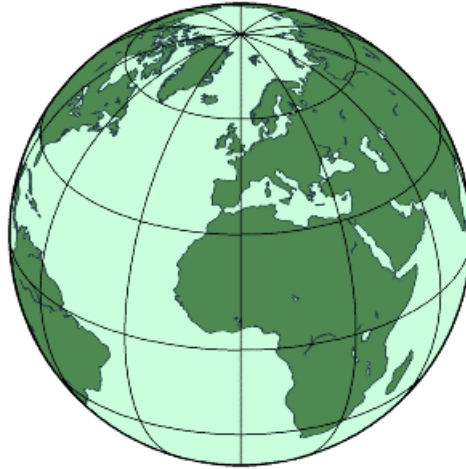


Two Kinds of Power



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Introduction

- You need power to change the world:
 - But, not necessarily the kind of power that most people think you need
- This chapter discusses two different kinds of power:
 - And explains which one is more likely to help you change the world

1. Power over people

Power over people

- Most people think of *power* as being “power over people”:
 - The ability to get people to do what you want through money, authority, threats or force

- You might think
“I could significantly change the world if I were...”:
 - Very rich, for example, a billionaire
 - The president or prime minister of a country
 - The owner and manager of a large company

- Unfortunately:
 - You are unlikely to be any of those things
 - You are unlikely to be successful if you plead with such people
“I think you should use your money or power to ...”

Getting “power over people” is not a viable plan

- Your plan to change the world should *not* be:
 - First get lots of power over people
 - Then use that power to change the world
- Why? Because the first part of the plan is unlikely to succeed
- There is *another* kind of power that it much easier to obtain:
 - And that other kind of power has a proven track record for being able to change the world

2. Power to help people

Power to help people

■ Recall:

- Most people think of *power* as being “power **over** people”
- The ability to get people to do what you want through money, authority, threats or force

■ But *power* can also be “power **to help** people”:

- Almost everybody has this kind of power
- Most people do not use this kind of power as much as they could

■ Before examining this kind of power, let’s look at examples of its use

Examples of power to help people

- Before there was a vaccine to prevent polio, Sister Kenny developed a cure, and spent decades curing millions
- Mother Theresa helped poor people around the world, most notably in Calcutta, India
- Gandhi opposed oppression in South Africa and India:
 - Eventually, he ended British rule of India
- Richard Stallman promoted the idea of free(dom) software:
 - His GPL copyright is the most popular software license in the world
- Alex Haley was an author struggling to make a living:
 - He wrote *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*
 - Then he wrote about his slave ancestry in the book *Roots*

Examples of power to help people (cont')

- John Howard Griffin was a white author in America:
 - In 1959, he darkened his skin so he appeared to be black
 - He lived as a black man for 4 weeks and then wrote of his experiences
 - In this way, he helped to expose the extent of racism in America
- Black-rights activists, like Martin Luther King and Malcolm X
- Mohammad Yunus was an economics professor:
 - He saw people in Bangladesh starving to death because of poverty
 - In 1977 he started with \$27, giving microcredit (small loans) to help people work their way out of poverty
 - His microcredit system has spread to over 50 countries
 - He and his Grameen Bank won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006

A common theme

- You might be able to think of many more examples
- There is a common theme in the examples on the previous slides...
- When those people *started* helping others they:
 - Were *not* famous and did *not* have “power **over** people”
 - But they used “power **to help** people”
- Eventually, they became famous *because of* their work:
 - That is quite different to thinking that they were able to do the work because they were already famous
 - Becoming famous was *not* their motivation for wanting to help others:
 - Many faced hardship because of their desire to help others
 - Some faced death threats, and some were assassinated

Likelihood of success

- The examples show that “power to help people” *can* work:
 - But just because it *can* work, does not mean it is *likely* to work
 - Perhaps the examples are exceptions rather than the rule
- You probably know individuals who like to help others but:
 - Are not famous
 - Are not effective (they have an insignificant impact on the world)
- What can you do to make “power to help people” *effective*?

3. Making “power to help people” effective

Focus

- You should focus your work on just *one* issue
 - There are two reasons for this...
- It's better to make a large impact on one issue than smaller impacts on several issues
 - Better for the world, and better for your morale
- Many people prefer specialists over generalists:
 - Example:
 - A newspaper has printed lies that damage your reputation
 - You want to sue the newspaper for libel
 - Do you hire a lawyer who does many types of cases (divorce, accident compensation, making wills, contracts, copyright)?
 - Or do you hire a lawyer who specializes in libel?
 - People are more likely to help you if you specialize your efforts to change the world

Altruism

- *Altruism* is an unselfish concern for others
 - Often, acts of altruism are beneficial for others, but harmful to you
- Group altruism is rare but can be very effective. Examples:
 - Human rights activists tell oppressed people “You have to stand up to your oppressor. You might be killed or imprisoned but it will give freedom to future generations.”
 - Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X succeeded with that tactic
 - When an earthquake or storm puts many people at risk, the populations of other countries often donate millions to provide aid
 - Tens of thousands of programmers around the world write free or open-source software
 - Tens of thousands of people contribute to Wikipedia (an online encyclopaedia)

Altruism (cont')

- A comparison:
 - Group altruism is rare but can be very effective
 - Individual altruism is more common, but less effective
- Often, a person who changes the world does so by creating group altruism:
 - This magnifies the effect that the person has
 - One person's "power to help people" becomes a large group's "power to help people"
- People are more likely to follow your altruistic lead if:
 - They see you are dedicated to the issue (hence the need to focus)
 - You are willing to suffer as much as them in being altruistic

Example: Richard Stallman

- In the first few decades of computers, hardware was sold, but:
 - Software was often distributed free of charge
 - In both binary (ready-to-run) and source code (recipe) formats
- Some users modified source code to fix bugs or add new capabilities
- One day, Richard Stallman:
 - Found a bug in some software to control a printer
 - He asked for the source code so he could fix the bug
 - The manufacturer refused to give him the source code
- Richard thought this was unacceptable and, in fact, immoral:
 - Soon, he started noticing other similar cases of users being denied what he felt was a legitimate right to access source code

Example: Richard Stallman (cont')

- The move to proprietary software accelerated
- Richard did not have power **over** people:
 - He could not force companies to provide source code of applications
- But he eventually realized he had power **to help** people:
 - “I asked myself: what could I, an operating-system developer, do to improve the situation? It wasn’t until I examined the question for a while that I realized that an operating-system developer was exactly what was needed to solve the problem.”
- Richard decided he would write an entire operating system:
 - He called it GNU (a recursive pun for “GNU is not UNIX”)
 - Make all of it non-proprietary, provide everyone with source code
 - He was willing to dedicate his entire life to this (focus)

Example: Richard Stallman (cont')

- Richard publicly asked others to join him:
 - His request was initially met with optimism but disbelief
 - “The community reaction was pretty much uniform. People said, ‘Oh, that’s a great idea. Show us your code. Show us it can be done.’”
— Rich Morin
- 18 months later he released the first piece of software:
 - This was GNU Emacs (a powerful text editor):
 - People could see he was dedicated, and acting altruistically
 - Offers to help him increased greatly

Example: Bob Geldof

- Bob Geldof enjoyed success with The Boomtown Rats
 - But by 1984, they were no longer popular
- In late 1984, Bob Geldof saw a news report about famine:
 - “What could I do? I could send some money. [...] But that didn’t seem enough. [...] What else could I do? I was only a pop singer. And by now not a very successful pop singer. [...] All I could do was make records that no one bought.”
- He decided to make a record and donate the profits to charity:
 - The record would not sell well if it was recorded by The Boomtown Rats
 - So he asked other, more popular singers, to join him
 - He was surprised that so many agreed so readily
 - Chapter 13 (“Driven to Tears”) of his autobiography discusses how many others also agreed to give time, forego profits and incurred great personal expense to help with this charity work

4. Summary

Summary

- “Power **over** people” can be used to change the world
 - But you probably won’t become powerful enough
- Better to use “power **to help** people”:
 - Almost everybody has this power, but most don’t use it much
 - There are some famous examples of this type of power being used effectively
- Suggestions for making “power to help people” effective:
 - Focus on one issue rather than spread your energy on many issues
 - Find ways to make a large group of people act in an altruistic way
- Many chapters in this training course discuss related skills and insights that will help you

Relevant quotes

- Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821), French general, emperor
 - “Ten persons who speak make more noise than ten thousand who are silent.”

- Margaret Mead (1901–1978), American cultural anthropologist
 - “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. In fact, it’s the only thing that ever has.”