

MANAGING POWER IMBALANCES AND ABUSE

A. Introduction

1. My story
2. Meet the Smiths (Small Group Discussion)

3. **Thesis:** It is _____ to utilize _____
 when there are _____.

B. POWER DYNAMICS 101

1. Power is...
 - The capacity to influence or shape something (Diane Langberg)
 - The ability to make something happen or to stop something from happening.
 - Power is not a fixed trait but varies by context.
 - Power is not inherently evil.
 - "Power belongs to the Lord." (Psalm 62:11)
 - All power is derivative from the Lord. (John 19:11)
 - All image bearers possess power (Genesis 1:26-28)
2. Types of Personal Power
 - Knowledge - Education, training, skills acquired, cognitive ability
 - Verbal - Language, mastery of words, speaking quickly
 - Emotional - capacity to express, read, and process emotions (EQ)
 - Spiritual - Scriptural knowledge, relationship with God
 - Positional - office, title, role, or position

"Power is the capacity to influence." - Peter Scazzero

"Power is what enables us to make things happen or not. In this sense everyone has power, but we do not all have it to the same degree. Power as influence is always relative to our resources." -Richard Gula

- Relational - trust-based relational credibility, who you know and can access, wooing and winning social capital through connection, perceived power
 - Physical - physical characteristics, strength, which extends to gender and sexual identity
 - Cultural - Age, race, gender, and ethnicity
 - Resource - money, time, material goods
3. Power imbalances
- Power inequities are normal, natural, and neutral
 - Abuse occurs when power is misused in relationship to another image bearer of God to exploit, manipulate, or control the vulnerability of another for their own ends (Ezekiel 34:1-16, Matthew 23).

26 Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." 27 So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. 28 God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground." Genesis 1:26-28

D. Power Dynamics in Christian Conciliation

1. Assumptions about power dynamics in Christian Conciliation:
 - Equality
 - Mutuality
 - Responsibility
 - Goal: interpersonal reconciliation

D. Research Review of Power Imbalances

1. Mediators "may inadvertently exacerbate an existing power imbalance by imposing impartiality on an unlevel playing field" (Turner and Saunders. 1995).
2. Power is contextual and having equal power is not a necessity for a fair mediation. Having a stronger party does not inherently mean they will abuse power. (Green, 2005).
3. The litmus test for assessing power imbalances is a determining how it affects a party's ability to self-determine. (Gewurz, 2001)
4. Increased power: can (1) reduce the accuracy with which we judge others' emotions; (2) reduce felt compassion toward others who suffer; and (3) alters emotions. (Dacher Keltner)
5. *Conclusion:* There is literature to support settlement negotiations and mediation when power imbalances exist, however, when those imbalances are a result of abuse, or will result in a re-enactment of abuse, it ought to change the approach.

"Power belongs to you God, and with you, Lord, is unfailing love." Psalm 62:11

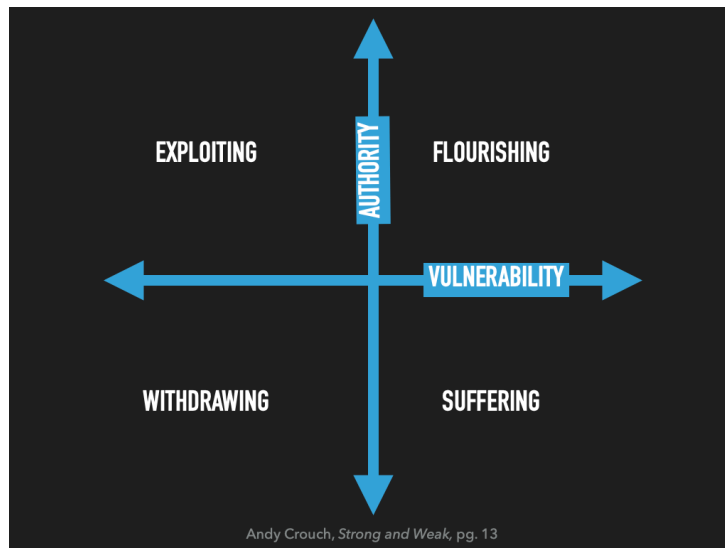
"You cannot do justice without recognizing how power has been used to exploit and abuse, but you also cannot do justice without exerting power yourself." Tim Keller

D. Power Imbalances Created by Abuse

1. Intimate Partner Violence (Domestic violence)
2. Workplace bullying (Organizational "conflict")
3. Emotional, verbal, psychological, and spiritual abuse (Personality Disorders)
4. Caution:
 - Significant racial, ethnic, gender, or socio-economic differentials
 - Protective systems and image management (Mullen, 2020)

D. Stewarding Power Redemptively

1. "Who is flourishing because your use of power?" Andy Crouch
2. **Assess** power dynamics wisely
 - Who has power? What power do they have? How does this affect the capacity for self-determination?
 - What is the level of fear in the parties?
 - Who controls more of what the other party wants or needs at any given moment?
 - Are there abusive dynamics reported?
 - Assessment tools
3. **Accommodate** power differentials gently (2 Tim 2:24, Gal. 6.1)
 - Start with the weaker party
 - Change the format (Ex. Restorative Justice, removing log and speck assignment, shuttle negotiation, increase causes, etc.)
 - Empower by providing options
 - Focus on repentance, restitution, rather than the interpersonal process of reconciliation
4. **Advocate** for justice lovingly (Prov. 31:8-9, Jer. 22:3, Psa. 82:3)
 - Naming reality
 - Directly confronting abusive behavior
 - Protecting the vulnerable



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