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## **Chapter 8**

### **THE ISSUE OF POWER IN THE COACHING RELATIONSHIP**

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#### **Introduction**

*“A coach strongly believes in the value of his tool kit for reaching the goal of the coaching session and imposes on the coachee one exercise after another without any clarity as to their aims.”*

*“The coachee asks the coach to push him to the limit in order to achieve what he wants to achieve. The coach takes on this role and coaches in an unusually forceful manner. Neither party is comfortable with the process; however the coachee is satisfied with the outcome.”*

What is the single dynamic at issue in both these cases? Sampson (1985) argues that it is the will to and exercise of power – that single urge, in both men and women, to impose our will on our fellow being. Whether in the home, the office, the street or the coaching room, the *nature* of imposition remains the same. The degree may vary, but ‘dominato’ itself, as Sampson writes, is always ‘dominato’.

This ‘will’ has a long history, some might say as long as history itself. Hobbes (1651: 47), for example, wrote of a “*restless desire*” of “*all mankind*” for “*power after power that ceaseth only in death*”. He also, more mildly, called it the “general inclination” of us all. Whether it is, in fact, a “restless desire” or a “general inclination” and whether it is “of us all” is perhaps something we can only answer for ourselves, but the evidence of recorded history and the pre-occupations of our time would suggest, at the very least, that it is a key dimension of human existence.

It is also widely accepted that power affects relationships. And so it is perhaps surprising, given that the quality of the relationship between the helper and the client is proven to be crucial (Clarkson, 2000; Kilburg, 2004; O’Broin & Palmer, 2007; Wampold, 2001), that the topic of power has been largely ignored in the coaching

literature. This chapter is an attempt to help redress this balance and to make clear some of the issues with which the coach is likely to contend.

In drawing these ideas together we have tried to keep uppermost in mind what might be most useful to the coach. At times this emphasis sits uncomfortably with philosophical exactness, but, in a field where there is so little agreement as to nature and form, this is perhaps inevitable. It is also our view that, ultimately, language is the approximation, whilst the *experience of power* itself is usually all too real.

The purpose of this chapter, then, is to increase the awareness of the coach of some of the issues that power presents in the coaching relationship. First, we identify the form of power that we think *is* an issue and compare it with related concepts. Then we explore why coaches need to pay attention to this phenomenon, illustrating our points within three specific dimensions of the coaching relationship. The chapter concludes with recommendations for coaches.

### **Defining power in relationship**

Little agreement exists as to an exact definition of ‘power’. Philosophers and other social scientists find themselves disagreeing as to what it is, who has it and when, whether it is a good thing or not, whether we should aspire to have more of it or less, and so on (Fromm, 1960; Kipnis, 2001; Lukes, 1987). However, for our purposes, we wish to identify two well-accepted meanings:

- one is *power over somebody*, the ability to dominate him or her, to impose one’s will on them, and
- the other is *power to do something*, to be able to, to be potent.

Both these definitions sit at the very heart of the coaching endeavour – the former as a perpetual potential and the latter as, arguably, the essence of coaching itself. Coaching is often described as *empowering* people to reach their potential, to develop new skills and to be able to use them effectively, while its associated term ‘powerlessness’ is used to describe a state of *not* being able to do what one wants. Furthermore, these twin meanings of power may actually appear *together*, for example, when a coach explores the relationship between a coachee (seeking potency) and their employing organisation (experienced as ‘impositional’). In both these cases, academics and practitioners may find themselves using a single term to describe impulses which could hardly be more distinct. They may also find themselves

slipping from one definition to the other without noticing, obscuring the analysis and perhaps avoiding the issue.

That these terms are not only central and contrasting but are furthermore antithetical should also not escape our notice. Fromm (1960: 140), for example, suggests that a person with a lack of potency is more likely to strive for domination: *“the extent to which an individual is potent, that is, able to realise his potentialities on the basis of freedom and integrity of his self, he does not need to dominate and is lacking the lust for power”*. If he is right, it would appear that these particular ‘twins’ are neither identical nor compatible.

Another useful distinction is of that between power (as imposition) and influence. Clearly we are influencing each other all the time – for how else would we get our needs met? - and yet this form of social exchange does not, *in itself*, involve imposition. The exact point where influence becomes imposition may be difficult to identify in absolute analytical terms. Consider, for example, the account of Milton Erickson’s intervention with a deeply depressed lady who lived in Milwaukee (Griffin and Tyrrell, 2003). Having seen flourishing African violets and an open Bible in her home, he ‘prescribed’ that she give as a gift to members of her church (for clearly she was a church-goer, he concluded) an African violet on all appropriate occasions (births, marriages, christenings, etc.). If she did that she would be well, he proclaimed, and left. Years later he heard of the death of “The African Violet Queen of Milwaukee”. “Anybody who takes care of that many African violets is too busy to be depressed,” he said. “I only saw her once.”

At first sight his actions might be considered bordering on imposition. To have ‘swept in’ with all the accoutrements of power (his professional reputation, his manner, expert knowledge, etc.) and within half an hour to have left leaving clear and precise instructions, raises alarm bells. And yet, nowhere did he actually *impose* his will, in the sense that she was compelled to follow his advice. She remained a free agent. There is much more that could be said about this encounter but the point we want to make at this stage is that, whether or not he was being *influential* (clearly he was, for she took his advice, with dramatic effect) or also *‘impositional’*, is, ultimately, an *experiential* issue rather than an analytically verifiable one. We would need to enquire into his motivations and her reactions, for example, to determine the particular case.

## Why investigate power?

However compelling may be the use of power as potency, we choose to explore here the meaning of power as domination. As this book is about relationship we need to address the issues that the urge to personal ascendancy may bring. It may sound extreme to be considering it for a profession grounded on libertarian principles and yet it is well known that counselling and psychotherapy, based on equally laudable aims and objectives, and more professionally regulated, has a history of cases and debates about precisely this topic (Clarkson, 2000; Masson, 1989; Spinnelli, 1994). There is also a growing body of literature concerning power in the mentoring relationship (Manathunga, 2007; Ragins, 1997; Klasen & Clutterbuck, 2002; Schmidt, 1997). It is clearly an issue that warrants attention.

As we approach this subject there is little doubt in our minds that we are entering emotionally turbulent waters. The definition of power as imposition is almost guaranteed to raise emotional reactions in the perpetrator *and* in the recipient of their actions (Sampson, 1965, 1985). And yet it is precisely this *emotional turbulence* that makes the topic so important. There is, for example, research which suggests that, when emotionally aroused, the neurological pathways to the higher cortex (the thinking brain) are impeded, and, in extreme circumstances, cut off, so that the emotional brain can attend (without questioning thought) to our immediate survival needs (Griffin & Tyrrell, 2003). To exert power over someone or to have someone's will imposed on us, *is* emotionally arousing. It follows, therefore, that to the extent that we are engaged in these emotionally arousing matters we will not be at our rational best, and neither will our coachee. Hawkins and Smith (2006: 293) provide a vivid example of this happening to an experienced coach when he was 'inexplicably' intimidated by a coachee: "*I began burbling about what I did, and felt almost in my 'panic zone' ... All my experience and skill ... deserted me*".

There is a further reason for looking at this issue in these terms. When coaches sense where the line between influence and imposition falls, it may free them to explore with more creativity areas of legitimate influence which they may not yet have ventured to use. One of the features of the coaching relationship is the extent to which the coach should 'push' the coachee. There is some evidence to suggest that the coach may be over-protective of the boundaries of the process whilst their coachee, more concerned with outcome, would like them to be bolder (Gyllensten & Palmer, 2007; Hawkins & Smith, 2006). Knowing where the line falls grants the coach more freedom of legitimate movement, with potential benefit to their coachee.

Finally, there is a more homely reason for our enquiry into this side of coaching. The teenage son of one of us recently said that he was exploring the dark side of music and films and, when asked about his motivation, replied that he had had a happy childhood and now wanted to see the shadows. With a psychologist's hat on, one might say he felt sufficiently safe and secure to explore the darker sides of life. In similar vein, we feel sufficiently confident about the coaching endeavour to explore the shady edges, if they be there, and in so doing enhance our understanding of the territory. Staying with the wisdom of youth, we might contend with Christopher Robin that, if we know where the lines are, the bears may not get us (Milne, 2004).

### **The nature of power as imposition**

The nature of imposition is often elusive and subtle. To own the desire to impose one's will on another person is not the easiest acknowledgment for any of us. As much of the literature suggests, it does not exactly put us in a good light (Greene, 2006; Fromm, 1960; McClelland, 1987; Sampson, 1985). In fact we may even have well-rehearsed explanations of how we are working to avoid doing just this, and indeed why we are working as coaches at all - to help others resist the imposition of those around them, for example. But the matter is more elusive than that. For one thing the urge to excel may be subconscious; we may even not be aware of how, or indeed *that*, we are doing it.

Secondly, there are elements of 'perception' and 'reception' to be considered. What is *considered* an 'imposition' may vary between people, circumstances and contexts. There are no guarantees that our best (or worst) intentions will be interpreted as such by the recipient of our behaviour (Bargh & Alvarez, 2001). If we are looking to define what is 'real' on any occasion we need to look beyond the intentions of the perpetrator. It may also be argued that there are dimensions of power embedded in the context which we may have become so used to working within that we lose sight of them as bindings at all. If periodically they begin to chafe, we may even put them down as inevitable – part of the natural order.

Thirdly, power, as imposition, is not only an important aspect of relationship, it *requires* a relationship. You cannot exert power on your own; you need someone to exert it *over*. Some authors have gone so far as to say that relationships themselves are 'power in flux' (Spinelli, 1994), as if you cannot avoid being in a relationship of power by virtue of being in relationship. This determinism is also evident in some of the sociological literature. We see these definitions as suffering from a single fallacy, namely that whilst the potential for power may be ubiquitous – part of the fabric of life –

the (*f*)act of power (being *exerted* at any one time) is *never* inevitable. And it is by making 'power as imposition' explicit that we are able both to focus on the possibility of 'benign' relationships giving rise to acts of imposition *and* avoid the limitations of structural determinism (Ragins, 1997; Masson, 1989). We agree with Spinelli's (1994) criticism of Masson (1989) that just because it is possible does not mean that it will be manifest. It is the language of 'pre-disposition to' and 'possibility of' power which we find more helpful in the coaching context.

It is with these thoughts in mind that we turn our attention to specific dimensions of the coaching relationship. The following are three groups of factors that coaches may find useful to consider:

1. Factors influencing the predisposition to power in the coach
2. Contextual issues, including the power of the coachee
3. Dealing with power in the immediacy of the coaching interaction.

### **1. Factors influencing the predisposition to power in the coach**

It is not unusual that coaches are commissioned to work with coachees more successful than they were themselves in their previous careers. This may give rise within the coach to feelings of insecurity and inadequacy. As a way of compensating for this situation they may seek to dominate, for example, by holding on disproportionately to the process itself, denying the coachee their fair share of control.

Fear of the unpredictability of the coaching process is often a reason for imposing unnecessary structure on the session, with the overuse of models and techniques. This reason for domination is most often reported by less experienced coaches who may seek to demonstrate credibility by the application of a forceful pace to the session and by the extensive use of structured activities. One of the consequences of this may be that the coach comes to view the coachee as no longer being the primary agent of their own behaviour. They may even come to value their tools as more instrumental than the coachee's own resources and effort. There is evidence to suggest, for example, that cognitive-behavioural therapists, who are known for their extensive use of tools may be less likely than others to attribute gains in therapy to their clients' own efforts and motivation (Kipnis, 2001; Kipnis, 1984; Mitchell et al, 1977; Zimbardo, 1970). Kipnis offers the above as an explanation of why we may come to *devalue* those whom we are most able to control.

Another temptation to exercise power may stem from the attachment of coaches to specific outcomes of the coaching process. If they are overly concerned with their reputation as coaches, for example, they may be tempted to exert unnecessary pressure on the coachee in order to demonstrate a tangible outcome of coaching. And even if they are not so tempted, *any* attachment to outcome runs the risk of *conceding* power to others, which may equally distort the process.

Amongst the *means* that are available to coaches if they wish to exercise power, is their *status* as specialists who are in a position to deliver a service that is needed by the organisation or an individual coachee. In spite of some voices that still argue against the professionalisation of coaching, this process is under way and coaches enjoy their status, particularly when their services have been sought out.

The professional status of coaches is closely linked to the image of an expert in a particular field. The myth of professional *expertise* as a symbol of power has already been explored in other professions (Illich, 1971; Szasz, 1984). In relation to coaching it is claimed that the expertise of a coach is related to the process rather than to the content of their work, and so is not as great as that of, say, a doctor or a teacher. The coach's expertise implies knowledge and skills that facilitate the coachee's learning. However, being an 'expert' of the process could still give the coach an opportunity to overstretch the coachee, to illustrate their intellectual power unnecessarily and to lead them in a direction that they have not chosen.

Coaches may also feel more powerful when they act as representatives of an organisation. This may lead them to associate themselves with the 'needs' of the organisation to such a degree that, for example, they put inappropriate pressure on their coachee to change, and in particular ways. The consequences of this action may enhance the reputation of the coach with their employer, but may have a negative impact on their relationship with their coachee and their long-term developmental process.

Amongst the psychological factors that may contribute to the coach's temptation to dominate are various personality traits, for example, Machiavellianism (Christie & Geis, 1970), dogmatism and locus of control ((Lee-Chai et al. 2001). There are also several power-related measures such as the Social Dominance Orientation scale (Pratto et al., 1994) or the Misuse of Power scale (Lee-Chai et al. 2001) that have been shown to be useful in research on power differentials. Whilst acknowledging their value for such purposes, the emphasis of this chapter is on personal responsibility and the capacity to determine one's own behaviour.

If the coach takes seriously the issue of power as described here they will appreciate the need to examine their values and personal philosophy. This would include their very choice of coaching philosophy for each philosophy (psychodynamic, cognitive-behavioural, person-centred, Gestalt, etc) contains assumptions about power. And even if they are satisfied that their values and intentions are positive, they may yet wish to concede (with Fitzgerald, 1993; Freud, 1933; McClelland, 1987; Wilson & Brekke, 1994) that, on occasions, they may be unaware of their true motivations or even be subject to self-deception.

A particularly challenging account of human nature in relationship to power is found in the writings of Krishnamurti (1991, 1996). He invites us to look at our deepest psychological nature that is rarely free from social conditioning, typically glorifying success, power and competition. *“Power is another form of corruption – political power, religious power, power in the business world, power in the exercise of a certain talent that one has. ...The energy, which is so necessary to bring about a transformation in the content of consciousness, is dissipated in all these ways.”* (Krishnamurti, 1996: 272). He leaves no doubt as to his attitude regarding the nature of power as explored in this chapter. *“Power in the sense of ascendancy, dominance, forceful influence over another, is evil at all times; there is no ‘good’ power”* (Krishnamurti, 1991: 182). This way of understanding power invites coaches to take an honest look at what is truly motivating them and how it may stand in the way of their best service to their coachees.

## **2. Contextual issues, including the power of the coachee**

The coach clearly does not work in a vacuum with their coachee, but in a context which may include the organisation that buys their services, their representing company and their professional association. The question arises as to whether these relationships ever amount to impositions of will on the coach. Are *they* ever the victim of the power of others? In this section we sketch out some of the issues and the means by which this power may be exerted.

The coachee themselves may exert power over the coach in ways which vary in terms of consciousness and intent. At one extreme they may intimidate, mock or otherwise demean the coach, or, more covertly, may undermine their credibility by reporting unfavourably on their work, gossiping about them, wrongly attributing ‘failure’ to them or failing to attribute ‘success’ to them. Or they may simply underplay all positive aspects and focus only on minor difficulties (Clarkson, 2000). Furthermore, in the work



itself, they may thwart the best endeavours of the coach; they may pace the process to their advantage, they may play on the perceived vulnerabilities of the coach, they may lead them into territory that is not of their choosing and resist attempts to move in the direction that is. At the end of the day they have considerable free will to go or not to go where they will and, if the coach is reluctant to follow, there is little he or she can do, ultimately, except follow or leave.

As mentioned earlier, there is a yet more subtle form of coachee power drawn paradoxically from the very value the coach may place on their work. To the extent, for example, that the coach values their reputation, the models and techniques they are working to, particular outcomes, etc., they become vulnerable to anyone who is in a position to deny them the outcomes they desire. In this case it is the coachee who may hold this power. The coach needs to keep a clear head not to become enthralled in an over-commitment to ends or means, but to remain open to the possibility of their non-fulfilment.

Another principal aspect of the context is the organisation for which the coach may be working. It is in a strong position to determine various aspects of the coaching practice, for example:

1. The act of employment itself, with its control of access to the means of making and sustaining a livelihood, gives the employing agent considerable power over those seeking such a livelihood from them (Jackson and Carter, 2007).
2. The organisation may instigate a coaching or mentoring programme which is closely wedded to the principal goals of the organisation, with specifically designed tasks itemised for attention and the deliberate exclusion of others (Klasen & Clutterbuck, 2002).
3. The organisation may instigate a reporting framework to monitor activity and progress within the coaching encounter.
4. The organisation is likely to allocate the space, time and facilities for the activity, with implications for the effectiveness of the work as well as the standing in which it is held.
5. The organisation has power to frame the activity in terms of staff expectations, which may affect the nature and potential of the work – anything from being a high profile addition to a programme of personal development to a standard concession in a dismissal process.
6. The organisation may regard the work as an adjunct to organisational change itself – an activity providing valuable feedback and focus for new ideas, or it may be treated as a discreet activity with no expectation of further effect.

7. The organisation has access to the law and professional bodies of the coach whereby it may ensure that agreements are adhered to and deviations sanctioned.
8. There may be a reporting mechanism back to the coaching organisation from which the coach came, with implications for their future employment.

There is also a more covert form of power that may be found in the language and logic with which organisational theory is constructed and in which coaches may find themselves enthralled, consciously or unconsciously. Morgan (2006: 4), for example, writes that *'... all theories of organisations and management are based on implicit images or metaphors that lead us to see, understand, and manage (them) in distinctive yet partial ways.'* He and other writers offer us metaphors for 'understanding' organisations - for example, as 'instruments of domination'. This may give rise to the idea that we have been beguiled by unchallenged concepts of 'rationality', which should be studied in the context of those who have a vested interest in their definition (Jackson & Carter, 2007; Davies, 2005). They also suggest, however, that times are changing and that the definitions themselves are now up for discussion, or should be. It is therefore expedient for coaches to be aware of whose definitions of 'reason', 'purpose' and 'value' they and their coachees are working to, and the mechanisms by which they have been brought about. As Hawkins and Smith (2006: 6) suggest, coaches need to be wary that their work does not *"become a tool that can be used to coerce individuals and groups to someone else's will, a will that they have no real chance of resisting, because it is dressed up in the clothes of 'performance, efficiency and benefit to the organisation', or more directly impacts on whether they stay in their job."*

Standing this argument on its head for a moment, there is another notion here worthy of comment. Coaches may have a view of organisations which even leads them to avoid working there because, for example, they feel they compromise, beyond tolerable limits, the scope of their work. How we view organisations will, in part, determine how we experience them. If for too long we have failed to see them as 'instruments of domination', we may yet want to avoid seeing them as only, or indeed principally, this. Morgan (2006) suggests other metaphors which may add yet more perspectives to our sight, (for example, 'machines', 'organisms', 'brains' and 'psychic prisons'). It serves coaches well to keep their minds open to new ways of thinking - and ultimately to an awareness of the partiality of all thought. It would be ironic indeed if the most lasting thralldom they succumbed to was that of their own thinking.

### **3. Dealing with power in the immediacy of the coaching interaction**

It is clear from the above that the consequences of power as domination are difficult to overestimate, both in terms of the broader view of the profession and in terms of the 'here and now' of the coaching interaction. In the case of the latter, we believe that it is awareness and consent that make the crucial difference between 'forceful influence' and 'imposition of will'. Some of the possible interplays are illustrated in the following diagram.

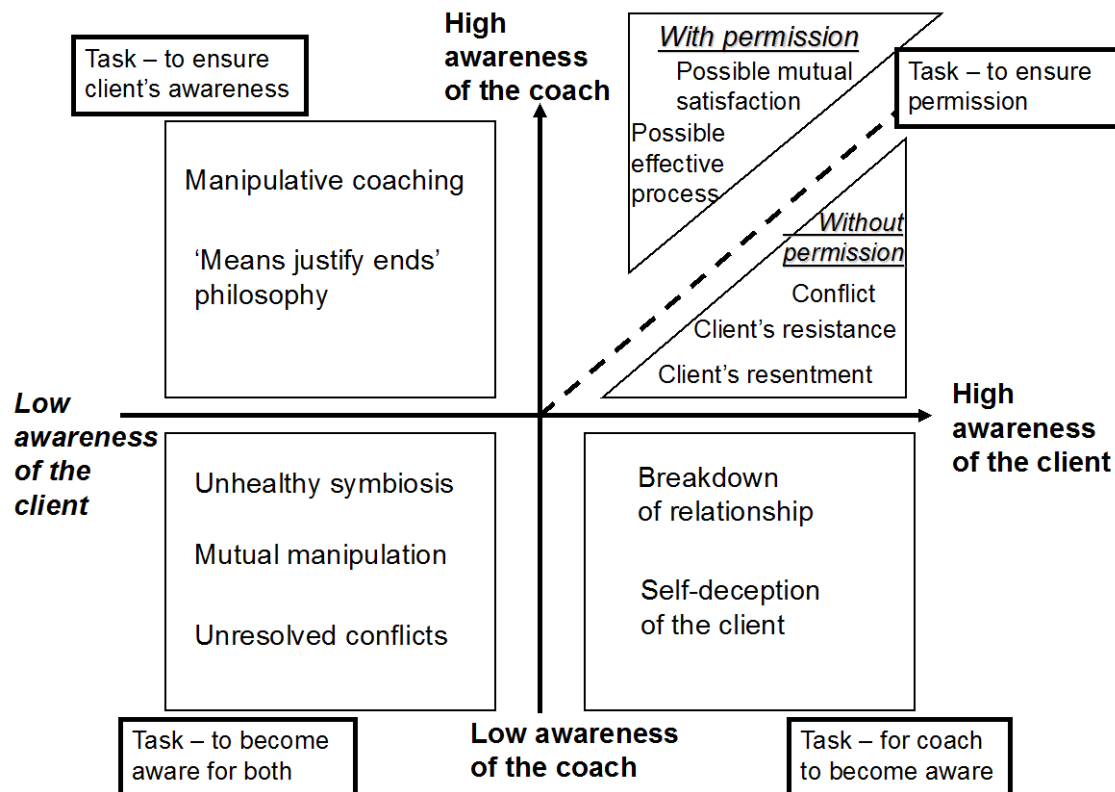


Figure 1. Consent and awareness of power in coaching relationship

In the first quadrant the coach is aware of their imposition of will on the coachee but the coachee is not. Such a case might arise, for example, if the coach values outcome more highly than means. When the coach becomes aware of such a situation they have the option of drawing the coachee's attention to it and of involving them in the decision about the best way forward. Furthermore it is expedient that they do this as soon as possible for, if Torbert's observation is correct, the value of any change thus evoked is likely to be highly questionable. *"Traditional forms of power, such as force, diplomacy, expertise or positional authority... may generate immediate acquiescence, conformity, dependence, or resistance. But... no matter in what combination, they will not generate transformation"* (Torbert, 2004: 8).

When both the client and the coachee become aware of the possible use of power by the coach, the critical issue becomes a question of consent - whether explicit permission by the coachee is given (Quadrant 1). The coachee may give this permission willingly or they may do so under pressure of the need to change or in the belief that coaching has to have an element of challenge according to the principle of 'no pain – no gain'. They may even *ask* the coach to be tough with them. In this case the process may lead to mutual satisfaction and effective outcomes. It is important to notice, however, that this scenario implies that both the coachee and the coach are able to reconsider this arrangement at any point in the coaching engagement.

Another difficult scenario is when power is imposed on the coachee without their permission (Quadrant 2). Potential consequences of this are coachee resentment, overt or covert resistance to the coaching process or sometimes actual conflict. If expressed, these reactions could be healthy for the coachee's overall development. However, in some cases the coachee may 'resolve' this by keeping back the truth or actually telling lies. The loss of trust and rapport may be irrecoverable. And even when this conflict *is* openly discussed and 'learning' takes place it may not justify the energy invested in getting that far. The way out for the coach is to check with their coachee if they ever sense they may be imposing their will on them and to adjust their behaviour as necessary.

The most problematic scenarios, however, are those in which the coach is unaware of their dominating behaviour (Quadrants 3 and 4). If the coachee also lacks awareness of this fact, it may not be discovered for some time, creating an unhealthy symbiosis or any one of many power games. In cases where the coachee becomes aware of such situations, they will probably choose to terminate the coaching relationship unless they have a good reason 'to play the game' on their own terms. It goes without saying that a coach would seek to avoid this situation.

The situations described in fig. 1 suggest that the awareness of the coach of exerting power on the coachee is a key factor that is likely to change the dynamics of the relationship. If the coach sees power in the terms described here and wishes to avoid its temptation, we believe that they need to be aware of its possibility moment by moment. They will then have the opportunity to stop or at least to raise the awareness of the coachee to the situation. The next step could be to seek the coachee's informed consent if there is any doubt as to its appropriateness. In the light of this debate the first case that we started our chapter with is illustrative of power as imposition. The second case draws our attention to the crucial areas of awareness and consent, which require careful and open discussion. Where 'forceful influence' merges into 'imposition'

may be analytically impossible to define, but when the consequences of getting it wrong can so impair the relationship on which hangs the value of the encounter, it is vital that the coach is as open and informed as possible.

## Recommendations

We believe that the issue of power as domination has to be attended to by those who are responsible for coaching relationships and their long-term outcomes, i.e. by individual coaches, coaching companies, training providers and, in the most difficult legal and ethical cases, by professional bodies.

There are two key dimensions to this issue – firstly, how to identify and deal with any personal inclinations that one may find within oneself and, secondly, how to contend with the issue when met with in others. Here is a list of some ideas that have occurred to us in writing this chapter.

The three ancient ‘golden rules’ can hardly be bettered –

- know thyself
- above all do no harm
- do nothing to anyone that you would not wish done to you.

More specifically we might add the following:

1. *Keeping a distinct language for the analysis of power.* To examine this issue it is important to retain a distinct vocabulary which avoids confusion with other uses of the same term.
2. *Examining your personal philosophy in relation to power.* This implies having a clear understanding of how issues of power fit into your personal philosophy of life and work. How, for example, your very choice of theoretical tradition, models and techniques may have been influenced by your attitude to this phenomenon.
3. *Developing self-knowledge.* This implies taking an honest look at yourself and how your attitude to power may have affected, and may still affect, your personal and professional relationships.
4. *Developing self-awareness in the process of coaching.* It is important in understanding your own inclination to power to monitor it moment by moment in the coaching encounter. For example, how do you normally introduce an activity that you want the coachee to take part in? Are you always transparent

about the purpose of the activity? Do you give them enough information and time to make their choice to participate or not? How flexible or insistent are you on a particular interpretation of the outcomes of the activity? Even the common request to 'be reflective' may be an imposition unless the coachee truly understands and agrees to it.

5. *Developing the capacity to stand firm when confronted with the real or imagined power of others.* This is always likely to involve a degree of courage, but courage often comes with understanding. If we understand the potential for and nature of the phenomenon in ourselves we may be less daunted when we meet it in others. This should mean that we are better placed to maintain the "centeredness" (Hawkins and Smith, 2006: 246) we require to attend to the needs of our coachee.
6. *Transparency with coachees.* If the coach feels that they are about to cross the line from influence to imposition (or indeed that the coachee is imposing their will on them) it is important that they discuss it with the coachee. As stated elsewhere, this may become a valuable learning experience for either or both parties, but most crucially, it safeguards the integrity of the process. Both the coachee and the coach have rights and responsibilities in this matter and it is vital that any hint of infringement is carefully discussed. If the coachee agrees to be 'pushed' it is even more important that the terms of the 'pushing' are understood, monitored and reviewed.
7. *Sharing the concerns.* The subject of power is pervasive and illusive. If the coach finds that the issues in this chapter resonate with them they would benefit from exploring them further with colleagues and supervisors.

We hope that the issues discussed in this chapter help the coach to stay alert to the dangers of power in the coaching relationship. If Hobbes is right that the desire for power "ceaseth only in death" we can at least seek to temper its prevalence in the meantime.

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## **Discussion/reflection points**



1. The point at which influence becomes an issue of power is difficult to determine. How might you reflect on this distinction in your own professional and private behaviour?
2. Reflecting on your private and professional life, identify an occasion when someone or an organisation imposed their will on you. How did you feel and how did you react? What was the outcome?
3. What steps can you take to minimise your own potential to exert power over others?