



# 7 Rules Of Power

*Some Implications for Public Relations Professionals*



**Jeffrey Pfeffer**

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# SOME FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

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- People are motivated to self-enhance—to feel good about themselves and everything associated with them. Therefore...
  - The above average effect
  - People love what is theirs—the endowment effect
  - People love their own decisions—commitment to choice
  - Similarity is one of the most important bases of interpersonal attraction
  - People love things that remind them of themselves and are associated with them—implicit egotism
  - People seek to be associated with, and close to, success and power

# SOME FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

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- People—and organizations—need support from the social environment—bosses, employees, customers, suppliers of capital. With support, leaders stay; without support, they leave.
- Social perception: people tend to judge others along two dimensions—warmth (niceness, friendliness) and competence (potency, agency, strength, capability)
- Empirically, judgements of warmth and competence tend to be negatively related (“Just Because I’m Nice, Don’t Assume I’m Dumb”—*HBR* article by Amy Cuddy, 2009)

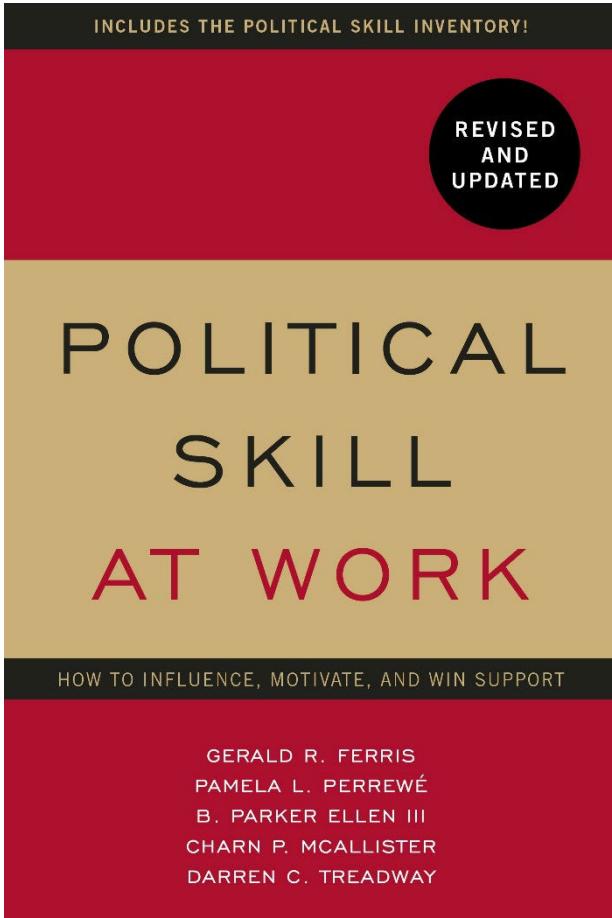
# 7 **RULES OF POWER**

**Surprising—but True—  
Advice on How to  
Get Things Done and  
Advance Your Career**

**JEFFREY PFEFFER**  
Stanford University

# POLITICAL SKILL & CAREER SUCCESS

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“Political skill is the ability to effectively understand others at work and to use that knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance one’s personal and/or organizational objectives.”

- Gerald Ferris

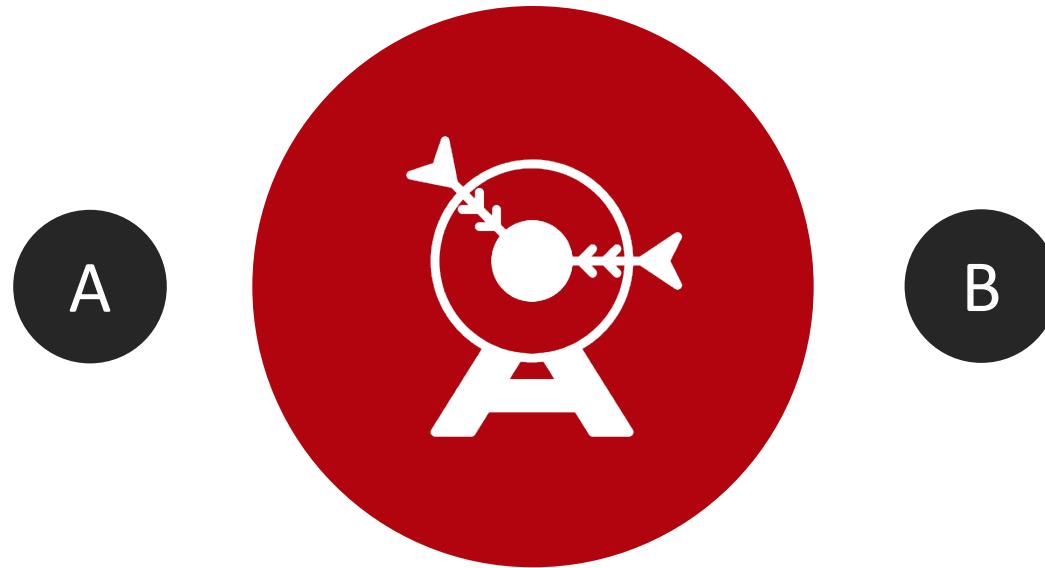
Empirical research shows that political skill positively affects...

- Total compensation
- Career satisfaction
- Promotions
- Life satisfaction
- Perceived external job mobility
- Work productivity
- Personal reputation
- Not experiencing physiological strain

# Rule 1: Get Out of Your Own Way

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**Self-descriptions,** to yourself and in your presentation of yourself to others, that disadvantage you



**Unwillingness to embrace certain strategies/behaviors** that, for instance, competitors use and/or that are effective

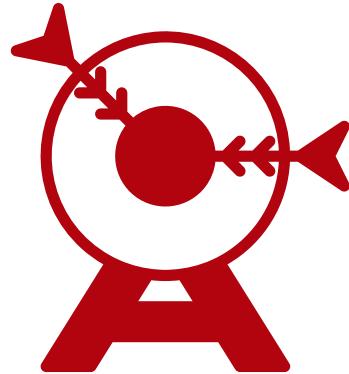
- The U.S. men's soccer team and drawing fouls

“For better or worse, gamesmanship and embellishment—or depending on your sensibilities, cheating—are part of high-level soccer. Players exaggerate contact. They amplify the mundane. They turn niggling knocks into something closer to grim death.” Christiano Ronaldo and Luis Suarez “regularly fall to the ground, particularly if they feel that they are going to lose possession. And why not? If it works, they get a free kick. If it doesn’t, they were going to give up the ball anyway.”

*Sam Borden, “Where Dishonesty Is Best Policy, U.S. Soccer Falls Short,” New York Times, June 15, 2014*

# Rule 1: Get Out of Your Own Way

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- **Too much emphasis on being liked**, which includes seeking to conform to gender-based, ethnicity-based, and social class-based behavioral expectations.
- Choose competence, then display warmth

“If you want to be liked, get a dog. A dog will like you unconditionally.”

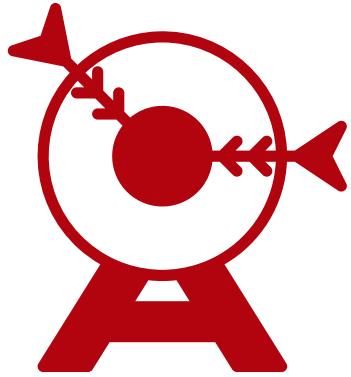
*Gary Loveman, former COO, CEO, and then non-executive chair of Caesars, former #2 executive at Aetna, current founder of Well.*

“I do not **choose** to be relegated to a lower status role, although many, many in power have tried to act that way... I have no problem challenging people or making them rethink their assumptions. There are many examples—you are a woman—or you are just a surgeon and you cannot comment on that. It came up during negotiations with the FDA over COVID—this is not breast cancer (really?)....I don’t feel like I have to ‘stay in my lane’ and I will not **let** people push or keep me there. Haile Debbas, the dean who hired me said, ‘Laura, do you not see the boundaries between disciplines?’ And simply, I said, ‘No, why should I?’”

*Laura Esserman, M.D., MBA, winner of the GSB Arbuckle Award (2016) and named by Time in 2016 as one of the 100 most influential people in the world*

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**The “curse” of authenticity**

“Unless You’re Oprah, ‘Be Yourself’ is Terrible Advice,”  
by Adam Grant, New York Times, June 4, 2016.

“Nobody wants to see your true self. We all have thoughts and feelings that we believe are fundamental to our lives, but that are better left unspoken.”

“A decade ago, the author A. J. Jacobs spent a few weeks trying to be totally authentic. He announced to an editor that he would try to sleep with her if he were single and informed his nanny that he would like to go on a date with her if his wife left him....He told his in-laws their conversation was boring.”

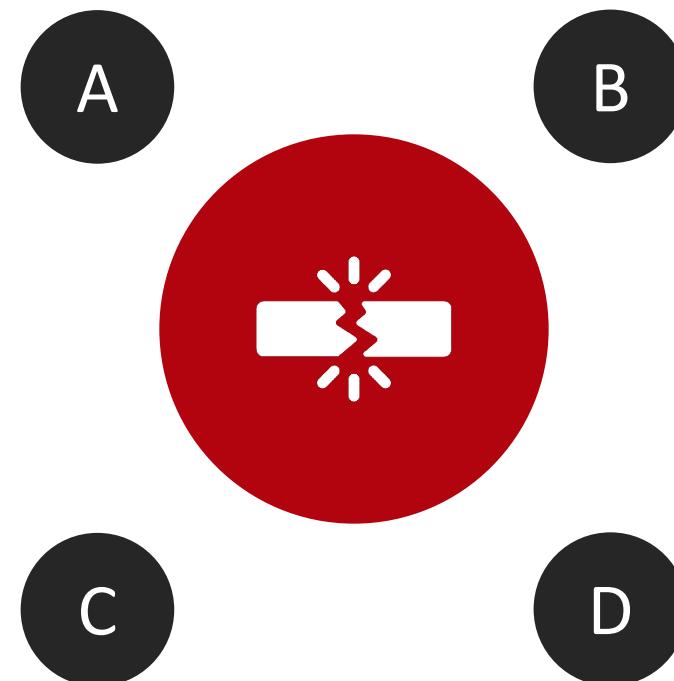
“Deceit makes our world round,” he concluded.  
‘Without lies, marriages would crumble, workers would be fired,  
egos would be shattered, governments would collapse’.”

# Rule 2: Break the Rules

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**The heuristic association between rule-breaking and power** means that people who violate social norms & conventions are perceived to have more power.

**Break the rules by asking for things**—thereby violating the normative expectations that people are supposed to a) not bother others and b) demonstrate self-sufficiency.



**Breaking the rules often catches people by surprise.**

- Surprise provokes curiosity and memorability
- Surprise prevents people from having time to plan how to respond

**Because people are conflict averse**, they often won't call you on norm violations.

# Some Examples of Rule Breaking

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**Reginald Lewis**, “No Application Required”

**Christina Troitino** & dinner with Martha Stewart

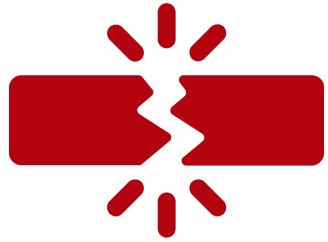
**Keith Ferrazzi** at Deloitte

**Jason Calacanis**: “do you have an appointment?”

**Donald J. Trump** and lying—is this a “bug” or a “feature?”

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**Rules typically favor those that made them**—not underdogs or people—or companies—seeking to change the existing order.

# Rule Breaking and Social Change

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**Almost all social movements involve some (often considerable) degree of breaking with rules, social conventions, and even laws—fundamentally changing power relationships in the process.**



**Nelson Mandela**  
became the  
“father of South  
Africa” while in  
prison



**Martin Luther  
King’s “Letter from  
a Birmingham Jail”**  
was written while  
in jail



**“Our struggle...is the  
struggle of a lifetime.  
Never, ever be afraid  
to make some noise  
and get in good  
trouble, necessary  
trouble.”**  
- Rep. John Lewis,  
in a tweet from June, 2018

# Rule 3: Appear Powerful

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**People respond primarily to how others look** (the importance of body language), secondarily to how they sound (e.g., the confidence they demonstrate), and least important, to the content of what they say.

**Act with Power**

**A**

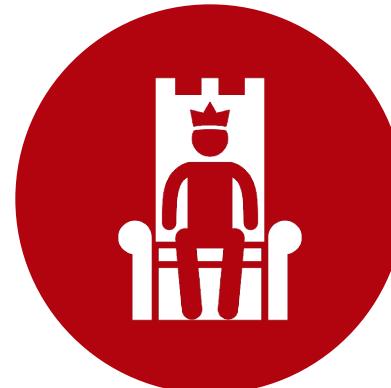
**B**

**Speak in a powerful fashion**

**Don't apologize**

**C**

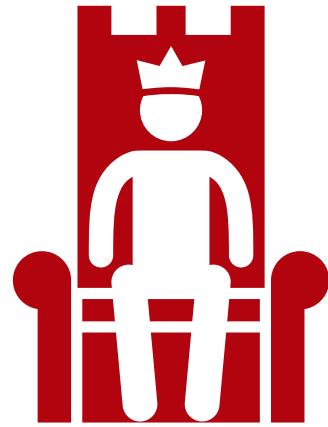
**D**



**Dana Carney:** signaling power and dominance is the same for women and men

# Nonverbal Expressions of Power

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**Longer gazing time**  
**More looking while speaking**  
**More shaking head “no”**  
**Broader/expansive gestures**

**Less interpersonal distance**  
**More invasive touching**  
**More leaning toward others**  
**More controlled hand/arm gestures**

# CONTRASTING BP AND GOLDMAN SACHS

In the summer of 2010, both BP and Goldman Sachs faced public outcry and scrutiny.

BP had the oil platform catastrophe in the Gulf of Mexico, for which it was blamed even though Transocean and Halliburton were partners on the rig.

Goldman Sachs was accused of a conflict of interest—betting against the very securities it was selling to its clients



Consider the differences in the performance of Lloyd Blankfein, CEO of Goldman, and Tony Hayward, the (former) CEO of BP, as they testified before the U.S. Congress.

Although there are obviously many differences, both individuals have the identical task—to inspire confidence in their customers, employees, and most importantly, in their boards of directors who control their fates. They also must explain and account for their companies' actions.

**BP**

**BP and the Gulf of Mexico Oil Spill**

**House Committee**

**June 17, 2010**

# **GOLDMAN SACHS**

**Investment Banks  
and the Financial Crisis,  
Goldman Sachs  
Chairman and CEO**

**Senate Committee**

**April 27, 2010**

# Rule 4: Build a Powerful Brand

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## Examples:

Jason Calacanis

Tristan Walker

Laura Chau

Nuria Chinchilla

1

Create a short, succinct narrative that integrates who you are/your life experiences with what you are doing or seek to do—who are you and what do you “stand for” that fits with your current or desired role or position

2

Cultivate the media—do their work for them; be accessible

3

Build visibility—an invisible brand is not worth much

# Rule 5: Network Relentlessly

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**Spend sufficient time on social relationships—**  
in many if not most jobs, your “task” is to know as many people as possible

- Omid Kordestani
- Ross Walker
- Heidi Roizen
- Keith Ferrazzi, ***Never Eat Alone***
- Jon Levy, ***You're Invited: The Art and Science of Cultivating Influence***

# RULE 5: NETWORK RELENTLESSLY

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**The importance of weak ties**—which provide nonredundant information and contacts

**Be central**—control the flow of information

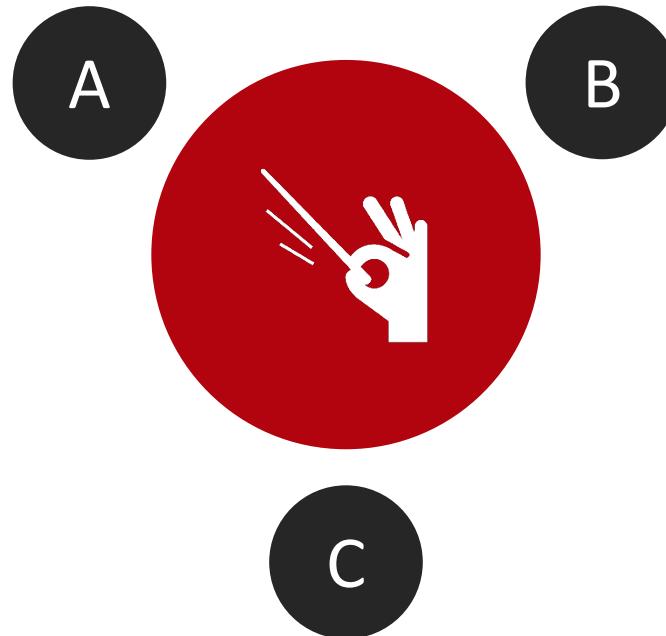
**Occupy brokerage positions (fill structural holes)**—connect groups or individuals who could benefit from knowing each other

# Rule 6: Use Your Power

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**Power is not something that gets “used up”—the more you (successfully) use it, the more you will have**

- Robert Moses
- Lyndon Johnson



**Remove your opponents or people who inhibit your ability to achieve your objectives because of lack of skill or buy-in**

- Willie Brown & strategic outplacement
- Amir Dan Rubin & Gary Loveman

**Reward those who support you; punish those that don't—the lesson: it is better to be a supporter!**

# Rule 7: Once You Have Power, All Is Forgiven & Forgotten—or Both

**Moral rationalization**  
— it's not that bad

A

**Power permits** you to  
purchase legitimacy

C



**Moral decoupling**  
— it's not that relevant

B

**Motivated cognition**

- Desire to believe that the world is a just and fair place
- Desire to be close to power & success
- Consistency/confirmation bias
- Selective attention & retention
- All (well almost all) will be excused once you are in power

# Coda: Implications For You

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1

**Turn knowledge into action**  
—engage in self-reflection  
& action planning

- Build social relationships
- Get out of your own way
- Practice acting and speaking with power
- Create a brand, an identity

2

**Get help** — to provide social support and hold you accountable for doing things that at first may not seem comfortable

- A personal board of directors
- A coach
- “Power posse” or “power lunches”
- Make lists/notes/a plan (e.g., a “doing power” project)