



Power Unused Is Power Useless

This week, Gloria wants to talk about power. Our relationship to it. Our fear of it. Our misunderstanding of it. Drawing from examples in her own life, sociological studies, and decades analyzing power dynamics between people and within organizations, she guides us on ways to break through our hesitation, discomfort and mistrust of summoning and asserting our power.

Gloria Feldt: Like I always say, power unused is power useless. Hello, and welcome to Power to You. I'm Gloria Feldt, cofounder and president of Take the Lead, and I'm here with secrets and tools to prepare and propel you with training and coaching to harness your incredible power to in your professional lives. I have spent my entire career advancing women's rights and equality from the boardroom to the bedroom. I cofounded Take the Lead because I figured out how to crack the code that has been holding women back from equal leadership and pay, and my mission now is for women and men to hold equal power, pay, and leadership positions by 2025.

I am so glad you're here with me listening to this podcast. It seems like everyone has a podcast these days. The podcast medium feels very familiar to me and I really enjoy it, because it's a lot like doing radio. My first paid job was working in an FM radio station, where I wrote some of the worst advertising copy known to man or woman, and among other tasks, the station owner had me run a recorded classical music program on Sunday afternoons. People would call in and ask questions about the music, whereupon I would quickly grab the album cover, (Yes, we had albums then), and I would pretend that I actually knew what I was talking about.

I share this not to convince you that I know anything about classical music. In fact, my tastes run more toward classic R&B and I was obviously bluffing my way through that program. But I wanted to illustrate [two of the classic types of power that sociologists Raven and French identified in the 1950s](#), and that are still being used today. Expert power, or the power that comes with having information or skills on a topic, so like I could go grab that album cover, and legitimate power, the power that comes from the position one holds. So, people assumed that I knew what I was talking about simply because I was the more or less DJ, you could call it, running that program.

Now, Raven and French also identified several other aspects of power. Coercive power, I can make you do it. Reward power, I can give you something you want if you do it. And referent power, you want to do it because you like me, you admire

me. It's kind of like celebrity power. These five classifications of power have long been the standard definitions. They remain useful, but I am going to ask you to consider a different way of thinking about power. One that allows us to shift the paradigm to a way of thinking that I have found women are more likely to embrace with full confidence, authenticity, and even joy.

I realized that I wanted to share my latest thoughts about power and women's relationship with it with you today after I was asked, "What is the biggest challenge you help female leaders face in business today?" Now, [Dr. Sarah E. Brown](#) asked me this question on her popular podcast, The KTS Success Factor. Dr. Brown, who helps mid-career professional women who are stuck get clarity and get moving in a direction that will bring them happiness and success at work, among other things teaches women how to self-coach.

Now, the biggest challenge, I thought to myself, the biggest challenge that I help female leaders face in business today is definitely rooted in women's often complicated relationship with power. It's [changing our mindset about power, so that we value and embrace it with confidence](#), and we're freed to elevate our intentions and lead authentically as women. That's the challenge. This, I found in my research, is necessary for women to achieve parity in leadership roles. And frankly, until there is equality in pay, position, and power, women will often remain frustrated by the organizational cultures they work in, and too often will leave promising careers just before they have opportunities to rise to executive leadership. And I want to help stop that flow out of female talent.

By realizing that power is like a hammer, it's what you make of it, you can build with it or you can break something apart, then you can shift from a belief that power is a negative thing, the power over people and resources. You can understand that by rethinking power as the creative, generative, innovative power to, you will begin to know that anything is possible. If you can dream it, you can do it, and I want you to dream big.

Now, with that new definition of power, you can fully appreciate the phenomenal power that you have. After all, the business case is clear that companies with more women in their leadership make more money. Women also constitute the well-prepared talent pool that companies need, because [women earn 57% of the college degrees](#). And women are also the consumer market. We have the power of the purse. We [buy or are the primary influence on 85% of purchases](#). Wow! That spans all the kinds of power.

But realistically, remember what I said at the beginning. Power unused is power useless. If you don't realize you have it and put it to good use, you might as well not have power. Power unused is power useless. I just can't say that enough, because you can't be an effective leader without using your power, and I want to help you use it in a positive power to way. So, if you want to know how I came up with the title of this podcast, there you go. Power to.

Dr. Brown also asked me about the biggest mistakes individuals and companies make before working with us at Take the Lead. And my observation is that too often companies want change without actually wanting to change. Because change disrupts the status quo, and that can be painful. And actually, I find that women themselves often don't want to rock the boat to get that kind of support, mentorship, and sponsorship that they need to reach their highest capabilities and intentions. Often, they're concerned about changing the status quo also.

Now, some companies think they already know it all and are already doing it all, and sometimes they are. But even those companies are challenged to do more today. Diversity and inclusion officers seem to change jobs frequently, so it's hard to create relationships or do a long-term plan with them, one that would have the substantial impact that they say they want. I'm just being truth-telling here. Failing to incorporate the redefinition of power module in [women's leadership programs](#) can actually keep companies from getting the results that they want. So, companies can advance women into and up through the leadership pipelines and can reap all the benefits of women's leadership by putting resources into programs like the ones we offer that get real and measurable results, helping women know their value and their power, know how to self-advocate, and how to lead authentically as women.

Now, individual women often make the mistake of either giving their power away or not realizing the power they have. Self-limiting beliefs that have been culturally instilled and learned can hold us back as women. These beliefs and behaviors are not hardwired, so that means they can be changed before they cause imposter syndrome or make women risk averse or reluctant to raise our hands or self-advocate. And why does it matter? Well, it matters for our families that we get equal pay, that we get the positions that we deserve. It matters for fairness that women are able to achieve our highest and best intentions and use our gifts in our companies and for our families and for the world. It matters for the future, for the future of our communities, and certainly this pandemic has made clear that women are the frontline workers in so many fields, so it matters for the future that women have equality at work. And it's fuel for profits if companies want to just get real practical about it.

So, here are some tips that can help you become better at embracing your power, so that you can self-advocate more effectively. Number one, I want you to take a sheet of paper out, and I want you to list three points of power that you bring to the workplace. They might be knowledge, skill, connections, experience, or any of a number of things, but focus on what you have that is of greatest value to the organization where you work. Secondly, get in touch with those points of power. Appreciate them. Meditate on them. Think about how you can best leverage them to bring recognizable and actionable value to your organization.

Next, I want you to write down at least one action that you will take to use each of your points of power. Then, and this is most important, do that. And finally, intentionally work to structure meetings so that all voices are heard, and all people

feel their voices will be heard. The result will be more and better ideas, more innovation, and more profits for the company, and greater satisfaction for all of the female employees who will then be more inclined to stay. That, in turn, reduces the high cost of turnover recruitment and onboarding, while it builds employee loyalty.

Let me know how it goes for you by sharing with me on social media @gloriafeldt or emailing me at powertoyou@taketheleadwomen. Until next week, Power to You.

Power to You is produced by Lantigua Williams & Co. Cedric Wilson is our sound designer. Emma Forbes is our assistant producer. For more about my work, please visit gloriafeldt.com, and follow me on social media @gloriafeldt. To learn about Take the Lead and our courses and coaching services, go to taketheleadwomen.com and follow us on social media. You can also send comments about the show and questions on leadership and power to powertoyou@taketheleadwomen.com. I might even use them on future episodes. Be sure to subscribe or follow Power to You on your favorite listening app, and just please do me a huge favor and leave a review on Apple Podcasts, as those really help us know what you like about the show. Thanks.

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