

Growing into our power

As used in *Putting Power into Practice* (November 2024), Sara Shapiro-Plevan, Ed.D.

An effective, useful way to lean into or grow our power is through the relationships in our lives—and at work—that make a difference. We can grow into our power not alone but with and in partnership with others: this is actualizing or operationalizing relational power. The relationships that are grown through our *closest and strongest personal ties* (family members, and nearest and dearest friends) help us to feel safe, secure and trusted, brave and able to take risks while accessing social support. Our *weaker personal connections*, acquaintance level relationships and friends are the connections that help us to access new information, and connect to new or distant others who may be sources of new information, relationships and additional connections.

Trusted Relationships

In order to experiment with power at work, we need to access, find and develop relationships with folks we trust. They can be peers or supervisors, in our department or not, friends or simply acquaintances. Can you access these relationships? Can you grow this trust? Where and with whom does it live?

Listening

Use your listening skills. Simply listen and observe. Hear where people are sharing power (or not) and what might offer itself as a specific area for action (and with whom). Listen before you act.

Mutual Respect

Where are the relationships of mutual respect that emerge? This two-way exchange of respect is where everyone involved values and acknowledges the other person's boundaries, opinions, and worth. Look for this as it may emerge in surprising situations and places.

Feedback

Invite everyone—from your supervisor to your colleague to any peer—to coffee or for a conversation. What's the best way to learn from each other? How can you be most open to gathering feedback?

Relational Connection

This is a key factor in building and maintaining strong relationships everywhere, not just at work, and helps us to understand where we can access our power. It involves agreements about how to navigate and build trust in relationships.

Psychological Safety

This is the shared belief that we are safe to take risks, share ideas, and make mistakes without fear of negative consequences, and that we can experiment with power without punishment or destroying a relationship. Do you have this at work? For more information on psychological safety, see the work of [Amy Edmondson](#).