

Are Power and Control Real?

I was having a conversation with a friend recently, and she commented that “power and control are two concepts that don’t actually exist”. Instinctually, I said that I agreed. The conversation continued and we eventually changed topics, but I kept coming back to that statement. Did I really agree that power and control don’t really exist?

Questioning My Assumptions

The more I thought about it, the more questions started racing through my head, like:

- What does power really mean? That you’re in control? That you influence people?
- Is having power a good thing or bad thing? Can it be both?
- Who/what do we really control anyway?
- Can you tangibly have power and/or control? If so, what does that look like?
- Perhaps power and control are an illusion? A disillusion?

Then I got out of my head and revisited what I know to be true. Everything in this world is evolving and growing - including nature, human beings, thoughts, intentions, me, you - you name it. Everything is in motion and changes on its own accord, independently of others.

How Can Power and Control Exist?

Last week, I was working with a client and we hit an unexpected blocker - just when I thought I was in control and we were on schedule with the overall project. Despite the monumental efforts put into deterring setbacks like this - tirelessly planning ahead, aligning resources, delivering regular communications, and everything in-between that a project leader does - this project was sidelined.

I was not happy. As a matter of fact, I was ticked off! Was I experiencing a false sense of control? Was I feeling powerless? You betcha!

I decided to rewind further back in time to 2-3 weeks ago and replay what led to this moment in hopes to find some sort of clue to avoid the situation in the future. I realized my “control” triggers went off, but I ignored them. I shifted into overdrive and tried to demand answers, drive schedules, and command resources to bring order and calm back into my work.

This was my “shadow self” and the behavioral signals I ignored. Had I paused a moment to regroup and regroup, I would’ve detached myself from the outcome, allowed my influence and insights to steer efforts, and let the chips fall where they may. Instead, I took the tightly-wound, exhausting, unproductive approach to try and control tasks and resources as if they were static pawns in a game.

The Reality

What I realized was that our entire project team is in constant flux, dealing with other needs, competing projects, and higher priorities. I cannot control them, nor do I have power over them.

I come full circle to say that I definitively agree there's no such thing as power or control. Instead, there's influence through guidance, direction, support, compassion and love. These are ALL the things that make me sparkly and shine. This is also how I aspire to work and live - through leading an internal project, managing a client project, parenting my daughters, solving life challenges with my husband, supporting family and friends, helping at my daughters' school, and even training our puppy.

This is what I've found to be true. So, now it's your turn. Do you think power and control really exist?



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