

Power and Influence with Prospects and Clients

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In the earlier days of my career, I used to think that being aligned with a strong company, and having my own name on the door in a prestigious lobby, could give me power. It took me quite a while to recognize that at best I would only have authority, not power, with my clients and employees. Authority has more to do with influence, and the real power is with those who have the money or access to money.

Another understanding about being an entrepreneur is the difference between power and control. Power comes only from the people you work with. They give it to you, because they trust you to use it well, and if you do not, they take it away from you. I have experienced this within my private practice. I would say to my staff, "Okay, guys, I would like you to go out and do this or that in this particular manner."

My beloved staff at times would say, "But Lou, we do not think that will work so well," and I would respond, "I'm sure it will work, go for it."

After a few days, they came back and shared, "Lou, we tried it the way you said... and it did not work."

I was starting to learn some subtle rules of relationships. What I had with my staff was influence not power or control. Power and control are illusions that we create for ourselves out of our sense of authority. We have the illusion that we control our children, because we are bigger and stronger. Then the truth sets in: Our children control their own lives, and at best, all we can do is influence them.

The same is true with your prospects and clients. The power you have is the willingness and commitment to your clients to carry out your vision. Your clients reciprocate that commitment when they trust you to lead them in the right direction. You never have the power to force them to do the things they do not want to do. You have the illusion of power with your clients, as long as it is used in their behalf. The minute you violate that trust and confidence, they will take it away from you in a New York minute.

This is very apparent by the fact that so many clients are on the move at this time. They have the power, because they have the money, and they're pulling rank on professionals who they feel have not served them in their best interest. The same truth is also evident with management. We give them authority to use on our behalf. To the extent they use it for or against the people they manage will determine how long they keep it.