

EDITORIAL

Power and Change

In previous editorials, there has been much said about how to go about changing an organization. This time I'd like to say a few things about the rarely discussed, but in my mind very important subject of power, since power and leadership of change are so intertwined.

When the term comes up, it is frequently viewed negatively, thinking of dictators *et cetera*. And thus, for many, the preferred word is "influence". Whatever it's called, in my interpretation of things, leading change in an organization has much to do with power or influence—how much a person has of it, where it comes from, how to get more of it.

Leaders, it seems, never have enough power to start changing an organization (in our case a school of health professions). Therefore, one of the first things that must be done is to get more of it, and one of the first steps to getting more is to understand what it is. That is what I want to write about in this editorial.

So what is it? Simply put, power is whatever it takes to get others to do what you want and not do what you don't want (Gardner, 1990). Some say that it is based on one or more of the following (French & Raven, 1959):

- legitimate (people do what you want because of the position you hold),
- coercive (people do what you want because they fear the punishment that you could give them),
- reward (people do what you want to get rewards from you, like a salary increase or an office with windows),
- expert (people do what you want because they perceive that you know more about a subject than they do), and
- referent (people do what you want because they like you).

But more recent authors have turned this notion on its head. One author says that power comes from one's ability to love oneself and others (Hagberg, 1994). Hagberg talks about leadership and personal power. In her configuration, there are six stages of leadership and her two highest are characterized by empowerment and wisdom. In her words, those who reach the highest level "inspire inner peace".

Yet another definition of power (there are many!) is that it comes from the relationship between followers and leaders (Chrislip & Larson, 1994; Green-

leaf, 1977; Matusak, 1997). As Chrislip and Larson see it, the problem with power is its fragmentation. To quote them: "... authority, responsibility, and the ability to act have become so diffuse that no one person or group can successfully address difficult issues." Their solution to this problem is to engage those who care the most. That is, to give the power of solution to others. According to Northouse, borrowing the concept from Burns, this latter approach would fit in his category of "relational power" (Northouse, 2004). That is, the power to lead has more to do with the relationship between leaders and their followers.

There is, of course, the power to prevent changes from happening at all, a phenomenon that should not be ignored. In that regard I think only as far as demonstrations or what often goes on in Faculty committees.

One important aspect of power that is often overlooked is that of empowerment—gaining power by giving it away, strategically (see for example the works of Kantor, 1982, Kouzes & Posner, 1991, Richards, 1996). Gaining by giving! That's as complicated as it is profound! For me, in academe giving control and credit (power) away is the mark of a successful leader of change. Power, in other words is not a "zero sum game", i.e. if it's given away the giver does not have less of it. Kouzes and Posner (1991) quote Kantor in their popular book on leadership, *The Leadership Challenge*, in presenting her four principles of gaining by giving. They are: give people important work to do; give people discretion and autonomy; give visibility and recognition; build relationships to others.

In the corporate world, there are many examples. For one, I again quote Kouzes and Posner (1991): "An otherwise successful chemical company found that it had a stubborn problem. About 10% of all its orders were sent from its loading dock with one sort of defect or another ... A crackdown would bring only a month or two of improvement. Finally, one enterprising executive decided on a new approach. He knew that in most companies the loading dock team is, at best, lightly regarded. He bet that if the low status of the loading dockworker was turned around, greater productivity would follow. Each member of his team, he decided, would no longer be a worker. He would be a manager. Each would be assigned an account list and would be held responsible for any orders going out to any of his customers. Suddenly, every shipment that went out had a sponsor, on the dock. It wasn't just the company's shipment anymore. It was a manager's shipment. And each manager cared very much that his order went out without flaw. Within 90 days, the error rate dropped to two percent. And it has stayed there—or lower—ever since."

In the academic world, most of these principles are givens, but not often with regard to the educational changes being undertaken. They more often involve the faculty member's research. In the academic world some things are regarded as the prerogatives of the Faculty. Examples would be the admissions process (where it is not done by the government), or the nature of the curriculum, or the shaping and carrying out of student assessment. In one case

that I can recall, community members were asked to sit on an admissions committee and they were in the majority, not just token members. In turn, the community lobbied successfully for governmental support for the school. In other words, by giving away the important decision as to who got admitted, the school gained financially.

Power!! Leaders, if they are to change their organizations, need more of it than they have and they must not be concerned about control and credit. They must focus on getting things done. That is, effective leaders gain power by giving it away, very carefully. Lao Tzu is quoted as saying in about 1200 BC: "Fail to honour people and they fail to honour you. But, of a good leader who talks little, when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will say, 'We did this ourselves'." (Heider, 1985).

Ronald Richards, PhD
 Editor, *Education for Health*
 E-mail: richards@uic.edu

References

- CHRISLIP, D.D. & LARSON, C. (1994). *Collaborative Leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- FRENCH, R.P. Jr. & RAVEN, B. (1959). In D. Cartwright (Eds), *Studies in Social Power*. Ann Arbor, MI.: Institute for Social Research.
- GARDNER, J.W. (1990). *On Leadership*. New York: The Free Press.
- GREENLEAF, R. (1977). *Servant Leadership*. New York: Paulist Press.
- HAGBERG, J. (1994). *Real Power*. Salem, Wisconsin, Sheffield.
- HEIDER, J. (1985). *The Tao of Leadership*. New York: Bantam Books.
- KANTOR, R.M. (1982). *The Middle Manager as Innovator*. Cambridge: Harvard Business Review.
- KOUZES, J.M. & POSNER, B.Z. (1991). *The Leadership Challenge*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- MATUSAK, L.R. (1997). *Finding Your Voice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- NORTHOUSE, P.G. (2004). *Leadership: Theory and Practice*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.
- RICHARDS, R.W. (eds) (1996). *Building Partnerships*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.