B2 · BOOK CLUB · STUDENT WORKSHEET

Power: Why Some People Have It

A speaking class on Jeffrey Pfeffer's book — the Introduction to Chapter 3

Name: _____ Date: _____

1 Warm-up: power vs influence

SPEAKING

What makes someone influential at work? Sort your ideas into two columns.

Formal power — comes from your position	Informal influence — comes from you

DISCUSS *Think of the most influential person you've worked with. Was their power mostly formal or informal?*

2 Reading recap: in your own words

READING

What is the main idea of each section? Write one or two sentences.

Introduction · Be Prepared for Power

Chapter 1 · It Takes More Than Performance

Chapter 2 · The Personal Qualities That Bring Influence

Chapter 3 · Choosing Where to Start

3 Vocabulary: 12 words for talking about influence

VOCABULARY

Word	Meaning	Example
influence	the ability to affect people's decisions and actions	*Her influence comes from trust, not her job title.*
power base	the support, resources and relationships that give you influence	*He built a power base across operations and risk.*
leverage	an advantage you can use to get the result you want	*Unique data gave the team leverage in the negotiation.*
zero-sum	when one side's gain is the other side's loss	*There's only one CEO job — it's a zero-sum game.*
visibility	how much your work is noticed by decision-makers	*Great results need visibility to count.*
track record	your history of past results	*She has a strong track record in portfolio management.*
stand out	be noticeably better or different from others	*Leading the pilot helped him stand out.*
ambition	a strong desire to achieve success	*Ambition is easier to admire than to admit.*
self-assurance	calm confidence in your own abilities	*She answered the committee with self-assurance.*
empathy	understanding what other people feel and need	*Empathy shows you what the other side really wants.*
tolerate conflict	accept disagreement instead of avoiding it	*Good leaders tolerate conflict to reach better decisions.*
niche	a specialised area with less competition	*She built her career in an emerging niche: ESG data.*

Also from the reading: the 'just-world' belief · manage your boss's perception · status carries over · self-handicapping

4 Vocabulary practice

VOCABULARY

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not used.

track record · ambition · zero-sum · leverage · empathy · tolerate · niche · visibility · self-assurance · power base

1. She built her _____ over ten years by helping other departments solve their problems.
2. Our team's results were excellent, but they had almost no _____ at board level.
3. His expertise in risk models gave him real _____ in the budget negotiations.
4. Good leaders _____ conflict instead of avoiding every difficult conversation.
5. She presented the results with quiet _____ — confident, but never arrogant.
6. Promotions here feel _____: if one person moves up, someone else doesn't.
7. Showing _____ for the client's concerns helped us keep the account.
8. He has a strong _____ of delivering complex projects on time.

Now use the two unused words in sentences about your own career:

5 Discussion questions

SPEAKING

Give reasons and examples. Try to use the word in brackets. Keep work examples general — no confidential information.

1. **Introduction.** Pfeffer says power is linked to health, wealth and getting things done — yet many people feel uncomfortable talking about it. Why do you think that is? How comfortable are you? — influence
2. **Chapter 1.** Many people believe in a 'just world', where hard work is always rewarded. Is the world of work fair? What has your own career taught you? — track record
3. **Chapter 1.** Pfeffer says being too good at your job can hold you back, because your boss won't want to lose you. Have you seen this happen — or done it yourself as a manager? — stand out
4. **Chapter 1.** How can a team make its results visible to senior leaders without sounding boastful? What works in your organisation's culture? — visibility
5. **Chapter 2.** Rate yourself from 1 to 5 on Pfeffer's seven qualities: ambition, energy, focus, self-knowledge, confidence, empathy, tolerance for conflict. Which is your strongest? Your weakest? Would a colleague agree? — self-assurance
6. **Chapter 2.** Pfeffer says intelligence and likability are overrated. Do you agree — even in a technical field like investments? — empathy
7. **Chapter 2.** How do you deal with conflict in meetings? Does tolerating conflict make you more influential — or just unpopular? — tolerate conflict
8. **Chapter 3.** Pfeffer reads power from signals: pay, office location, committee seats, the CEO's background. Using those signals, which areas hold most power in your industry? Is that shifting? — power base
9. **Chapter 3.** Is it better to start in a powerful, competitive department or in an emerging niche where you can stand out? What would you advise a young analyst? — niche
10. **The big picture.** Many power games are zero-sum. Where is the line between building a power base and 'playing politics'? Has the book changed how you see your own career? — zero-sum

6 Language for discussing influence

USEFUL LANGUAGE

Giving an opinion

- My view is that performance is necessary, but not sufficient.
- The strongest argument in the book is that…
- I can see the logic, although I have concerns about…

Disagreeing diplomatically

- I agree to some extent, but I'd add that…
- That's a fair point. However, it may not apply when…
- I'm not entirely convinced, because…

Giving advice

- A sensible first step would be to…
- Before accepting the role, I'd look at…
- If I were in his position, I'd…

Discussing ethics

- There's a difference between self-promotion and deception.
- Influence becomes a problem when it depends on…
- It may be effective, but it raises questions about…

7 Case study: too good to promote?

SPEAKING

You are Daniel's director. Read the situation and discuss the questions.

> Daniel is one of the best analysts in your team. His reports are accurate, always on time, and the whole team depends on his models. But he works quietly, rarely presents his findings, and most senior leaders don't know his name.
>
> A new cross-functional project is starting in a strategically important area. It would give Daniel visibility and new contacts — but if he joins, your team loses its most reliable analyst for six months.

1. What is Daniel's main problem: performance, visibility, confidence or position?
2. Would you let him join the project? What does Pfeffer's Chapter 1 suggest?
3. How could Daniel get noticed without exaggerating his achievements?
4. What advice would you give him about building a power base ethically?

8 My influence action plan

REFLECTION

Complete the sentences, then say them aloud.

One strength I can use to build influence is...

One quality I want to develop is...

One ethical way I can increase my team's visibility is...

A project or network that could strengthen my position is... because...

★ Homework

- Write 150 words: 'Is Pfeffer right that performance is not enough?' Use 6 words from today.
- Read the next chapter and note 5 new words or phrases to discuss.
- Choose one idea from the book you disagree with. Be ready to argue against it in 2 minutes.