

Before we acquire great power we must acquire wisdom to use it well.

-Ralph Waldo Emerson

The acquisition of wisdom in education is often thought of in terms of increased certification or hierarchy of your position. It is commonly understood that the student learns from the teacher, the teacher learns from the supervisor, the supervisor learns from the principal, and the principal learns from the superintendent. As the certification or hierarchy level increases so does the conventional wisdom of strength and power increase. The superintendent of a district clearly has the most power of influence over all other employees within a district. A superintendent has the "power" to dismiss or recommend a person for employment. This may require in the case of tenure legal action, but non-the-less is in the authority of the superintendent. The events I am going to share regarding the use of power as a conduit for conflict stem from events prior to this assignment. The issue of conflict however remains constant.

My superintendent (for purposes of story called M) has made it repeatedly very clear for his disdain of my immediate supervisor, boss, and friend (for purposes of story named B). Their history dates back about ten years to when B was on the hiring committee for M. M was and is a very intelligent and competent educator who interviewed well and was deemed a good fit for the district. Upon M's employment, he became a very vocal advocate for change with little regard for the emotional well-being of other individuals. Accepting the elements essential to an employee's personal growth and satisfaction is an integral component of job satisfaction that middle level management, in my case instructional leaders, should be concerned with (Foor and

Cano, 2012).

B has been employed by the district for nearly 25 years. During that time he has served in many roles and many schools throughout the district. They include teacher's assistant, teacher, assistant principal, principal, union delegate, union president, and negotiator. He is well respected, admired, and recognized by the district and regarded by many as a valuable member of the community. When I came to the district eight years ago, he told me in confidentiality, "keep your friends close, but keep your enemies even closer." I understood that expression to be one where he knew during times of conflict, to maintain a close relationship with your adversary.

During the years of M and B working together a relationship of community envy and harsh regard for staff emotion evolved. B was clearly irate with the often lack of regard for personal relationships and candor while M was irate over B's innate ability to woe people and be admired for character. This friction caused significant trouble when M was appointed supervisor and eventually superintendent of B. Keltner, Gruenfeld, and Anderson define power "as an individual's relative capacity to modify others' states by providing or withholding resources or administering punishments. This capacity is the product of the actual resources and punishments the individual can deliver to others." The power that M held over B as his supervisor and superior was one that allowed and permeated the withholding of resources and administering of punishments. As a result, the daily work relationship that I had with B was becoming increasingly more exhausting, difficult, and even criticized.

Knowing that my access to district personal and "dependence on those resources" was constrained I was fraught with significant conflict. Understanding the

resources were more social (knowledge, friendship, decision-making opportunities, or ostracism) than material (food, money, physical harm), although job termination was presented several times throughout my tenure in the form of excess letters, they were always fortunately rescinded (Keltner, et al.). The conflict I was fraught with and the value my boss B had been often in terms of my own tenets of naïve realism. The notion of “it is what it is” needed to be fully ingrained in my dealings with both my direct supervisor B and my district wide supervisor M. To accomplish my tasks effectively, I would need to serve in between the two despite the communication breakdown. Additionally, I often was unable to share the information I acquired for fear of retribution. This rational reaction to the dynamic relationship between the two parties only created greater conflict. Lastly, my bias towards not accepting or a willingness to maintain an open mind and see the disdain they had for each other, worsened my conflict personally on an emotional level I had never dealt with prior (Ross & Ward, 1996).

The dominance in power held by M over B deepened and caused B to make a decision on his dealings and actions. B ultimately recognized resistance was futile and the consequences of both dealings necessitated B to resign. I was saddened and relieved at the same time, but also recognized, my conflict had not disappeared, only shifted. As Martin Niemöller stated during the Holocaust and his placement in the concentration camps as a Protestant pastor who openly criticized the atrocities of Adolph Hitler,

*First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out--  
Because I was not a Socialist.*

*Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out--  
Because I was not a Trade Unionist.*

*Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out--  
Because I was not a Jew.*

*Then they came for me--and there was no one left to speak for me.*

...I am conflicted that "they will come for me."

The conflict between M and B resulted in M remaining in power and B submitting to ensuring no further conflict happened to him or those that surround him. In his parting ways he confided in me to remain steadfast in my endeavors but recognize the limitations one can have in others trust. Roderick Kramer has researched the emerging and enduring questions that have recently been brought to scholarly research around the realm of trust in an organization. His research on dispositional trust concluded some people will never trust anyone for reasons that are based solely on early assumptions. The fear of never being able to trust someone I find personally upsetting as I am too trusting and open with my thoughts, concerns, and opinions. The hallmark of trust is "anticipated cooperation" (Kramer, 1999). Understanding the fundamental needs of developing trust is understanding and accepting anticipated cooperation. If I am not able to generate trust in my colleague(s), friend(s), spouse, or family; then how can I fairly plan a course of action without fear of power retribution?

Knowing that power can be social or material requires me to properly evaluate my development and acceptance of trust prior to deepening any relationship. This matter complicated my present situation when B resigned and his replacement was a friend and respected professional of M's. The replacement, G, was widely accepted as

a fully trusting and competent professional colleague and admirer of M's diplomacies.

As his subordinate, I was offered the chance to make amends and provide the skills that have allowed me to serve in the capacity I have been successful for the prior 7 years.

During the following months I witnessed many events that permitted me the opportunity to evaluate events that normally would have been received and perceived differently as a result of my prior relationship (Ross et al., 1996). The manifestation of my new knowledge and experiences created a diminished conflicting dilemma within me. I witnessed a professionalism and respect for the profession that I had never previously experienced before. The demise of conflict within myself I feel was emerging as a result of my ability to deliver competent work and show myself to M and G as an independent thinker and an abled employee. Although my membership into the "old boys club" certainly will not be arriving in the mail anytime in the immediate future, I am frequently recognized as a valuable employee who is committed in both my willingness to go above and beyond serving the community and schools in capacities that are unrelated to my direct job description.

My intimate time and need for developing trust within my organization not only satisfies a hierarchy need, but also strengthens over time as a result of our "cumulative interactions." The increased interdependencies we place upon each other essentially require us to further enrich our behaviors for future dependency. This cyclical reliance is one of many bases for trust within an organization, hence reducing conflict. In conclusion, my thought on my actions serving as a traitor to clearly established lines of trust verse conflict resolution wane with each pedagogical conversation of our organizations vision and mission. I can comfortably recognize that prior events and

emotions held deep by others fostered an inability to value and conflict resolution, but with each tested day of the rigors and demands placed upon me, I am reestablishing new levels of trust based on character and competency. Accepting the development of trust is “complex and often in unexpected ways,” my optimism and countless years of collegiality, I will bear the words of Arthur Ashe...

“Trust has to be earned, and should come only after the passage of time.”

## References

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