

The Right Use of Power System

by Cedar Barstow

The Power Spiral

Right Use of Power is one of the most crucial needs of our time and one of the greatest challenges we face in leadership and in personal development. We have the capacity for wisdom, skillfulness, and service in our use of power. Yet we have all been wounded by misuses and abuses of power by those in positions of trust, and we have also inevitably misused or under-used our power.

Power is simply the ability to have an affect, or to have influence, but the right use of this influence is profound and complex. Right use of power in positions of trust, far from being an automatic result of good intentions, must be learned and practiced. The ability to act sensitively, creatively, and effectively on behalf of others requires attention, skill, and wisdom, and a lifetime interest in the impact of your use of power.

The Right Use of Power program brings heart and soul to the study of ethics by honoring the good intentions of helping professionals for wanting the best for our clients. Right use of power is the use of power to heal, protect, collaborate, and empower those in our care. It is the use of personal power to express compassion and kindness, and to be of service by manifesting our purpose and gifts.

Right use of power and influence can be learned and this learning happens through a spiraling process of gaining understanding and skillfulness at higher and higher levels of complexity, inclusivity, and transcendence. In the Power Spiral model, right use of power has four aspects: it is informed, conscious, caring, and skillful. Sets of educational material are grouped with each of these components, and organized around a circular map of the four cardinal, seasonal, and elemental directions. Here's a little more detail about the philosophy which I hope will be a useful context. Both the resource book and the workshops cover the following material in depth.

Informed Use of Power—Ethics Codes and Guidelines

The foundation for right use of power is learning and understanding Ethics Codes and Guidelines. This is informed use of power. On the process map, informed use of power is represented in the East, where we “show up,” and (from Angeles Arriens Four-Fold Path) where we gather the information that comes to us through the lived history of our profession. This wisdom has been passionately and deliberately downloaded into ethics codes and guidelines. There is a vast reservoir of information here about behaviors that have been determined to cause harm, some of which are obvious and some of which are not obvious. There is information about potential dilemmas that require complex understanding of relationship dynamics and considerations of the impact on our clients over time. There is information about contemporary issues that are currently under consideration or re-consideration. Information that helps educate the public about what to expect from us. Here we also learn about the nature and impact of the power differential that goes with role relationships in which the helping professional has greater power and influence than the other. This information provides a solid base of understanding about ethical behavior.

Topics covered here are:

- . Codes of Ethics
- . Confidentiality
- . Dual Role Relationships
- . Ethical Decision-Making
- . Power Differential
- . Violations & Statistics

Conscious Use of Power—Awareness

From gathering information about professional standards of behavior, we move to the Awareness Section, symbolized in the South, where we learn more about the conscious use of power. Here (in an adaptation of Angeles Arrien's Four Fold Path) we "pay attention to what has heart and meaning". This involves engaging compassion and curiosity in unearthing and sharing personal stories of experiences of being wounded, and courageous reflection on experiences in which we have misused power. Through these stories, truly told, we can find understanding, connection to others, new perspectives, healing, release, and valuable information about decisions we've made about power which now inform how we express and use our power and influence more and less skillfully. We look at shame as an isolating and de-resourcing force.

We also remember stories of using power well, finding that it is often harder to acknowledge our goodness than our flaws. We build compassion through acknowledging, without shame or blame, the humanness of our vulnerabilities, sufferings, and mistakes. In this section of the cycle, we explore three kinds of power: power of position, power of communication, and power of presence, and two ways in which power can be expressed: dynamic and magnetic. We also learn about the value of acquiring skillfulness in asking for, receiving, giving, and using feedback.

Topics covered here are:

- . Non-Ordinary States
- . Personal Power
- . Sexuality
- . Shame
- . Touch
- . Transference

Caring Use of Power—Accountability

Moving to the West on the map, we learn about "telling and hearing the truth without shame or blame". Being accountable and taking responsibility for our behavior, is an expression of caring. We need to care about our impact on others in order to be willing to bear the possibility that we may have caused harm. The core of this section is understanding the difference between intention and impact. This involves learning to track for impact, to tolerate the possibility that you are not being received in the way you intended, to lean into the difference by acknowledging it, and then to use the interaction to clarify, improve, or repair the relationship. Here we also learn processes and attitudes for resolving difficulties before they escalate to a grievance process. Indeed, in reading lists of reported grievances, it appears that many of these could have been prevented by conscious and courageous attention in the moment. We reframe accountability as an expression of caring and love, rather than an expression of guilt, weakness or shame.

Topics covered here:

- . Boundaries
- . Grievance Processes
- . Impact & Intention
- . Referrals

- . Resolving Difficulties
- . Supervision & Support

Skillful Use of Power—Empowerment

Returning to the North, we arrive with a deeper understanding of right use of power—Right Use of Power and Influence as a set of embodied skills and attitudes informed by compassion that can be used to empower ourselves and those in our care and, in addition, can be used to prevent harm, heal, and repair, self-correct, and collaborate.

In this section, we identify tendencies and unmet needs in our lives that may make us vulnerable to making specific kinds of ethical errors so that we can be proactive about preventing or repairing these. We learn how vital self-care is. We name some dynamics associated with power, and turn toward using power as a social force for good. We learn to allow ourselves to be nourished and replenished by actions of wise use of power. We understand more about the meaning of “being open to outcome, and not attached to it,” inhabiting our integrity and caring, and learning when to persist and when to let go. We take a stand for our goodness, claiming and stating our vision for the right use of our power.

Topics included here:

- . Challenges
- . Feedback
- . Influence, Values, Diversity
- . Leadership & Power Dynamics
- . Self-Care
- . Soul Work & World Service

The Vision

The spiraling journey to mastery in the use of power is numinous and potent because it brings together personal development and soul work (being) with creation and accomplishment (doing). Love and creativity yearn to be expressed in form. Use of power in the full use of Self is both a right and a responsibility.

Those who learn to use their power consciously, caringly, and skillfully are familiar with their profession’s code of ethics and with contemporary ethics issues, have done personal work with their power history and beliefs, are willing to be held responsible for their behavior and can self-correct, know how to track for and resolve difficulties whenever possible within the therapeutic relationship, have proactively assessed for their ethical challenges, understand dynamics around power, and are actively engaged in the empowered and empowering use of power for the good of all.