Power, Authority, & Influence

"I'm their leader, I've got to follow them."

Alexandre Ledru-Rollin

Power, Authority and Influence - 1

Fresh Start

Talking Points

Power is a reality in human life. It is neither good nor bad. However, it can be used constructively or destructively. As Christians we are called upon to exercise our power to help bring God's peace to a broken world. We must engage in this enterprise with our eyes open to the power exerted around us in order to engage it with the love of God.

Thinking about the passage we just read from Daniel, who has power? Authority? Influence?

How would you define these terms?

Facilitate a general discussion about the differences among these concepts, capturing the definitions on a flip chart.

> **"Power is the capacity to translate intention into reality and sustain it."**
>
> Warren Bennis

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Talking Points

As this quote indicates, power is nothing more than the ability to see that something happens. In and of itself, it is neutral – and as Bennis has also said "Leadership is the wise use of power." Let's explore the power dynamics of congregations – if you don't understand them, you can find yourself in real trouble (and feeling powerless).

Types of Authority

Formal: By virtue of one's position either appointed or elected

Informal: By virtue of one's knowledge, experience, personality

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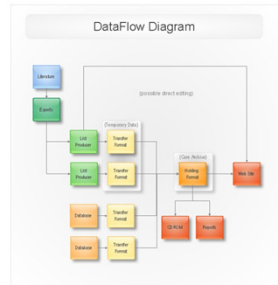Fresh Start

Talking Points

The authority to exercise power in a situation can come from two sources: from one's position as an appointed, elected, or called leader or from the dint of one's personal characteristics (knowledge, experience, personality, etc.). Formal authority flows through the established organizational chart and is usually documented in a congregation's by-laws, specific policies, procedures, position descriptions, letters of agreement, or contracts. Informal authority is less easy to identify – it requires an analysis of the congregation's culture and dynamics. You can see it operating when someone says "You need to check with so-and-so before attempting that or you could face a backlash."

Power and authority are two-way streets: leaders must be granted the authority to lead by those who follow. The power of coercion works only under very limited circumstances (and is hardly Christian in nature!).

Talking Points

Congregational cultures may be focused on formal power – decisions are made by those who are elected or appointed to positions, and it is clear from the organization chart and the by-laws who has authority to do what. Other congregations have by-laws and organizational charts, but they follow them in only a pro-forma way. Real power is exercised through the networks of relationships and connections within the congregation. Knowing which way is the "norm" (and it may vary from one type of situation to another) is an important part of the power analysis of your congregation.

Think about the planning and decision-making processes that are important in your congregation. Do they follow a set of documented and well-known procedures or are they more informal in nature? What observations have you made that support your conclusion?

Facilitate a large group discussion, capturing the signs of the formal and informal processes on a flip chart.

Formal Authority

Who has authority by virtue of their named role or position – e.g. vestry member, treasurer, committee chair, warden, organist, EYC leader.

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Talking Points

Now let's look at the individuals who exercise power in your congregation.

When we talk about formal authority, we are really talking about roles. Who are the people in your congregation who have specific authority by virtue of their role or position in the congregation (including yourself)? What authority do they have? Are there overlaps or shared authorities?

Distribute Handout 1, an analysis of formal authority in the congregation. Ask participants to complete it and then share their responses in a small group OR facilitate a large group discussion of the responses. What are the similarities and differences among the various congregations?

Note: if both clergy and lay leaders are present, have them complete their lists individually then compare them in congregational teams. Are they in agreement regarding the formal authority given to each person named? Any surprises?

Three Different Types Of Informal Authority

- Common Purpose or Interest
- High Profile
- Information Control

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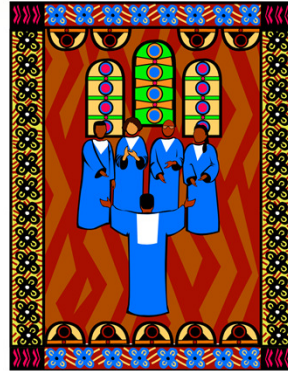**Talking Points**

Informal authority is the power to influence without regard to formal position or role. It can come from the impact of a number of voices with a shared interest. It may also come from the charismatic personality of the individual or from the person's ability to access and control information. Let's look briefly at each of these in turn.

Influence Through Common Purpose

Groups who share a common purpose, for example the altar guild, choir, Christian formation teachers, the professional women's group, young singles –

Can you think of others?

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Talking Points

While we want to avoid stereotyping any group of people, those who have a common purpose often DO share values and concerns and may voice them (especially if their values or concerns are threatened). In seeking to make changes that would impact the lives of these groups, you need to be willing to include their voice in the decision-making process.

Influence of Common Interest

Groups who think alike about certain issues, for example liberals, conservatives, social or political activists, special interest groups –

Can you think of others?

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Talking Points

Sometimes groups coalesce not around a common purpose (e.g., singing in the choir), but around an issue or cause. The power and authority exercised by these groups can be very great indeed.

Common purpose or interest influence means there is a built-in group of people that can be supportive, neutral, or in opposition to just about anything.

Often, the head of common purpose group has the ear (and the trust) of that group and can sway the group members in a certain direction. For instance, if the head of the Altar Guild thinks putting in new carpeting is a great idea, then it is likely that the members of the Altar Guild will support it.

A common interest group, on the other hand, may not really be a group until it feels threatened. Then people band together in opposition to or support of whatever is being proposed (e.g., a change in service times or a move from Rite I to Rite II).

Think of a time when you personally witnessed the power of a common purpose or interest group. What was the situation? What happened as a result of the group?

High Profile Influence

- There are usually a limited number in each congregation.

- People with high credibility including highly articulate persons, leaders during interim periods, matriarchs, patriarchs, community leaders,

<u>Or</u> ...

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Talking Points

Some people are influential simply because of their own credibility (often backed by having done something to earn people's trust). In transition times, these people may include one of the wardens who held things together during the interim, or the chair of the search committee.

High Profile Influence

Erratic, volatile or bizarre people who act out; we might "baby" them to avoid their tantrums or "walk on eggshells" around them.

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Talking Points

Just as power may be used for good or for ill, so high profile influence may come because of one's high credibility OR because someone behaves in such a way that no one will challenge them. This second type of high profile influence is not what we usually think of when we think about high profile influencers. We all, however, have certainly encountered such people: e.g., the person is renowned for his/her ability to disagree with any decision the music director makes; the congregational curmudgeon who objects to any change in the liturgy and voices his disappointment at every opportunity. Such people might actually hold considerable power because the other leaders try to make decisions in a manner that avoids the person's wrath.

Often these are the individuals around whom many people "walk on egg shells" to prevent an outburst or "flare up" of anger. Have participants think about this dynamic. How does it feel to walk on eggshells?

What are some examples of individuals you have encountered who have had high profile influence in both categories – the healthy and the not-so-healthy?

Information Control

Think about both formal and informal communication systems:

• How does information flow?

• How effective are the established mechanisms?

• Who listens to whom?

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Talking Points

What does the formal information flow look like in your congregation? What are the established mechanisms?

Facilitate a large group discussion, capturing formal methods of communication on a flip chart.

Now, what about the informal channels of communication? Who listens to whom? If you want to know something to whom do you go? Are there different people depending on the topic?

Information Control

Another way of controlling the flow of information is to be "in the know" by being "in the church" – physically that is.

• Who is around the church a lot?

• Who answers the phone and conveys the messages?

• Whose car is always in the parking lot?

• Who knows who is meeting with the rector?

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Talking Points

When thinking about the influence of information control, consider who has the keys or swipe cards to the facility? Who besides the rector is aware of the pastoral concerns of members of the congregation? Is there a "rule enforcer"?

Who is widely held to be a "gatekeeper"? This person might be a former member of the vestry who is retired and has been in the habit of coming down to the church every day to help out. He/she may have significant influence over the information flow because he/she is 1) on site a lot; 2) able to talk to lots of people; and 3) communicates about what they see happening on a daily basis.

Who are these people in your congregation?

Who Has the Power?

Knowledge of
Congregational Power
Is <u>Important</u>

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Talking Points

Let's take a look at informal power and authority in your congregation. On the sheet I am about to hand out list the individuals who wield each of the three types of influence – common interest, high profile, information control – in the appropriate column. Circle those whose names appear on more than one list. Compare the lists you just did with the list of those who have formal authority (from Handout 1). Put a square around the names of those who hold both formal and informal authority.

Distribute Handout 2, A Power Analysis Grid, and ask participants to complete it, then share their responses with a partner. You may want to give them some questions to guide their discussion: What did you learn? Any surprises? Is your congregational culture more influenced by formal or informal power? Share an experience where you saw power, authority and influence at work? Did the analysis you just did help shed light on that situation? Following the sharing in pairs, hold a large group discussion to share learnings.

Note: if both clergy and lay leaders are present, have them complete their lists separately then compare them in congregational teams. How much agreement is there about who wields power and authority in the congregation. Any surprises?

Dealing with Power Dynamics

The ingredients of relationship are:

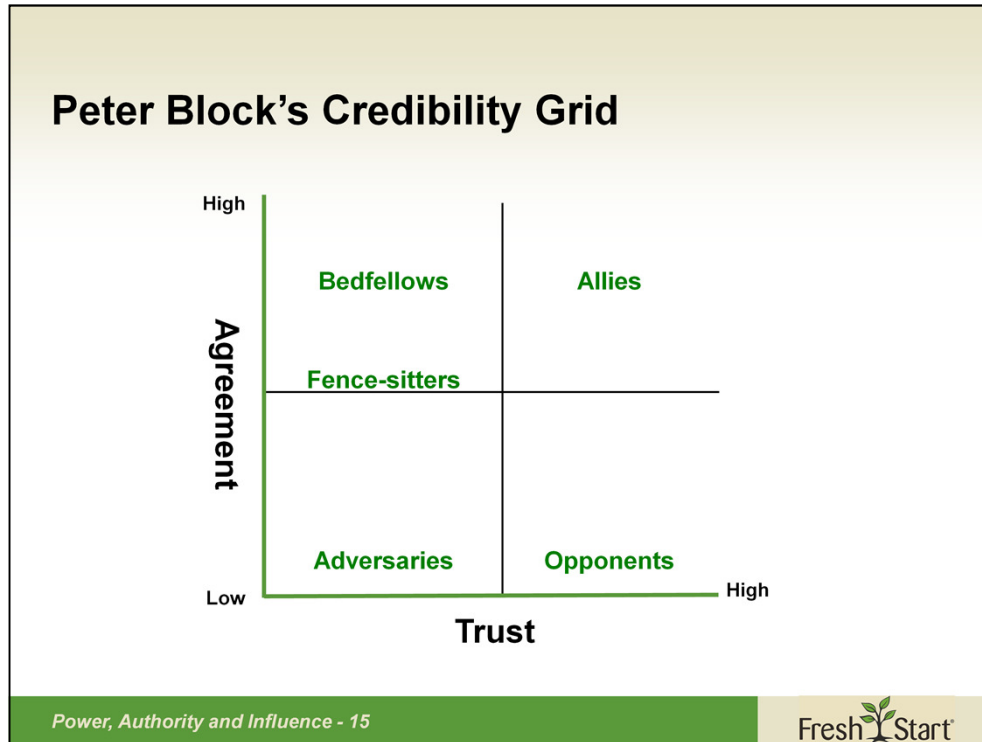**Trust** and **Agreement**

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Talking Points

Building the support within a congregation that enables you to exercise power means building relationships. Leadership theorist Peter Block says there are two basic dimensions to our dealings with others – trust and agreement.

If we are in a high trust situation with someone who agrees with us, they will be our allies. If they disagree, they are our opponents, but much like the loyal opposition they do not discredit our motives or feel that they cannot negotiate with us.

If trust is low, those who are in agreement with our vision and goals may still go along – as "bedfellows". When both trust and agreement are low, people become true adversaries whose only goal is to convert or destroy.

Peter Block's Credibility Grid

High

Agreement

Bedfellows   Allies

Fence-sitters

Adversaries   Opponents

Low   High

Trust

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Talking Points

In his book, The Empowered Manager (see page 132), Block offers this visual to illustrate the relationship between agreement and trust.

In building credibility in the congregation, the first thing to look at is trust. Look at the people you have identified as having formal or informal power in your congregation, especially those whose names appear on more than one list. How high is the level of trust between you? To what extent is each of them in general agreement with your vision and goals (recognizing that agreement may vary depending upon the issue at stake)? Place those people on this grid.

Distribute Handout 3, Credibility Grid, and ask participants to complete it then share with the partner they had earlier. Then facilitate a large group discussion about their observations.

Note: If both clergy and lay leaders are present, ask them to think about the extent to which they feel there is trust and agreement with the new clergyperson's vision and goals and complete the grid individually. Then ask them to share their individual observations in congregational teams – to what extent is there agreement? Are there any surprises?

Strategies for Dealing with <u>Allies</u> and <u>Opponents</u> (High Trust)

• Affirmation

• Negotiate/reaffirm agreement

• Acknowledge own doubts to allies and show that you understand opponent's position

• Look for alternative solutions (win/win)

• Request support and seek advice

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Talking Points

When trust is high, your strategy should be to reinforce your relationship with those you consider allies and to look for a win/win situation for those who oppose you. Strengthening support is a surer strategy than trying to overcome opposition, but opponents will help keep you from making mistakes by openly expressing their concerns and reservations. You need to engage them – and by negotiating a win/win solution you may be able to move them into the allies' camp.

Strategies for Dealing with <u>Bedfellows</u> (Low Trust)

• Reaffirm agreement on vision or purpose

• Acknowledge doubts

• Be clear on what you want moving forward

• Ask what they want

• Reach agreement

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Talking Points

Congregational politics sometimes makes for strange bedfellows. Dealing with them requires keeping the focus on where you are in agreement and hammering out a mutually beneficial strategy of support. They may never trust you on some issues, but clear dealings with them may lead to more respect and mutual trust in the future.

Strategies for Dealing with <u>Fence Sitters</u>

- State your vision or goals
- Probe for their interests
- Express frustration
- Ask them to "sleep on it"
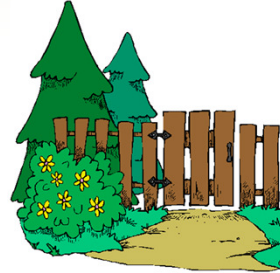
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Talking Points

Fence sitters are cautious and non-commital and often driven by fear or doubt. To reach them, try to probe for the underlying concerns or interests that are keeping them "on the fence," while remaining clear about your vision and plans. Fence sitters may simply not care or they may have something to share that will help you further refine your own thinking. If they continue to sit on the fence, express some frustration at not being able to count on their support and perhaps ask them to reconsider and let you know if they change their mind. Since they will probably not actively oppose you, however, they should not consume too much of your time and energy.

Strategies for Dealing with <u>Adversaries</u> (Low Trust)

• Be clear on your vision/goals

• Demonstrate understanding for their position

• Identify the ways in which you contribute to the adversarial relationship and agree to stop

• Let go – no demands or promises

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Talking Points

We often label people as adversaries when they are really opponents, so the first thing to determine is whether the person is truly an adversary. Adversaries emerge ONLY when attempts to negotiate a mutually agreeable solution fail – frequently we do not even try to engage those who oppose us, assuming that they are truly enemies.

True adversaries are low on both agreement AND trust, and conversion or destruction are the only possibilities. For them, your primary objectives are to lessen the threat and then let go. You can simply refuse further contact, but another strategy is to reduce the tension by demonstrating understanding. By showing that you understand their position, even if you cannot agree, you show respect. You also need to take responsibility for what you have done to contribute to the development of an adversarial relationship – and promise to stop doing it. After all, you can only control yourself and your own reactions – you have no control over the other. You do not have to be in the position of having to convert OR destroy.

Any questions?

Distribute Handout 4, which summarizes the strategies, as a take-home reminder.

Building Trust

- With whom do you need to build trust?
- What ideas do you have for doing that?

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Talking Points

Trust is the foundation for the exercise of power and influence. Look at your Credibility Grid – with whom do you need to build trust? How might you go about doing that? Take a few minutes with your partner (or in your congregational teams) from earlier today and talk through some strategies for building trust with these members of your congregation.

After participants have had a time to share, facilitate a large group discussion of the ways people have identified to connect and build trust with the members of their congregation. Wrap up with a prayer or blessing.