

# A QUESTION of LEADERSHIP

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"You're hired!" Those words were sweet music to an aspiring business leader whose status was elevated on the recent reality TV show, *The Apprentice*. Contestants vied for a top executive position in Donald Trump's organization. They were presented with a series of challenges over several weeks, during which they were observed by and received feedback from corporate executives. Contestants were "fired" until only one remained. To most viewers, the winner appeared to acquire an enormous amount of power.

CCL doesn't have a TV show, but it does have its own version of *reality organizational life*, The Looking Glass Experience (LGE) program. Participants experience a set of real-time challenges while working for Looking Glass Inc., a fictitious glass-manufacturing company, and receive feedback from certified facilitators. Although participants are not "fired," they can "fail"—or at least see themselves as having failed—after analysis of how their teams performed. Participants are rated by fellow participants on their effectiveness in setting the team agenda, managing information, making decisions, and building organizational relationships, and are ranked from most to least powerful.

Power is often viewed as a function of formal authority, position, role, or control over resources. Many

people view power as the imposition of will to persuade others to do something they wouldn't ordinarily do. But how do people who work together for just one day acquire power in the eyes of their colleagues?

Daren is a law enforcement officer in a large city. He came to LGE because he wanted to hone his leadership skills, but he had never worked in a traditional business environment. Susan works for an insurance company, where she is considered to have

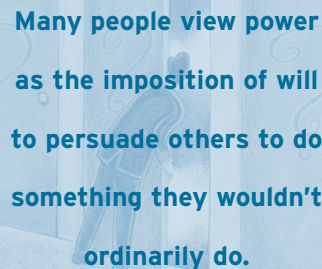
*things done*, members of each team ranked one another from most to least powerful. They also viewed an organizational chart representing the structure of their team and other teams in the company. They indicated the individuals with whom they believed they had significant relationships by drawing arrows between themselves and these individuals—creating a *sociogram*.

In the simulations Daren held a high-ranking role, whereas Susan's role was the most subordinate in Looking Glass Inc. Despite their different experiences, Daren and Susan were both considered by their colleagues to be the most powerful person on their respective teams.

Daren had formal authority stemming from his status in the organization. Susan did not. Daren had direct control over human and material resources. Susan did not. The cultures of the teams with which they worked were different. But the sociogram drawn by each of them was a veritable spiderweb of arrows.

Daren and Susan both had reached out to engage in group problem solving, form coalitions, and learn from others. They did not work alone to *be* powerful. They *acquired* power by marshaling, through social networks they had created, the human, informational, and material resources needed to get things done.

The lesson is that leaders can acquire power by mobilizing the energy that exists in the collective knowledge and talents of the members of their teams.



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high leadership potential. Daren and Susan attended separate LGE programs.

They worked in a simulated company beset by problems—issues to be resolved, challenges to be overcome, and decisions to be made with limited amounts of information. They had prepared for the simulation by reading a batch of memos and had devised plans for succeeding in their respective roles. After the simulation they completed a survey about the outcomes of their work. With *power* being defined as *the ability to get*

# How do leaders acquire power?

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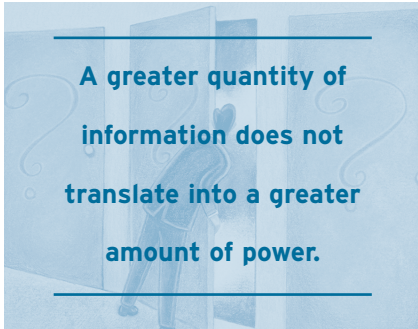
T. S. Eliot asked, "Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?" During my career with the U.S. Department of Defense intelligence community and now as a CCL senior faculty member, I have heard the expression *information is power*. But is it really? Information that is not applicable or in some way useful to others is not knowledge; it's just a collection of facts. I could spend an afternoon memorizing all of last week's baseball scores, but if the task at hand is to solve a marketing problem, those statistics would be of no use.

Many leaders have difficulty distinguishing which information is useful, so they attempt to know everything and miss opportunities to lead. Overloaded with information, they often become paralyzed by thoughts of the many things that could go wrong.

As a facilitator in CCL's The Looking Glass Experience program—in which participants take on leadership roles in a simulated company, Looking Glass Inc. (LGI)—I see this phenomenon play out repeatedly. After participants spend a full day running the company, they rate one another on various performance measures, including *information known*,

*power*, and *effectiveness*. Participants who rate high on *information known* frequently rate poorly on the other two.

Recently I watched as Jim, a newly elected president of LGI, met with people throughout the day. It was clear that he had not prepared for his role as president by reading the material provided beforehand. In his meetings, he asked questions of his staff members



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but rarely added information himself. What he did was connect people with the relevant information he collected along the way. As he gathered information, he let people know he had it, and the right information made its way to the right people. Jim actually made no decisions himself and brought no new information to the simulation, yet he scored the highest I have ever seen on both *power* and *effectiveness*. Jim clearly understood the relationship between information and power—that a greater quantity of information does not translate into a greater amount of power.

George Peabody, who teaches a course at Georgetown University on

power and values in organizations, believes that power is "the ability to get desirable things accomplished through the appropriate use of others." Jim knew that all he needed to do was establish a direction and connect people to that direction so they could transform the information they held into useful knowledge for the organization. I talked with Jim after the program, and he conceded that the only homework he had done the night before his stint as LGI president was to decide the corporation's basic strategy. He believed that any further delving into the details would derail him from his main purpose.

What, then, do leaders need to determine whether they have the right amount of information? A good friend of mine calls it *field expediency*. She learned it from her mother, who was frequently called upon to have dinner parties at a moment's notice. Her mother mastered the art of making use of what was on hand at the moment to create success.

Leaders, too, must be willing to make decisions on the basis of limited information, guaranteeing power but not effectiveness. Effectiveness comes from the willingness to share power with others at the opportune moments. In doing so leaders give up some of their power but hold onto all of their strength—the personal resources they have gained along the way: their knowledge, character, energy, education, and beliefs. Further power comes from their willingness to use the strength of others.