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What is Authority?

Power invested in a job role or given to another person which enables them to exercise control over and individual(s).

Different types of authority

Positional

Here authority is invested in the job role, in a particular situation (project leader) for a particular amount of time or in technical expertise.

Interpersonal

Power passed from one individual to another based on mutual perceptions/expectations, e.g., seeing someone as charismatic, dominant, one-up, wise, controlling.

It is important to recognize that positional authority does not bestow on an individual an ability to be influential with others. Likewise someone with interpersonal skills does not always find themselves with direct authority over others e.g. the adviser.

Difficulties in handling authority figures

- bringing difficult authority relationships from the past into the present
- seeing in authority figures the personal qualities we are unwilling to see in ourselves e.g. judgmental, critical, caring
- using patterns of behaviors we learned in the past to deal with authority e.g. rebellion, compliance and passivity
- limiting our choices in dealing with authority by 'swallowing down' rules about how we should be with others e.g. be nice, don't trust others and don't upset others.
- using the authority figure as a way of putting ourselves down e.g. I wish I could be as powerful and influential as you.



Choices For Handling Authority Figures

See the following as a range of choices to be exercised selectively given the individual and circumstances concerned:

- say what you want
- say what you're feeling/thinking
- make demands
- be persistent
- be prepared to compromise
- pay attention to timing
- be sensitive to what the other person needs/wants
- take the initiative
- let go
- do nothing
- pay attention to falling into old patterns of behavior
- don't put yourself down
- exercise your own authority
- pay attention to who they are rather than who you imagine them to be
- test reality e.g. how do they exercise authority? (e.g. criticize/give advice/ impose conditions).



4 Questions To Ask Yourself When Dealing With Authority Figures

Question 1: What am I seeking to gain from this relationship?

With every relationship that's meaningful in life, we have lots to gain and plenty to lose. Relationships are always about "give and take" – it's when one party is doing all the taking that connections become strained.

Think about the benefits of dealing with a particular authority figure in your life. The more mature we get, the more we realize that "bucking the system" unnecessarily will only cause us more pain – such as arguing with a policeman who is about to give you a ticket.

Learn respectful tactics for dealing with people watch your words and body language and ask yourself what you may gain (or lose) if the relationship with a particular authority figure goes on or off track. Weigh up the positives and negatives.

Question 2: How has this working connection changed over time?

Business blogger Bryce Johannes seems to have a combative experience with authority – something that many of us carry on from childhood or early teens. He says, "The world is ruled by and for the elite. They have unique opportunities on a scale completely out of line with their reward for work."

Johannes is not alone - many people feel this way. Some of us think that allowing an authority figure to "rule over us" can be disruptive to the way we see ourselves as an employee. Johannes says, "Authority becomes part of the boot keeping you down,



4 Questions To Ask Yourself When Dealing With Authority Figures

transferring the benefits of your hard work to others whose sense of entitlement creates an enormous imbalance.”

If your working relationship with an authority figure has changed over time, examine the reasons why and don't put up with behavior that will not serve you in the long run. Having said that, make sure you consider your options carefully and aim to rise above any petty issues when you can. Work/school makes up only a portion of having a happy, fulfilling life.

Question 3: What am I contributing to this scenario or situation?

It takes two to tango in every scenario. When dealing with an authority figure, think about how your attitude, words, and actions are contributing.

Tanvi Gautam is the Managing Partner of an HR consulting and training firm. She suggests learning to read between the lines. “Each situation must be assessed on its own merit,” she says. “Be aware of the larger cultural context.” In some company cultures, workplaces, or educational environments, a direct confrontation might make matters worse. “Before you respond, remember you don't need to attend to every argument or challenge you are invited to. Differentiate between irritants and actual threats.”

Take the highroad where you can and learn not to sweat the small stuff. Sometimes authority figures who seem to be overly harsh or threatening are simply misinformed or being pressured from above.



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Question 4: How can I listen more – then act?

“Realise that the person in authority was in your position once. All modern-day authority figures were kids, and people of little authority at one time and all of them have been talked to by someone they saw as a superior or authority figure.”

Listening a little goes a long, long way. Far too quickly we feel the need to jump in and offer our own opinions on how something should be done. When dealing with someone in authority, learn when to step back, and when to step up.

“(Authority figures) have also suffered the awkward conversation, and they know how you feel when talking to authority.” “Most will go easy on you because of this. Remember, they want to either ask you a simple question or give you some helpful advice - they don't necessarily want to scare you.”

Learning to deal effectively with people of authority is an essential business and life skill that everyone can benefit from. Taking some time to examine your relationship with figures of authority can be a valuable exercise that may see your career and personal life reach new heights.

Accepting Decisions of Authority

- 1. Look at the person.**
- 2. Remain calm and monitor your feelings and behavior.**
- 3. Use a pleasant or neutral tone of voice.**
- 4. Acknowledge the decision by saying “Okay” or “Yes, I understand.”**
- 5. If you disagree, do so at a later time.**
- 6. Refrain from arguing, pouting or becoming angry.**

Accepting Decisions of Authority

Think Sheet

Name _____ Date _____

Who are some of the authority figures in your life?

Pick two of the authority figures you identified above and describe why it is important for you to accept their decisions.

If you disagree with an authority figure's decision, what words or actions are okay to say or show?

How can the skill of **Accepting Decisions of Authority** help you at work?

How can the skill of **Accepting Decisions of Authority** help you in your relationships?

How can the skill of **Accepting Decisions of Authority** help you in other areas of your life?

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