OPINION

At work, we constantly have opportunities to advocate for ourselves. Tap into your personal power

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SPECIAL TO THE GLOBE AND MAIL
PUBLISHED YESTERDAY

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When we use our competence, confidence and ethical behaviour to inspire others and influence outcomes, we are using our personal power. This is both a skill and an art. Every interaction, decision and relationship in our professional lives offers us an opportunity to advocate for ourselves, shape outcomes positively and navigate the complex dynamics that define our careers.

Yet, harnessing this power requires more than just ambition; it demands a proficiency in assertive yet respectful advocacy – an optimum combination of open, honest communication and an awareness of where professional boundaries lie. If you are a professional looking to tap into your personal power to advance your career, then it will serve you well to consider three important things.

Communicate with openness and transparency

To effectively leverage your personal power within the workplace, it is critical that you communicate with openness and transparency. If you do this well and consistently, you will foster trust, making you more approachable and reliable, and thus amplifying your ability to influence and inspire. You can do this in several ways:

- Use specific actionable language: Instead of making vague requests, clearly outline what you need, by when and why it is important. As an alternative to "I need this soon," say "Please could you have this report finished by Tuesday, as it is critical for the Wednesday presentation to our client."
- Implement regular check-ins: Whether it is with your supervisor or your co-workers, regular meetings to discuss ongoing projects and expectations let you review what has been accomplished, what is pending and to clarify any points of confusion. It is a proactive approach that helps prevent misunderstandings and keeps everyone aligned.
- Summarize and reflect: After discussions or meetings, summarize the key points and decisions made, either verbally or in a follow-up e-mail. This practice not only reinforces understanding but also provides a reference that can be revisited if there's any ambiguity later.

Establish and respect boundaries

Recognizing and respecting professional boundaries is essential for your personal power to continue to prevail. This can take two forms:

- Setting clear boundaries will help you maintain both your professional relationships and your well-being. One effective approach is using "I" statements to express your personal limits and needs without coming across as critical. For example, "I feel my schedule is quite full at the moment and I'm concerned that this additional

critical. For example, "I feel my schedule is quite full at the moment and I'm concerned that this additional project will jeopardize other deadlines" will likely be received more positively than a complaint that your workload is overwhelming. "I" language emphasizes personal feelings and responsibilities, making it easier for others to understand your position without feeling defensive.

- Recognizing others' boundaries is also crucial, especially when trying to influence their views. When addressing issues with your manager, present your concerns clearly and professionally, respecting organizational roles and responsibilities, and offer constructive solutions or seek feedback. Following up on unresolved issues is appropriate, but ensure your persistence is respectful of the decision-making process and organizational hierarchy. Pressing continuously without allowing adequate response time or after a decision has been made and communicated can be seen as overstepping and may damage your relationship.

Use your emotional intelligence

Your emotional intelligence (EI) plays a pivotal role in strengthening your personal power to improve workplace relationships. When you understand your own emotions and how they influence actions and decisions, you project confidence and control. When you recognize and relate to the emotions of the people you work with, you are more compassionate. Overall trust and collaboration are furthered and you build rapport and strong bonds. Here are two ideas for elevating your EI:

- **Actively listen:** Not only will you better appreciate others' points of view, but you will also be able to discern the emotions behind their words. A useful approach is to repeat back what you heard to confirm your understanding. It demonstrates attentiveness and care in your interactions.
- **Take the time to self-reflect:** Thinking about why certain emotions arise and how they influence your interactions with others will help you better control your reactions and enhance your decision making. Some people do this through meditation, others keep a journal. Find an approach that works for you and treat your growth in this area as a work in progress.

Harnessing your personal power is not just about advancing your own success; it is about transforming the way you engage with the world around you. If you are deliberate and thoughtful in how you use this ability, you can transform your professional interactions and lead with confidence.

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