Have you ever considered the origin of the phrase “rule of thumb”? Legend has it that it comes from an ancient law that limited the thickness of a stick with which men were allowed to beat their wives.

In the world of consulting, although without the use of sticks, consultants often try to get their ways by exerting force upon their clients, and in doing so, they very often ruin their relationships.

But if, instead of force, they used power, consultants could be much more helpful to their clients without coming across like elephants in the china shop.

But the problem is that...

Many people look at the word “power” as a negative word.

One reason for that is that we’ve been taught that the word power is related to the state, as in “state power”, and only the state has the right to use power.

After having read Power vs. Force by David R. Hawkins, I’ve learnt that while force is something we use on others, mainly in the form of violence to oppress them, power is something we use, first and foremost, on ourselves to express ourselves.

And in this sense, power refers to a set of character traits.

In summary...

Force is all about male energy and rules inflicted by authority.

Power is all about female energy, ability to attract, magnetise and inspire.

And while both force and power can be associated with controlling people and misusing one's position, power also means the ability to enable, empower and influence people to take action in their own best interest.

This reminds me of Dan Sullivan’s definition of selling...

“Getting people intellectually engaged in a future result that’s GOOD for THEM (keyword: GOOD and THEM), and getting them to emotionally commit to take action to achieve that result.”

If you think about it, this statement packs a hell of a lot of power but no force whatsoever.

I reckon, this is why we’re talking about consulting power not consulting force. In sales, force (aka. being pushy) comes into the equation in the three most despicable salespeople: car salespeople, realtors and insurance agents.

Sadly, many consulting projects fail not because the hired consultants are incompetent, but rather because clients don't act upon what they want to achieve as a result of the project. They have dreams and aspirations but no guts to actually take action to turn their dreams into reality. And that is the point when consultants’ power is called upon.

Power has two major ingredients: Knowing and doing. Clients usually know what to do but get so buried in day-to-day busyness that they simply don't take the necessary actions to move forward and stay buried.
We have all heard comments which essentially say the same: “I am so busy that I have no time to market for new business, have no time to help my people to improve their performance, etc.”

However, power also comes with the potential for abuse in forms of being self-centred, blaming, money-oriented - “it's all about the dough, stupid” mentality. When people are in search of power, we tend to think they are power-hungry, controlling, dictatorial and manipulative.

According to David R. Hawkins, when power is used in a negative way, it becomes force.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Bottom-Up Societies</th>
<th>Log of Power</th>
<th>Top-Down Societies</th>
<th>Log of Force</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Love</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Freedom (Enlightenment)</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Non-Coercion</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>Force</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Local Control</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>Centralized Planning</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Abundant Creativity</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>Stifled Creativity</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Optimism</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>Despair</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Strong Families</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>Breakdown of Families</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Personal Responsibility</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>Dependence</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Universal Opportunity</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>Concentrated Power</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Prosperity</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>3690</td>
<td></td>
<td>962</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A power-based society uses individual power to succeed. A force-based society uses (state-)inflicted force to succeed. Sadly, it has a snowball’s chance in hell to catch up with a power-based society.

Yes, perceived negative attributes can give power a negative meaning, but I believe we have to step beyond that and use our personal power to express ourselves, just as Tony Robbins teaches us in his programme Personal Power.

I guess, if he had given the title “Personal Force”, the reception would have been somewhat different.

So, let’s see what sort of powers we have to develop and safeguard.

**Power of authority:** You are in a power position for your client's organisation has given you certain responsibilities. You offer advice which the people of your client's company are supposed to follow and implement. There is one important caveat here: This power is temporary, so we'd better not build anything significant on it. Therefore we must use the power of authority sparingly.

The good part of this type of power is that no one can hold you single-handedly responsible for achieving specific goals in your clients’ companies.
Yes, we want to help our clients to achieve their goals, but we can’t do it FOR them. As consultants, we can initiate changes, but only clients can apply those changes to their companies.

**Power of association:** This refers to the connections you have built over the years. In this network there are many people who are crucial to your success in that they’re are willing to listen to you, refer business to you or engage your services and pay you.

As a result of being connected to influential people, more people will pay attention to your work and what you say. And more people spread the good gospels about you and your work.

If these people have the six powers we are discussing here, some of that power becomes available to you too. However, you must use it very carefully.

So, whichever power the people you associate with use, you will be regarded as a person who uses the same power(s). If you are associated to people with power of punishment, you will be seen as a punisher.

**Power of reward:** These are rewards you can offer to people. This power includes money, recognition, gifts, improved relationships, etc. We must know which rewards best motivates people.

We also must know that people who are not inspired from within can’t be motivated from without either. Trying it is just as futile as trying to stop corpses from stinking by spaying them with stronger deodorants or cologne.

According to various research\(^1\) some of the five greatest motivating factors - thus can be used as rewards - are: 1) Interest, 2) Performance, 3) Opportunity for development, 4) recognition and 5) autonomy. Interestingly money ranks at 10th place. Even if we consider certain inaccuracies, we can see money is not even on the top of the list of motivators. There is one important point here though: Lack of money is the greatest demotivator.

**Power of punishment:** We can practise this kind of power by taking something away from people that they want. In consulting, it usually is in the form of withholding information. It can be physical and/or emotional hurt.

We all have this power and unfortunately end up using it even unbeknownst to us. However, when we use our position and/or the confidential information bestowed upon us, we are running the risk of damaging our relationship our clients and their people.

There are some actions that appear to be punishing to people, but it is in the organisation’s interest. If you are hired to install a new voice mail system, you can’t give in to the emotion that

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the receptionist is about to lose her job.
If a CEO is stupid enough to replace a live receptionist with a cold but cheap machine, that company deserves to go broke, and the secretary is better off to jump ship when the company just starts “stinking” but before it starts sinking. All in all, do your best to filter punishing power out of your repertoire.

**Power of skills:** Over the years of both schooling and informal education, we have piled up a truckload of skills and knowledge. Furthermore, through repeated applications we have turned all those skills and knowledge into valuable know-how. And when that know-how comes with the courage of using it, it can be very valuable and very attractive to others.

People want to benefit from your expertise. However, it is important to know that expertise can put us in the door in front of potential buyers, but can’t keep us there for long. When we use this know-how to provide insights, wisdom and new perspectives to clients, we are valuable. When we use it simply to “fix things”, we are commodity, purchased solely on price. This is a very important power but to make lasting relationships we must use much more than expertise.

**Power of relationship:** This is the ability to develop lasting relationships with a broad range of people. This and the power of skills are the most important powers we can practise. This power helps us to develop mutual trust, respect and peer-level credibility with clients. This is also a very fragile power, thus must be continuously nurtured. Without this, skill power is pretty useless. This is where the majority of IT consultants fall flat on their faces. They are all over the place with their degrees and certificates that they often forget about enhancing their relationships.

Now you may think it’s inappropriate to use all of these powers, but either knowingly or unknowingly we use all of them. But which powers serve us best to improve our clients' performance. I believe if we truly have the client's best interest at heart, we are likely to use all of them. We use skills and relationships mainly, and call upon the other powers when we see fit.

There is one more factor to consider regarding powers. That is the client's perception. It is important that both you and your clients are aware of the power you are using and respond accordingly. If we consider, for example, the power of skills, we can see that our value goes up and down depending how our clients perceive the presence or absence or skills. When we use more of this power, we get more involved and push back if necessary. We know that our strength as advisors depends on the appropriate use of these powers.

And in contrast to force that is a zero-sum game, we can be powerful with powerful clients. No, the bully clients are not powerful. They are merely forceful. And force is a zero-sum game. The more I have, the less you have.

But power is mutually uplifting. Powerful consultants have powerful clients.
In a way it is just like encountering a dog. If the dog perceives you to be weak, he will get the upper hand (paw) on you. If you stand your ground, the dog will cringe back and stops barking. Sometimes clients try to put us up on pedestals, and we must resist the temptation. The higher we are on our pedestals, the lower in the ditch we perceive our clients to be. This is a dangerous situation, for they become dependent upon us. We end up feeding them fish, instead of teaching them how to fish.

**How Consultants Can Avoid Misusing Their Our Consulting Power**

Every now and then, inadvertently though, we may misuse some of the powers we possess. It’s not because we’re a bunch of nasty bastards, but denying this basic fact would blind us to the truth, that is, to everything we do.

Let’s get bone honest with ourselves regarding our work. And we can only be honest if we bring out our dark sides to the light and examine it - if not under a microscope, but at least - under a magnifying glass.

Let’s look at this list of what we all do consciously or subconsciously to get ahead in our trade:

Consultants distort the collected data to make the problem more outstanding and urgent, and in doing so, pushing the client into panic-stricken action to eliminate the problem.

It’s one thing to diagnose the client’s situation and discuss your finding reasonably objectively, and it’s another to scare the shit out of clients by paining a doom and gloom picture of the future and the client’s hopeless position in that future.

Many consultants pretend they know more about the client's situation than they actually do. They believe: “I have an MBA, so I must know this. If I admit I don't know it, they believe I’m a pompous nincompoop.”

Consultants use their expertise to sell alternative methodologies that will not necessarily improve clients’ condition but makes extra money for consultants. One example is many IT consultants who are also partners - euphemism for commissioned-based product peddlers - for IBM or Microsoft and a bunch of other companies.

From consultants they become products pushers. It can be done with discretion, but very often it is obvious that these firms are “pushing” their boxes pretty hard. Would you partner with a firm that tries to shove boxes down your throat? Many buyers can see this and send the message to the consulting firm: “Blow it up your arse, box pushing man. We need real consultants, do you understand?” (Paraphrasing the devil, a.k.a. Terry Bozzio, in an old Frank Zappa song (Titties and Beer), in which Frank meets the devil.

Some consultants are not clear about their limitations. My pet peeve is when accountants call themselves business consultants and take on assignments around general financial management of a company.

Where is the problem here?

Running a great business is about taking educated risks, being on the edge and using lots of
innovation.
Most accountants are allergic to risks and ambiguity, because that stirs up their neatly-organised spreadsheets. So, we must be clear about what we do and not do. Learning from each engagement is one thing and it is fine, but taking on a gig, hoping that we can learn on the fly and on the client's dime is somewhat unethical.

Again, we don’t do this out of spite or nastiness. We are simply human beings with our fair share of flaws and inexplicable assortment of dysfunctions.

“Don't you deny that we're all human beings, We all have our flaws that can make ourself obscene.” ~ Epica: Chasing the Dragon (from “The Divine Conspiracy” 2007)

Yes, we all try to elevate our egos and images. Lots of us have done personal development workshops to subordinate our egos, but it will never totally disappear. Some of the reasons are ego, expertise, vanity, power, control, aspirations, recognition, anxiety and - last but not least - fear.

Manipulating the Facts

Manipulation is about pushing our own agendas. Look at some large accounting firms that do business consulting. They have “cobbled together” some, according to them very unique, approaches, trademarked them, and use them over and over again. After all, if all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail, doesn’t it?

The other manifestation of this problem is IT consultants who become commissioned salespeople. They call themselves “strategic partners” for computer manufacturers but the meaning is the same. Many of them have no intention to solve clients’ problems, but only to sell more “boxes” and get the commissions from manufacturers. That is okay, but that is not consulting.

For some firms this is a very subtle process, for some it is more open and obvious. As consultants we have quite a bit of trust and power bestowed upon us. It is up to us how we use it. We are there to achieve certain ends, and together with the implementing team we have to figure out the means to those ends. We want to be both provocative and accommodating. We are at the client's company to initiate some sort of change. Change means ambiguity, and most people are scared shitless when we talk about change. Well, the mention of ambiguity may even kill some of those people. Well, many of them rather die than change, and some of them actually do with amazing style and elegance.

So, on the one hand we are provoking our clients to change, but we must also check how much they are willing to change in a certain space of time. Are they ready for this change? And sometimes we have to manipulate clients to make them see the unadulterated truth: The typical emperor has no clothes story. They may have “known” this before but due to dysfunctional company culture, nobody dared to point out the obvious, so they carried on marching barefoot and butt-naked while the wide, wild world was rolling on the floor with laughter.

Most companies desperately try to avoid going to areas where they really need to go. Just as
alcoholics get emotionally triggered by talking to non-drinkers, and broke people get upset by chatting with bankers about investments, many executives get angry when consultants point out problems at the company. They think we just called them incompetent nincompoops and they hate us for it.

So, at this point we can use a bit of good manipulation, and instead of pointing out the obvious by citing the “emperor” comment, through good questions we hold up mirrors in front of them, so they can discover their own nakedness. We just have to point out that the mirror tells as it is.

**Pretending to Be Different**

This is interesting. Many consultants think they have their personal and professional selves, and they can be different. I believe we have only one Self, and that one Self is impacted by both personal and professional issues.

What causes this difference? I reckon it is very often the fear of loss. We detect some shortcomings in ourselves, and we want to compensate for it. But we sometimes overcompensate.

Look at a person who is a brilliant consultant but she has just found out about her husband's mistress, and now the whole relationship is going down. We can say her personal life is on quicksand, and it can nosedive anytime.

She is likely to use any method with her clients to maintain the “business as usual” perception. After all, she is an educated, highly competent consultant, and nobody is supposed to detect this little personal issue. Well, people do detect it for we act them out subconsciously.

This is when exaggeration comes in. We also refer more and more to past big clients, credentials, awards we have won, etc. And since we use exaggeration more and more extensively to balance the mess in our personal lives, after a while we will not even know the magnitude of that exaggeration. We just keep repeating it.

How can we solve this problem. I reckon the best way is to clean up our own personal lives. We do our best work when we are happy, healthy, enthusiastic, we act it out both personally and professionally.

**Superiority**

Dealing with an organisation's problem can distort our perspectives after a while. We can’t help it. We become part of the client's company's culture and we can easily end up turning into “Yes” people.

And we all know this, so to avoid this trap we often click into a superior mode. We believe that we know it better because we are outsiders and have seen this or similar situation before. Besides, it is the client's company which is in deep shit anyway. We just want to pull it out. We send a message that we know it better and clients should not even think about solving this problem without consulting with us first.

With this action we are building dependency on us. Also, we tell clients things they want to hear,
so they can keep us as their “hit squads” in case they need extra votes.

**Deceiving Clients**

Deceiving clients is mainly about pursuing personal agendas on clients' dimes. This happens when IT companies learn and implement new technologies they don't know yet, but use a client project to make even the learning process profitable. The other manifestation of this disease is when some accounting firms take on projects, relegate them to junior staff and invoice clients for senior calibre work at senior rates. Is it legal? Well, yes. Is it ethical? No bloody way. Is it widely practised?

You’d better believe it.

As we’ve discovered, applying power in consulting is a good thing because, in turn, it empowers clients as well.

The problem is when consultants try to apply force. That approach almost always ends in disaster.

It can also happen that some clients mistake the application of power for the application of force. Yes, we try to explain the difference, but some clients never get it, so we’d better move on. They are probably the wrong clients for us anyway.

**With victory on high...**

Tom “Bald Dog” Varjan

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