Sources of Power & Influence

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Five widely recognized sources of power are used by managers and leaders to influence their subordinates, and not all of these sources require a big title to be effective. Most of these sources you will probably recognize as being used all around you. The five sources of power and influence are: reward power, coercive power, legitimate power, expert power and referent power.

1. Power of Reward

- Using a reward to obtain power is something you may be familiar with from childhood. Perhaps you were offered a trip to the amusement park if you earned good grades in school. Motivation through the offering of reward is common, and when you have the ability to offer such a reward, you have a source of power. Offering your employees the opportunity to leave work early if they accomplish the desired task is using the power of reward.

Power of Coercion

- Coercive power is also something that you may be familiar with from childhood. A parent using coercion will send a child to bed early if the child refuses to clean his room, just as an employer will threaten disciplinary action if an employee refuses to perform the desired task. When your employee complies with your orders in an effort to avoid punishment, you have effectively utilized coercion as a source of power.

Legitimate Power

- Legitimate power is power granted and recognized by your position. As a manager, you have legitimate power over those who directly report to you. Your position is recognized as that of authority, and your direct reports recognize they are obligated to comply with your requests. Even when your direct report feels he has a better way to complete the task, your wishes will be followed out of respect for your position.

Expert Power
○ Being knowledgeable and experienced in your position provides you with a source of power known as expert power. With expert power you do not require the title of manager, nor do you need to be in any position of leadership to effectively influence those around you. The respect you earn from your experience and knowledge becomes your source of power. Others will listen to you and follow your guidance because of your high level of expertise.

Referent Power

○ When you admire someone, or when you feel that you relate to him, and this leads to a desire to earn his approval, it can be said that he has a referent source of power. It is likely that you have been influenced by, or have influenced others through referent power some time in your life. In a basic sense, referent power is a son attempting to earn the approval of his father or mother. The son will do what is asked of him, expecting approval or acceptance in return.

Considerations

○ The use of coercion as a source of power often leads employee resentment and poor morale. Other sources of power such as reward power, expert power and legitimate power can be used in combination to achieve positive results for all levels of your organization.

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