

# EMPOWER YOUR LEADERSHIP

Questions of Power to Create  
What Matters

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## POWERFUL TIMES

We live in powerful times. Realities of having or not having power shape our lives. Powerfully. Power struggles, power wars, power moves are conditioned into our language, our behavior, our identities, and our beliefs about how the world works. Power becomes a story about who we are and what is possible for us. Significantly, our relationship to power is often indistinguishable from our relationship to leadership.

Our powerful times call for reframing and redirecting power for ourselves and in leadership. While we may not be “wired” to embrace change, our human journey is all about it. Any leader needs plenty of personal power to juggle multiple commitments, overcome obstacles, and gain support for creating outcomes that really matter. Especially in these times of change that is often chaotic, complex, and defies control, leaders who by their presence and competency build trust quickly and inspire purposefully creative collaboration make a meaningful difference.

Possibly like you, I am entranced, curious, and troubled by power. Power, itself, may be neutral but the way humans direct and use it is not. On any given day or in any given situation, we can feel powerful, powerless, overpowered, underpowered, disempowered, or empowered. What does that really mean? How can we be better with this, grow into it, and use our power for the better? Questions of power can seem so obvious or self-evident as to require no reflection or mention. But if power is life energy, then what relationship do I and do we need with power to lead our lives well?

We know the power of a clear, committed “yes” or “no.” We know the power of not knowing and engaging anyway. For some, there is power in a sparkling conversation about controversial ideas or creating harmony, beauty, and resonance from the impossible.

# Empower Your Leadership

Questions about power can make and unmake a life. They are the kinds of questions that poet David Whyte might say “have no right to go away.”

In a world obsessed with “effective” action, more is required of us all. The power to be “effective” can be used for good or ill.

“Effective” simply means something was successful in producing the desired or intended result. That result could be enliveningly generative or appallingly degenerate.

Our bigger challenge – especially in these powerful times – is to call forth other qualities in leadership to reach beyond “effective.” Work improves in every way when it has meaning. Powerful times call for more empowered leadership that creates meaningful outcomes. Outcomes to live for.

Wherever you lead – whether as effectively as you wish or not – you have power. Power arises from meaning.

Here are two questions to ponder as we begin:

- **What makes you a powerful leader?**
- **What would be different if you were an even more empowered leader?**

Sometimes  
if you move carefully  
through the forest

breathing  
like the ones  
in the old stories

who could cross  
a shimmering bed of dry leaves  
without a sound,

you come  
to a place  
whose only task

is to trouble you  
with tiny  
but frightening requests

conceived out of nowhere  
but in this place  
beginning to lead everywhere.

Requests to stop what  
you are doing right now,  
and

to stop what you  
are becoming  
while you do it,

questions  
that can make  
or unmake  
a life,

questions  
that have patiently  
waited for you,

questions  
that have no right  
to go away.

David Whyte

I offer my reflections and questions here to give you pause. Pause and some places to look, but not necessarily answers. As you reflect on these questions, maybe a greater curiosity and openness will arise. May you see with new eyes, bringing a different quality of light into a challenging or dark place. We all have power for life and are here to grow and evolve. What does it take to invite and embody the humanizing and ennobling qualities of wisdom, integrity, courage, dignity, humility, and compassion to flourish as we live and lead?

## CHOOSING TO LEAD

You can approach the idea, cultivation, and exercise of power in many ways. Wherever you are in your evolution as a leader, power will always be at play. How you engage in “power plays” will become part of your identity, your effectiveness in negotiating conflict, commitment, and change. The politics of power are an integral part of leading, like it or not.

Empowering yourself to contribute and create what matters is the point of leading. Power is something that any person may crave or fear. As a leader, you generate and direct the power to act and create. What is the nature of power? Who has it? How do they get it and use it? Power, whether used for good and ill, shapes people and can transform a situation and our future. In order to be an effective leader, it is important to know the sources of our power and be able to call upon them skillfully at will.

A great capacity for change lives in each of us. All change results from a change in meaning. People change when they decide that change is meaningful to who they are. Empowering your leadership starts there.

## Empower Your Leadership

We each have early experiences and memories of power used for and against us. What in your life contributed to a healthy sense of power as you were growing up? If you have an ambivalent or challenging relationship with power – your own power or that of others – you are in the best of company. Many accomplished professionals I know and have coached did not want to be leaders. They had the expertise and desire to create and contribute in meaningful ways. They wanted to advance in their careers, participate in decision making, and shape their future. But they did not want to lead. Why?

In my experience working with such individuals, this discomfort with identifying themselves or being identified by others as a “leader” has deep roots. Those roots may relate to a distorted understanding or experience of their own power. They may fear becoming “too powerful.” They distrust having the “wrong kind” of power or are wary about misusing the power they may have. Stuck in this ambivalence, they leave something important on the table and that can cause real difficulty for themselves and others.

You surely also know women and men who are hungry for the power inherent in leadership. This, too, can be rooted in a distorted understanding and experience of power. While their actions may have good intentions, they may become blind or callous to their impact on others. They can be stuck in a “never enough” race to acquire ever more power in order to make things happen and have their way. An overreliance on what feels “powerful” can come at great cost and cause real difficulty, just as a disidentification with power can.

Where the use of power creates a win/lose dichotomy, a conflict, or a sense of victimization, we adapt. Reacting to the threat of power, we reflexively shape ourselves to fight, flee, or freeze. We might tend and befriend. In some way – adaptive or not – we organize ourselves to take care of our safety, belonging, and dignity. We may learn to acquire more power or become more powerful, perhaps at the expense of the safety, belonging, dignity, or even the livelihood and life of another.

Typically, we celebrate when the exercise of power generates physical and emotional exhilaration together with an enhanced sense of accomplishment and growth in personal identity. As much as there can be discipline and triumph in “powering through” or “powering on” there can also be abuse and burnout. How many change initiatives (fire drills!) have you been part of where there was no clear vision beyond “we just need change!”? What begins with good intentions becomes oscillating churn without meaningful purpose and is ultimately draining, alienating, and damaging. Power as a contest of winning and losing is a limiting setup. Leaders, while “on board” with winning or achieving on purpose, also struggle to navigate the complexities of people and life, including the impacts of loss, illusion of control, and the ever-present yearnings of the human spirit.

Consider the times you have celebrated when the exercise of power is about liberation, dignity in adversity, and the experience of gratitude and awe. In truth, there is much more to power. There is much more to any person's power to lead.

## POWER TO LEAD

Leadership is ultimately about the release of human possibility, a way of being in action.

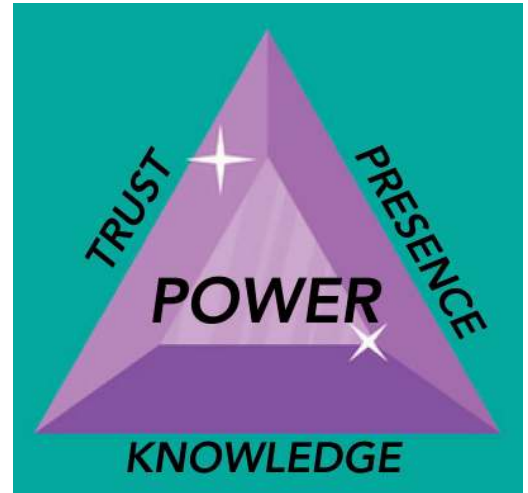
Leading is a relationship. You lead yourself. You lead over others. You lead with others.

In its essence, leadership consists of the principles, attitudes, and competencies that harness and integrate the knowledge, trust, presence, and power to accomplish something on purpose. Whether you consider leadership from a behavioral or developmental perspective, the necessary competencies for leading will somehow always touch on these four.

You might think of them like facets of a gem. We experience, express, polish, and shine all four at different levels of human development and in every possible context.

# Empower Your Leadership

- What **knowledge** – the cognitive intelligence and competency – is required to lead well where you are?
- To what extent do you **trust** yourself and do others trust you to lead through “thick and thin?”
- What **presence** – qualities of embodiment, consciousness, etc. – do you cultivate in yourself and with others as you lead?
- What is your **power** to lead, why do you have it, and what do you do with it?



It feels so good to work with a really good leader. An empowered leader. Someone who's competence you trust and respect. Someone who communicates a vision that involves and inspires you, a vision that directs people and resources in a process and towards an outcome that has the promise to touch and improve life. Someone who makes and fulfills agreements for a sense of accomplishment as well as for learning and growth. Someone who appreciates the value of your contributions and recognizes each person's significance in the web of relationships that make any venture succeed. Someone who elicits leadership and “best self” qualities from others, especially when the pressure's on. Someone you want to move towards, out of a sense of affinity for who that person is, what they stand for, and what gets created when they lead and you work together.

All leadership is an interplay between a ME and a WE. ME-centric and WE-centric approaches to leading are like tuning into two different radio stations. Which creates more dissonance or resonance?

- WIIFME - What's in it for me
- WIIFWE - What's in it for we

# Empower Your Leadership

Power in leadership often implies a contest. The fact of a contest might be meaningful in itself, but that eventually wears thin absent more substantial meaning. Yes, you can use your available power to gain the upper hand but for the sake of what? What happens to the ongoing relationship? What are the price and prize of either winning or losing?

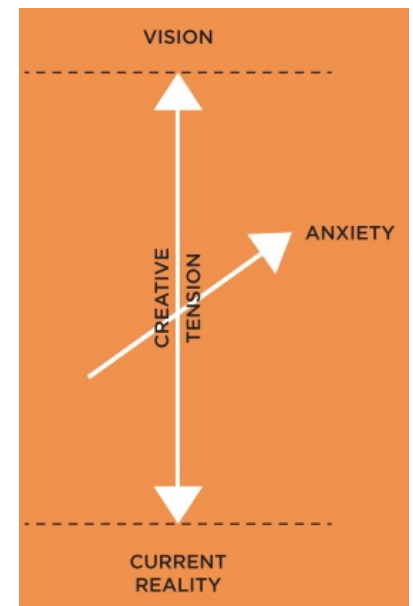
- Why should anyone be led by you? When you lead, who follows you and why? How and when is that meaningful and satisfying?
- Why should you follow anyone else? When you follow another's lead, what makes that a strong, reluctant, or mixed "yes" for you? How about for them?



Leading, you move yourself and others into action to create on purpose. We are constantly called to be in relationship – to information, people, events, ideas, and with life. The quality of those relationships and what they can produce depends on our awareness: what we choose to notice or ignore.

Your leadership challenge is to work – or play – ever more skillfully with **Creative Tension**. Creative Tension describes the gap between your current reality and your vision. How do you best catalyze and guide change that is strategic, meaningful, adaptive, and fulfilling? Creative Tension is an energy you can direct for power. You work with it both within yourself and with others.

*(See Mastering Leadership – Anderson & Adams, 2016)*





What do you draw upon within yourself and with others when leading is complex and difficult?

Wherever you lead, you are surely already oriented for high performance and excellence in your field of expertise. That keeps you at your creative, leading edge as an expert. Competence as a subject-matter expert and leadership mastery are not the same thing. Imagine what might be possible if you more consistently embodied both. Empowered leadership focuses on what I call **CompetencePLUS**. The **Competence** qualifies you at a level of expertise and in a position for leading. The **PLUS** evolves your leadership knowledge, trust, presence, and power for navigating the unknown in powerful times.

At its core, leading change is about making and acting on new choices. Ideally, you make those choices more consciously, more skillfully, and in a coordinated and purposeful way that builds trust while creating new possibilities or outcomes.

For the future to which you've dedicated yourself, how will you choose to grow?

## WHAT IS THE REAL POWER OF A LEADER?

Let's start by considering how power is commonly defined. Essentially, power is the ability to act or produce an effect. Power is a quality of directed energy.

*Power is the ability to cause or prevent action. It is the discretion to act or not to act.*

See [www.businessdictionary.com](http://www.businessdictionary.com)

Power is also defined a "position of ascendancy over others; authority" (See *Merriam Webster Dictionary*). In physics, it is understood as units of work per units of time. Theorists on socio-political power define power as the ability to compel obedience (*Bertrand Russell*) or as the property possessed by an actor that enables him to alter the will or actions of others so that they conform to his will (*Talcott Parsons*).

# Empower Your Leadership

In my more than 25 years working with highly accomplished leaders primarily in business – as a former attorney, as a mediator, and as an executive coach – I am forever looking for distinctions that can open our perception and capacity to make new choices. Distinctions in language create possibility in conversation. Language and conversation in the broadest sense – our internal conversations with ourselves and our conversations with what and who we encounter in life – generates meaning and catalyzes action. Creating or revealing distinctions is, therefore, a kind of power.

Here are four basic types of power to ask about now. How are all four interrelated and consistently at play in your evolving leadership?

- **Power over**
- **Power to**
- **Power with**
- **Power within**

In your quest to empower your leadership, your relationship with power matters. As your consciousness about and interaction with power evolves, so will your capacity to lead meaningfully. This is a collection of reflections to get the conversation going, maybe in new directions. This is the context for offering a simple and subtle practice for cultivating your personal power.

Take it on as a choice for empowering your leadership.

## POWER OVER

Everyone knows and has been shaped by **power over** in some way – whether externalized in relationship with another or internalized in relationship with oneself. **Power over** refers to hierarchy and domination as well as related attributes of control, force, coercion, punishment, and reward. The control or coercion may be by design, as in rules and requirements with damaging consequences for non-compliance. It can be transactional, as in “if you do this, then I’ll do that and if you don’t then there’s trouble.”

The exercise of **power over** can be exhilarating and satisfying, like a sense of winning. It can also be diminishing and limiting, like a sense of losing. The urge or mandate to dominate can be based in an urge for self-aggrandizement. It can also emerge from a strong idea about the common good. Is the “winner” someone who “plays to win” no matter what the game is, who is playing, or what results are won? How about the person who has adapted by “playing not to lose?” Playing to *be* a team player and playing to be *seen* as a team player could look the same. The outward behavior or ultimate outcome may look the same, but at the heart of the matter they are different.

The conventional idea of a leader is of someone who commands control. Control is generally seen as good in its own right, for its own sake, such that those with the greatest **power over** are praised as “the greatest” men or women. They are hailed as leaders.

Ideas of legitimate, formal power – of having a position of ascendancy over others in order to alter the will or actions of others so that they conform to one’s own will – are consistent with conventional understanding of leadership. Control and the kind of agency typically attributed to men (particularly light-bodied men) is often the basis for exercising legitimate leadership powerfully.

## Empower Your Leadership

Even when power is defined as domination, the term is murky and dependent on personal and cultural prejudice. In our Western culture, for example, domination is generally seen as admirable, unless practiced by “inferiors” – e.g. women, children, servants, dark-bodied individuals, etc. – upon “superiors” – e.g. men, adults, employers, light-bodied individuals, etc. (See *Beyond Power* – Marilyn French, 1985). In part, this is the legacy of what we know as “domination culture” (See *The Chalice & The Blade* – Riane Eisler, 1987). Diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives are often aimed to redress such power dynamics.

A **power over** type of authority also arises when someone possesses a special skill or knowledge that is useful to others. The power may not be explicitly coercive. That specialist person may be consulted but compliance may not be required. A coercive quality can be implicit, however, as in the example of physician with a patient or a senior leader with a subordinate who, by virtue of their position, is presumed to “know better.”

Where are you most or least likely to relish or relinquish power over? The leader as warrior is masterful in the fight. Whether it's a fight against or a fight for, it's still a fight. In negotiation and conflict resolution, there's a meaningful difference between the feeling of a true “win-win” and its imposter. War and sports metaphors prevail in the language of leadership. Our primal instincts for trust discern with lightning speed, some 0.06 seconds from the moment of contact, whether a person is friend or foe. As social animals, we all have experienced the power of excluding and including, of being welcomed or “othered.”

Small wonder that our ideas and experience of power are often distorted, and our sense of personal power damaged, by the exercise of **power over**. Like it or not, however, this type of power persists within us and around us. We can live at the effect of it. We can also learn to lead and live with it better.

What would that mean for you? What other types and sources of power could give better results?

## POWER TO

The idea of power to is highly esteemed in our society and is of growing importance for leadership competency as well as for human evolution. **Power to** refers to ability or capacity. It connotes a kind of freedom. **Power to** is generally considered to be a personal attribute, based on ability and developed through self-discipline. **Power to** reflects individuality, independence, and often a drive to excel.

Since power is directed energy, our **power to** is perhaps infinitely variable.

MY or YOUR **power to** \_\_\_\_\_.

Fill in the blank with any verb. Some of my favorites in the domain of evolving leadership include: choose, respond, reflect, engage, decide, learn, experiment, partner, excel, dignify, care, co-create, etc.

In truth, however, an individual's **power to** is rarely achieved by that individual alone. It takes communities or networks of support. An individual's **power to** also reflects dependency, interconnection, and the acceptance of society. Even in organizations that claim to promote and reward individuals on the basis of merit have to deal with the reality that people in society value, encourage, and reward certain kinds of talent and competencies over others. An ability, like a person requires nourishment and scope if it is to grow.

# Empower Your Leadership

**Power to** overlaps with **power over** where the practice of a skill becomes competitive or where it involves managing, influencing, or persuading other people. In a leadership context, for example, we can inquire about both legitimate power and decision process power. (*See The Leadership Triad: Knowledge, Trust and Power – Dale Zand, 1997*) Both relate to the **power to** exercise a power that is rightfully theirs. Decision process power is the leader's right to determine how a decision will be made. The leader's legitimate power is to decide who, when, and how people will be involved in making a decision. Legitimate power is the right that people give a leader to make choices and resolve conflicts. Leaders typically rely on legitimate power as their fundamental source of power.

So, even when we appreciate teamwork and empowerment as essential for performance, legitimate, formal **power over** persists as a core of leadership.

Emerging models of leadership – such as transformational leadership and integral leadership – are based on a fundamentally different approach to human motivation, interaction, and accomplishment. There is a greater emphasis on ways to optimize individual and collective **power to**. The theme in the “new science” of both physical and social sciences is our interrelatedness and interdependence. (*See Leadership & The New Science – Margaret Wheatley, 1999*)

The integral leadership model, primarily attributed to philosopher Ken Wilbur, asserts that changes to business systems must be supported by individual behavior, which demands personal commitment, a supportive organizational culture, and shared values. (*See A Theory of Everything – Ken Wilbur, 2000*)

	<b>Interior</b>	<b>Exterior</b>
<b>Individual</b>	<i>Personal Meaning</i>	<i>Individual Behavior</i>
<b>Collective</b>	<i>Organizational Culture and Shared Values</i>	<i>Business Systems &amp; Processes</i>

In Wilbur's integral matrix for effective and sustainable leadership, power – its sources and manifestations – is present in all four quadrants. Within each quadrant, both **power over** and **power to** are important.

An increased emphasis on **power to** opens the possibility of collaborative power, or **power with**.

## POWER WITH

**Power with** refers to joining together, blending, and co-creating. As much as humans are “wired” for domination, we are also designed to collaborate. Our survival and evolution depend on it. **Power with** connotes interrelated gain and the idea of synergy.

Even when we think we are choosing and practicing it, real power with can be hard to come by. Leaders may genuinely aspire to and declare their commitment to synergy, “win/win” approaches, and collaboration. **Power over** can “get smart” and adopt “better” lingo, like the proverbial wolf in sheep's clothing. It's a real victory of the human spirit when **power with** happens. Why? It isn't easy and it might not feel like “winning.” We have to shift our conditioning and be clearer about a bigger why.

One “bigger why” is the dimension and urgency of leadership challenges. As one leader puts it:

“So much disruption; so little time. Not only are organizations expected to provide great products and services, but to do so while the landscape is shifting and quaking. For those of us leading, it's both scary and thrilling. It is our job to lead our teams into these great challenges. I don't know about you, but I'm in over my head, and I need help.”

*(See Scaling Leadership – Anderson & Adams, 2019)*

What changes are within your power that would make **power with** easier for yourself and with others?

## Empower Your Leadership

Creative collaboration is imperative – not optional – for addressing the pile-up of major challenges we face as a human community. It is no secret that ineffective leadership is the top reason for failure of vision and strategy. This is highly problematic because vision and strategy are core tools for collaborative work.

We can learn from what Warren Bennis calls Great Groups who aim to change the world, not just fix a problem. They invest in extraordinary collaboration, tapping and augmenting the creativity of their members so they both achieve great things and experience the joy and personal transformation that such accomplishment brings.

“We must turn to Great Groups if we hope to begin to understand how that rarest of precious resources - genius - can be successfully combined with great effort to achieve results that enhance all our lives. The need is so urgent. The organizations of the future will increasingly depend on the creativity of their members to survive. And the leaders of those organizations will be those who find ways both to retain their talented and independent-minded staffs and to set them free to do their best, most imaginative work. Conventional wisdom about leadership and teams continues to glorify the leader at the expense of the group. Great Groups offer a new model in which the leader is an equal among Titans. In a truly creative collaboration, work is pleasure, and the only rules and procedures are those that advance the common cause.”

*(See Organizing Genius – Bennis & Biederman, 2019)*

Think of your own experience. When have **power over** leadership attitudes, behaviors, and practices disguised themselves and been an imposter for the sought-after **power with** that is essential for genuine, sustainable collaboration? **Power with** takes individual awareness, commitment, and skill in domains that have long been – and even today continue to be – mistakenly derided as “soft” and therefore optional for leaders. Additionally, even when individuals are aware, committed, and skillful, they may be caught in systems to reinforce and reward **power over** interactions.



# Empower Your Leadership

How might the following example play out where you are? ...

A leader where you work is rated highly for strengths like passion and drive, being a strong networker, demonstrating domain/technical knowledge, being results focused, and intelligent/brilliant or creative/innovative. All of these strengths will serve a person and a team to a point. They all can be used strengths for **power over** and **power with**, depending on what they're matched up with.

People experience costly **power with** breakdowns in leading collaborative work when a leader's..

- Passion/drive is matched up with an ineffective interaction style,
- Networking strength is matched up with failure to fully develop a team,
- Domain/technical knowledge is matched up with over-demanding tendencies,
- Results focus is matched with micro-managing, intelligent/brilliant is matched with not holding the team accountable, and
- Creative/innovative is matched up with being too self-centric.

Those match-ups are known to create a **Cancelling Effect**. The Cancelling Effect is when leaders rely on Non-Differentiating Strengths that then become liabilities, cancelling out the effect of remaining strengths. (See *Scaling Leadership – Anderson & Adams, 2019*)

Top 10 Reactive Strengths Offset by Top 10 Reactive Liabilities  
**The Cancelling Effect**



Reactive strengths are 1.0 X liabilities – essentially equal/offsetting.

Perhaps you know the negative impact that just one such leader can have on the tone, energy, and performance of a leadership team. There's a chilling effect, shutting down critical conversations and distorting necessary interactions. People face extremely difficult choices in an organization led by a genius who gets technical or business results but how they lead constrains growth by damaging people and the organization in the process. *(See Scaling Leadership – Anderson & Adams, 2019)*

By contrast, when have **power with** leadership practices surprised you as an energizing, fulfilling boost?

More than ever, leaders are called to “take charge” of intractable, complex problems. The kinds of problems that require a move from an “either/or” mentality to a more inclusive and empowering “both/and” approach. This significantly informs our quest for “win/win” solutions to problems. It also shapes our understanding about the nature of complexity and the need to “let go” of simplistic, short-term solutions while reaching for more integrated systemic improvement. Taking charge becomes more a process of charging up or energizing a team or a collective to access and guide the “wisdom of the group.”

The “new science” of the natural, physical world keeps reminding us that this is a participative universe and that nothing living lives alone. It is a vital reaffirmation of the dignity and worth of all of humanity.

“Everything comes into form because of relationship. We are constantly called to be in relationship—to information, people, events, ideas, life. Even reality is created through our participation in relationships. We choose what to notice; we relate to certain things and ignore others. Through these chosen relationships, we co-create our world.”

*(See Leadership & The New Science – Margaret Wheatley, 1999)*

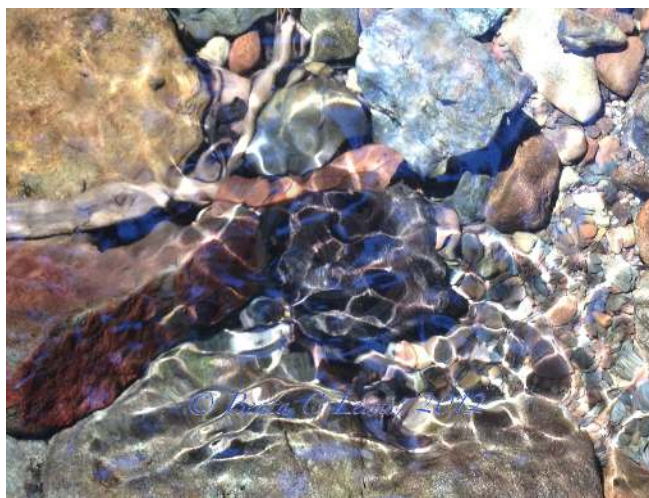
# Empower Your Leadership

Chaos theory and feminist scholarship are integral parts of our emerging understanding of what makes living systems function and evolve. By their influence and for the first time in history, science is focusing more on relationships than on hierarchies. (See *Beyond Power – Marilyn French, 1985*). A central motif of twentieth century feminist literature, for example, was to probe existing power relations and then consider alternative ways of perceiving and using power: power as affiliation. **Power with.**

To lead organizations of people – living systems – through unrelenting change, uncertainty, and chaos at superhuman rates of speed, leaders have to access the power of applied knowledge and awareness in themselves and with others.

According to Wheatley, living systems require self-knowledge in three critical areas:

- People need to be connected to the fundamental identity of the organization or community. Who are we? Who do we aspire to become? How shall we be together?
- People need to be connected to new information. What else do we need to know? Where is this information to be found?
- People need to be able to reach past traditional boundaries and develop relationships with people anywhere in the system. Who else needs to be working with us?



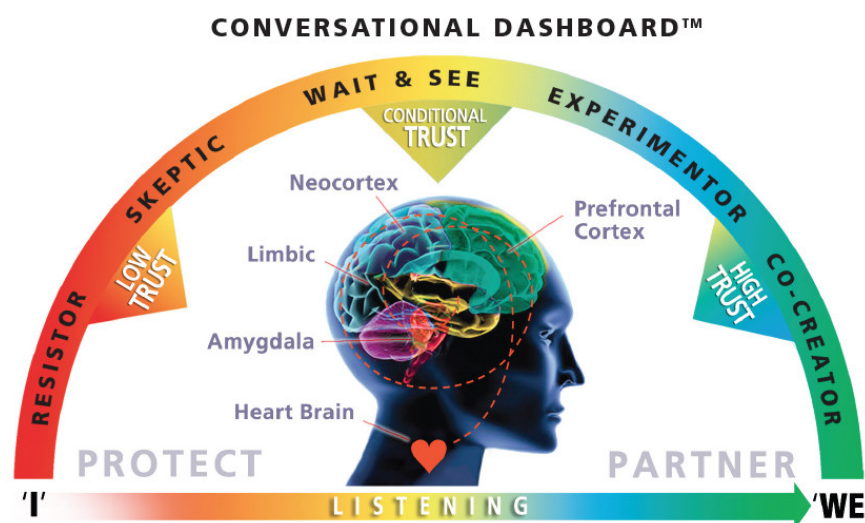
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**Power with** occurs in conversation. What quality of conversation do you need to experience to be more inclined to partner with someone? Especially those with whom you need to create important outcomes under pressure and when coordinating action is challenging? A vital way to shift away from protecting and toward partnering is to shift your mode of conversation.

The best communicators learn to align their intentions with their impact. As we engage in conversation more consciously and skillfully, we can down-regulate what inhibits and up-regulate what enhances creativity, connection, trust, and better outcomes. At best in conversation, we are able to center, connect, empathize, judge courses of action, and come up with fresh ways of engaging with others.

A wealth of insights emerging from neuroscience reveals an emerging new understanding for the role of conversation in creating everything. The **Conversational Intelligence® (C-IQ)** framework provides a pathway for becoming more masterful with vital conversations. The body-brain prioritizes and reacts incredibly quickly to perceived emotional threats. When we feel threatened, a natural response is to protect. This can show up as defensive conversation and stances of distrust. Transforming fear into trust is at the heart of C-IQ. It opens new possibilities for partnering to co-create.

*(See Conversational Intelligence – Judith Glaser, 2014).*



# Empower Your Leadership

- **Down-regulating modes of conversation** trigger fear, uncertainty, an experience of **power over**, a need to be right, and group-think. They deplete us.
- **Up-regulating modes of conversation** inspire transparency, relationship, understanding, shared success, and truth with empathy. They nourish us.

We shift from **I-centric** to **WE-centric** language, mindset, and behaviors. When difficulties arise – and they will – we (re)gain the connection and resilience of building or restoring trust.

Putting C-IQ into practice moves interaction dynamics from protection to partnering, from closing down or withholding in resistance or skepticism to opening up to experimenting and co-creating.

There is a significant shift moving away from a dominator **power over** model and towards the actual experience of a **power with** partnership model in leadership. By necessity and with conviction, leaders are learning to move from a reliance on rank to the cultivation of links and conversations to produce results that matter.

Questions of power concern one's capacity to translate self-awareness into productive relationships, coordinated action, and meaningful results. It is about one's capacity to bring out the best in oneself as well as the best in and with others, especially when that is not easy.



## POWER WITHIN

**Power within** or personal power is at the heart of leadership. It animates and directs leadership – your version of the art and science of influence. Leading change takes you into unknown and often tough terrain within yourself and with other people. Yes, **power over**, **power to**, and **power with** remain at play in varying degrees in our human endeavors. But the core source of power lies in one's relationship with oneself, leading from the inside out. Empowerment arises from consciously cultivating presence and integrating **power within**.

We commonly hear people talk about empowering others. How does that actually happen?

More accurately, we co-create environments for learning and choose to **empower** ourselves. When that happens together, we witness self-directed collective empowerment. When that happens, leadership and power become more an extension of who we are being, rather than a role we acquire or a thing we do.

From the perspective of human consciousness, we can also distinguish power from force. (*See Power vs. Force – David Hawkins, 2012*). The effect of **power** is to unify. The effect of **force** is to polarize, producing a win/lose dichotomy, a conflict, or a sense of victimization. True power emanates from consciousness itself. Power arises from meaning and has to do with motive and principle. What we see is a visible manifestation of the invisible. By Hawkins' definition, what we typically identify as power over might really be an exercise of force, not true power.

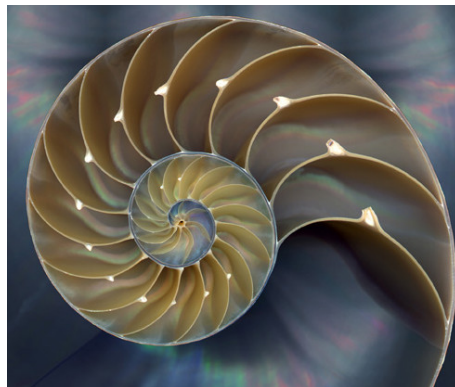
## Empower Your Leadership

Force automatically creates counterforce, so its effect is limited by definition. Its effect is to polarize rather than to unify. Polarization always implies conflict. The cost of polarization, therefore, is always high. Because force incites polarization, it inevitably produces a win/lose dichotomy: somebody always loses, and enemies are created. Constantly faced with enemies, force requires constant defense. Force is associated with judgment and makes us feel poorly about ourselves. Defensiveness is expressed in action and language. Defensiveness is invariably costly, whether in the marketplace, politics, international affairs or in intra- and interpersonal relationships.

Power is associated with the whole. Force is associated with the partial and always moves against something, creating counterforce. Power creates attractor patterns that strengthen life whereas force creates attractor patterns that weaken life. Therefore, power is associated with that which supports the significance of life itself. Power energizes, gives forth, supplies and supports. Power is associated with compassion and dignity and makes us feel positively about ourselves and the whole. Power appeals to that which dignifies, uplifts and ennobles.

What if most of what we call power is really force?

Seen this way, empowerment guides our intention, makes us attune to impact, and is conscious cultivation of power, not force. Especially when the going gets tough, what helps you lead effectively with more power and less force?



# SOURCE YOUR POWER WITHIN

You know the feeling of personal power when things are easy and in flow. What happens when you feel conflicted or challenged?

For example, as a leader, do you remember agonizing over a decision? Or maybe something is up for you now where you feel pulled in multiple directions, unclear about the “right” choice to make. Can you call to mind a time when you made a choice but still had that icky feeling of something not being right about it? And then when things played out, you had your head in your hands, saying, “I knew it! Why didn’t I listen to my intuition about this?!” You feel out of synch with your personal power.

It’s not just you. Maybe you hear somebody else’s “yes” or “no” and there’s just a feeling of “this isn’t quite right.” You sense a lack of congruence. You can take this person at their word, but there’s still the sense that they are not fully present and aligned to move with that “yes” or “no.”

Here’s another example. You may recall instances of feeling disempowered or powerless in the face of some challenge. It can seem that the cause of the “problem” and responsibility for changing it for the better are external to you. When that happens, there’s commonly a conscious or unconscious sense of victimhood, of being at the effect of something or someone with no meaningful sense of choice.

What else could you do with this?

Align within yourself to the conscious choice and real power you do have.



**Alignment** refers to a state of agreement or cooperation. Alignment begins within you and extends to alignment with others. Referring back to **Creative Tension**, alignment orients towards the vision to move towards improving a situation and bridging the gap.

**Centered presence** in action is both the experience and expression of personal power, your **power within**. Your personal power comes from how you cultivate and direct your own energy and consciousness. When you pause to center yourself and listen to the wisdom of your integrated, core intelligence, you come into a more powerful quality of presence.

## TUNE IN – INTERNAL ALIGNMENT

You have so many signals to pay attention to when making decisions as a leader. Whether it's on your own or in partnership with an individual or a team. Particularly in complex situations, you'll have conflicting data to process, including questions about what's not known and maybe can't be known until you get moving.

We each have our individual ways of discerning signal from noise.

We are designed to pay attention to patterns that help us deal with complexity. As we learn and grow, we develop "filters" for identifying what to pay attention to, what has weighted relevance. As professionals of any stripe, we're trained to trust certain external indicators. The trouble is, this can lead to an imbalance of externally driven decision-making. By this we learn to tune out our inner knowing, no longer trusting the wisdom it provides. We can lose touch with an essential compass and the power of our internal alignment.

Through the ages, all wisdom traditions have the same solution to this human dilemma: listen. Developments in neuroscience now validate what has long been known: listen for the inner signals. Our non-conscious body/mind is vastly more perceptive than the conscious mind, and the non-conscious perceptions are infinitely quicker and quieter than what we “get” at an analytical or cognitive level. Additionally, there are psychological traps when we make decisions to avoid loss and increase gain; we have biases and deeply rooted habits.

**Tune In.** To leverage the power of your internal alignment, you have to tune in.

Every human being comes equipped with a reliable set of at least three intelligent centers for assessing what to trust and what is next. These centers of intelligence are always in operation but often outside of our conscious awareness. Many of us have learned to pay attention to only one of them: mind. We inherited a cultural bias for “mind over matter.” It’s a preference for conscious and scientific reasoning, analytical and rational thought. While this is an essential aspect of our intelligence, there is more.

When listening for internal alignment, what indicators do you trust?

## LEVERAGE YOUR INNATE INTELLIGENCE

We have more to leverage than we think! Funny how we humans apparently use only about 10% of our brain capacity. Even better, we have multiple “brains” but consciously cultivate and rely on only one.

What can be better than this?

Scientists increasingly appreciate that humans have three essential intelligence centers. We can locate them anatomically as the **Head** (head-mind), **Heart** (heart-mind) and **Hara** (belly-mind). People speak loosely of a body-mind connection, but often with a lingering reluctance to “mind” the body. Somatic intelligence refers to the intelligence of the integrated, whole self – mind, body, heart and soul. In truth, we are only beginning to understand and experience how true this unifying concept actually is.

Everyone knows the head-mind. Neuroscience is focused here and we are learning ever more about the true nature and functioning of the brain. The heart-mind, however, is less familiar as a center of intelligence. According to the Institute of HeartMath (*See [www.heartmath.org](http://www.heartmath.org)*), the heart is a sensory organ that acts as a sophisticated information encoding and processing center. It learns, remembers, and makes independent functional decisions. In fact, the heart generates the largest electromagnetic field in the body, on the order of 60 times greater in amplitude than that of the brain. The heart-mind substantially affects the functioning of the head-mind and our overall health and wellbeing. For ease here, though, we can think of the heart-mind as the seat of our emotional intelligence.

The belly-mind may be the least recognized but is very important. It is the enteric brain, our gut sensing, the seat of our deeper knowing. You might think of gut feelings as intuition, but it's more than that. The enteric nervous system is housed in the intestines and has many of the same physical structures as do the brain and spinal cord (*See [The Second Brain](#) – Dr. Michael Gershon, 1999*). The belly-mind is able to perform many of the functions typically associated with the more creative and intuitive “right brain” i.e. the right hemisphere of our upper brain. This is a significant locus for a quiet and deep somatic intelligence that leaders rely on, for example, for critical split-second decision-making.

## Empower Your Leadership

With three intelligence centers to coordinate, what is **mind**? As defined by interpersonal neurobiology, the mind, too, is more than the brain. (*See Mindsight – Dr. Daniel Siegel, 2012*). It is an embodied and relational regulatory process. So, it's not just about leading with the head, the mental processing center. What connects mental life with neural functioning and relationships is energy and information flow. Energy is a scientific, measurable concept referring to the capacity to do things. It encompasses the inter-relationship of signals from Head, Heart and Hara.

Notably, organizations function in a parallel triangular system of energy and information flow in relationships. Individually and collectively, we lead toward coordinated integration. That's how the right stuff gets done.

Personal power comes from cultivating and leveraging your somatic intelligence. Your innate power arises when you align within yourself, trust your choice and move with greater congruence – both in language and physical action.

Even at the relentlessly fast and often chaotic pace of business, you can do this.



## PRACTICE: H TO THE POWER OF THREE

Here's a somatic practice for you to try now. ...

Here's a somatic practice for you to try now. In my coaching work I call it **H<sup>3</sup>: Head, Heart, Hara**. It's a somatic practice for tuning into all three intelligence centers for alignment. You pay attention to and become more aware of what's "alive," true, and energizing for you. This is a powerful place to start. It is also a powerful practice for deepening and refining what you already do.

Begin by practicing with easier situations so you can rely on the practice when things get tougher – when you feel conflicted or challenged about someone or something. You'll effectively increase your capacity to center into what's true in the moment, reframe and make a more skillful, conscious choice for action.

### OVERVIEW

First, find your question. It will be something about which you want alignment for taking more powerful action. You can focus on an issue or formulate a simple, specific question.

"With respect to \_\_\_\_\_, what is important for me now?"

Next, tune in. Focus your attention to get input from each of your intelligence centers:

- **Head**
- **Heart** and
- **Hara**

Finally, listen for alignment.

A useful metaphor is the green, yellow and red lights of a traffic signal. At each center, pay attention to what feels like



- yes/go – green light,
- pause/proceed with caution – yellow light, or
- stop – red light.

When all three centers give you a “green light,” you’ll feel alignment for yes/go.

What if you get mixed signals?

For example, let’s say you get two greens and a yellow. Are you inclined to override the yellow and just go with green? Are you inclined to override the green and defer to yellow? Whatever the combination of “lights,” try checking in to understand more.

For the above example, check in with the center whose message is “caution.”

- What’s that about?
- What does it need in order to go green or red?
- How will you take care of that?

Listening for alignment, you may have to quiet the louder voices within so you can hear what else is there. Each center has its own language. You might get an image, sound, physical sensations, or something other than the words you normally live by. Notice and be as curious as you can.

## TUNING IN - YOUR TURN

- Standing, sitting or lying down: center yourself. You may prefer to close your eyes. Inhale and exhale slowly and deeply so your lower belly moves. Notice the sensations in your body.
- Now focus your attention by bringing your hands to the sides of your Head. Ask your Head what it thinks about your question. Listen and trust that you'll remember what you need to remember. Ask again. When ready, release your hands and focus again on your breathing.
- Now focus your attention by bringing your hands to your Heart. Ask your Heart what it feels about your question. Listen and trust that you'll remember what you need to remember. Ask again. When ready, release your hands and focus again on your breathing.
- Now focus your attention by bringing your hands to your belly or Hara. Ask your Hara what it knows about your question. Listen and trust that you'll remember what you need to remember. Ask again. When ready, release your hands and focus again on your breathing.



## BONUS: AUDIO FOR PRACTICE

Now take a break and relax into it by following my lead with this [bonus audio](#).

## NEXT STEPS

Keep tuning in to take aligned action. As you practice, you can do it more quickly - maybe with 5-6 deep breaths. You can do it between conversations. It can be a quick reset anytime. The leverage you gain will augment your ability to choose and take conscious, congruent, skillful action act for yourself and with others. It's a quiet, grounded sort of power within that empowers your capacity to navigate power dynamics of all kinds more effectively.

Are you open and curious for more? Be in touch! I'll be glad to know how this practice is working for you. [Contact me](#) to explore what could be next for you and how we can partner as you lead to thrive.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR – BEATA C. LEWIS, JD, MSC

Beata partners with business owners, senior leaders, and knowledge professionals to evolve their leadership and revitalize collaboration with new levels of effectiveness and growth. Founder of Bridging Lives LLC and certified as a Master Somatic Coach, she leverages decades' experience as an Executive Coach, Mediator, and Change Consultant. Beata helps clients navigate organizational complexity and emergent issues, cultivate engagement for diverse teams, and achieve critical professional and business objectives.



Blending the essential inner and outer games of leadership development, Beata guides clients to translate new awareness into clear goals, compelling strategies, and tangible practices for next-level success. Beata's coaching uniquely integrates systemic thinking, interpersonal dynamics, and conversational intelligence with somatic practices so clients fine-tune and authentically embody changes for positive impact. Cultivating greater agility, trust, and resilience, Beata's clients refine their capacity to risk difficult conversations, move beyond limiting obstacles, and leverage their personal power for mutual gain and fulfillment.



# EMPOWERED LEADER COACHING

How you choose to grow makes all the difference in co-creating what matters most, now.

As a business owner, executive or senior leader, or accomplished knowledge professional, your capacity to lead and partner with conscious mastery evolves as you do.

As your leadership evolves, so does your team and organizational culture. Where do you need more resilience, purposeful agility, and wise presence under pressure? In these volatile, uncertain, disruptive times, what uplifts and sustains you and your leaders to be resourceful and at your best?

Next-era business needs next-era leadership and collaboration to succeed and thrive.

With Bridging Lives you have an ally to co-create for the better and *THRIVE*.

To explore next steps together...be in touch

[Beata@BridgingLives.com](mailto:Beata@BridgingLives.com)

Schedule a no-obligation 30-minute conversation