

# Sources of Power in Negotiation

## SOURCES OF POWER IN NEGOTIATION

Though this fact is not necessarily apparent to people who think about the nature of power in human relations, there are many available sources of power. In particular the power of "position"—which many people think of as the only source of power—is not necessarily the strongest or most effective.

### Positional power or the power of legitimate authority

*"You do what I say because I'm the boss—that's why!"* The power of one's rank or title or recognized position to give orders is perhaps the most widely recognized source of power. In a workplace this is the power to take administrative action.

### Rewards

*"He bought his way in."* The power of donors and big clients is legendary. The potential power of someone who can increase your salary is obvious. There are also other kinds of rewards—commendation, contacts, friendly acceptance and a thank you, opportunities, respect, speaking well of someone in public or in a report.

### Sanctions

*"She said she would just sue me..."* The power of sanctions is the reverse of rewards. It could also include speaking ill of someone in public, closing off opportunities, opening up someone to an investigation, writing a poor evaluation on an employee survey, organizing someone's enemies to block that person's promotion, frowning and scowling, obviously refusing to deal with someone.

### Force

*"I will get you and your children, if you continue..."* Force is usually thought of violent or illegal behavior or the threat of violence and criminal behavior. But it could also include acts of war or having the security force of an employer usher someone forcibly away from a workplace.

### Expertise

*"She is the most important employee here—she is the only person who knows how the data system works."* Expertise is a common source of power in the high-tech world. It is usually available to people of any age or background who have special skills that are needed.

### Information

*"He was able to get us the information we needed about what our competition is planning for the next year."* Information power is also available to a wide variety of people in a wide variety of positions. As with some other sources of power this one may not be apparent to a negotiating partner or opponent.

An elegant solution

*"We were completely stymied. He walked in here with a magic wand—he fitted together all the pieces of the puzzle and found us a workable answer that helps everyone at least a little."* The person who can come up with a solution that fits all the major pieces of a problem—possibly in an economical or otherwise attractive fashion—often develops great power in difficult circumstances.

Commitment

*"She just never gave up. She camped outside his office night and day until finally he had to listen."* Commitment, especially in its extreme forms like hunger strikes, can be an immensely potent source of power. It has the characteristic that its use often angers the person or people against whom it is used.

Charisma—referent authority—moral authority

*"People would just stop what they were doing and watch him and listen to him and do their best to support whatever he wanted done."* This is an amorphous group of sources of power that have the characteristic that the power is given by others to the person that has it. Sometimes this is a person who is very beautiful or personally compelling or someone that is perceived to be especially honorable and wise.

BATNA—the best alternative to a negotiated agreement

*"They had all the time in the world and lots of other customers—they did not need us."* One's BATNA is one's fallback position. If one has many alternatives, this lends power. If the other person has no alternatives and is dependent on a good outcome, the other party then lacks BATNA power.

Relationship (power gained or power lost)

*"Friends come and go—enemies accumulate forever."* *"I know her and she is the only person I will deal with on this matter."* Relationship power is possibly the most ubiquitous, least anticipated and least well calibrated by outsiders—and among the most potent of any power in negotiation. Relationship power sometimes resides purely within a family context, is sometimes solely within ethnic affiliations—and is sometimes apparently happenstance, and dependent on idiosyncratic events. The negative power of a bad relationship is among the most important for negotiations.