be like him. The assumption made by the younger brother is that he will be more like his older brother if he believes and behaves as his brother does. Once he decides to do so, it takes little effort for the older brother to exert influence over or gain compliance from the younger sibling. Referent power depends greatly on attractiveness and prestige; as they increase, so does identification and consequently your power to gain compliance. When you are well-liked and well-respected, are of the same gender as the other person, and have the same attitudes and experiences as the other person, your referent power is especially great. Legitimate Power If you are seen as having legitimate power over others (item 2 in the self-test)—if others believe you have the right, by virtue of your position, to influence or control their behavior—they’ll logically be ready to comply with your requests. Legitimate power stems from our belief that certain people should have power over us, that they have a right to influence us because of who they are. Legitimate power usually derives from the roles that people occupy. Teachers are often perceived to have legitimate power—and this is doubly true for religious teachers. Parents are seen as having legitimate power over their children. Employers, judges, managers, doctors, and police officers are others who hold legitimate power in different areas. expert Power You have expert power over others (item 3 in the self-test) when you are seen as having expertise or knowledge. Your knowledge—as perceived by others—gives you expert power. Usually expert power is subject-specific. For example, when you’re ill, you’re influenced by the recommendation of someone with expert power related to your illness—say, a doctor. But you would not be influenced by the recommendation of someone to whom you don’t attribute illness-related expert power—say, the mail carrier or a plumber. You give the lawyer expert power in matters of law and the psychiatrist expert power in matters of the mind, but ideally you don’t interchange them. Your expert power increases when you’re seen as unbiased and as having nothing to gain personally from influencing others. It decreases when you’re seen as biased or as having something to gain from influencing others. information or Persuasion Power You have information or persuasion power over others (item 4 in the self-test) when others see you as having the ability to communicate logically and persuasively. If others believe that you have persuasive ability, then you have persuasion power—the power to influence others’ attitudes and behavior. If you’re seen as possessing significant information and the ability to use that information to gain compliance by presenting a well-reasoned argument, then you have information power. Reward and Coercive Powers You have reward power over others (item 5 in the self-test) if you have the ability to reward people. Rewards may be material

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