

4.8 Power in the Workplace

Power is central to nursing's development as a profession (Hall, 1982; Styles, 1982). Kanter believes that nurses' lack of power may be rooted in a societal reluctance in general to discuss power openly. This is why it is included in the Mentoring Toolkit.

Bases of power refer to the methods that managers, leaders or co-workers use to influence you. Remember that leaders include managers, supervisors and co-workers, especially if they serve as informal leaders on your units.

The five bases of power as identified by French and Raven in 1960 (http://changingminds.org/explanations/power/french_and_raven.htm) are as follows.

Coercive Power

This power rests in the ability of a manager or co-worker to force you to comply with an order through the threat of punishment. Coercive power usually leads to short-term compliance but produces dysfunctional behavior in the long-run.

Legitimate Power

This power rests in the belief that the manager or co-worker has the right to give orders based on position or title.

Reward Power

This power rests in the manager or co-worker's ability to give some sort of a reward for a behavior. This can be a strong motivator. However, it can backfire when too much emphasis is placed on the reward versus the actual performance.

Referent Power

This power comes from respect for the manager or co-worker and the desire to identify with or emulate him or her. The manager or co-worker leads by example, and this power rests heavily on trust. The concept of empowerment in the workplace rests primarily on referent power.

Expert Power

This power rests on the belief that an individual has a particularly high level of knowledge or highly specialized skill set.

Try This!

Discuss types of power with your mentee using the "Power in the Workplace" worksheet found in this section.

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