BOOK CLUB · 1-ON-1

B2

Business English Training Series

Power: Why Some People Have It

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

TODAY'S JOURNEY

Warm-up
Power vs influence

Recap
The four sections

Vocabulary
12 words for influence

Discussion
10 questions

Case
Too good to promote?

B2 · One-to-one · Speaking · 60 minutes

Book follow-up class — for senior professionals

Today's Plan

60 minutes of speaking — you lead, I listen and push

7 min	**Warm-up**	Formal power vs informal influence
8 min	**Reading recap**	The main idea of each section, in your own words
12 min	**Vocabulary**	12 words and phrases for talking about influence
20 min	**Discussion**	10 questions on the book — and your own career
8 min	**Case**	The analyst who's too good to promote
5 min	**Action plan**	One ethical way to build your influence

Ground rule: we're evaluating Pfeffer's ideas, not accepting them. Disagree with him — and with me — whenever you like.

Warm-Up: Power vs Influence

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

Teacher Note

FORMAL POWER

Comes from your position
e.g. job title, budget, the right to approve or veto

INFORMAL INFLUENCE

Comes from you
e.g. expertise, trust, relationships, reputation

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

Tutor — listen for: how freely she talks about power · range of vocabulary before today's input

Reading Recap: In Your Own Words

What is the main idea of each section? Explain it in 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

➡️ **A summary of each section is on the next slide — give yours first**

Reading Recap: Summary

Compare with your version — what did you notice that this misses?

🔑 **ANSWER KEY — Do not show until the student has completed the exercise on the previous slide**

Introduction · Be Prepared for Power

Power is worth pursuing — it is linked to better health, wealth and the ability to get things done — and building it is more achievable than most people think.

Chapter 1 · It Takes More Than Performance

Performance matters less than we believe. Many people trust in a 'just world', but you also need to get noticed and manage how your boss sees your work. Being too good at your job can even hold you back.

Chapter 2 · The Personal Qualities That Bring Influence

Seven qualities bring influence — ambition, energy, focus, self-knowledge, confidence, empathy and tolerance for conflict — and they can be developed. Intelligence and likability are overrated.

Chapter 3 · Choosing Where to Start

Where you start matters. Learn to read which departments are powerful (pay, location, committee seats, the CEO's background), notice how power shifts, and weigh powerful units against emerging niches.

Which argument do you find most convincing? Which one would you challenge?

Vocabulary: 12 Words for Talking About Influence

Power (teal) · Getting noticed (blue) · Personal qualities (green) · Where to start (purple)

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

Vocabulary Practice

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.

➡️ **Answers on the next slide — do not look until you have attempted all questions**

Vocabulary Practice: Answer Key

Not used: ambition · niche

🔑 **ANSWER KEY — Do not show until the student has completed the exercise on the previous slide**

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

Now use the two unused words: what is your biggest professional ambition? Which niche could help someone stand out in your industry?

Discussion Questions (1/2)

Give reasons and examples. Use the word in the tag.

🎓 Teacher Note

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

Follow up: Can you give a specific example? · What could go wrong? · What's the ethical risk? · Would you advise a colleague to do the same?

Discussion Questions (2/2)

Give reasons and examples. Use the word in the tag.

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

Follow up: Can you give a specific example? · What could go wrong? · What's the ethical risk? · Would you advise a colleague to do the same?

Language for Discussing Influence

Use these to give opinions, disagree and talk about ethics

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 her 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…'

Challenge: use at least one phrase from each box during the case study

Case Study: Too Good to Promote?

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

🎓 Teacher Note

THE SITUATION

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?

Use today's words: visibility · track record · stand out · power base · leverage

🧭 FINAL TASK — REFLECTION

My Influence Action Plan

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…

MODEL EXAMPLE

'One strength I can use is my ability to explain complex data clearly. One quality I want to develop is tolerating conflict in senior meetings — I tend to avoid it. One ethical way to increase my team's visibility is to let my analysts present their own results to the committee. A cross-functional project could strengthen my position because it would connect me with decision-makers outside my area.'

Take 2 minutes to prepare. Your teacher will note two strengths and one thing to work on.

Wrap-Up & Homework

Today's language and what to do before next lesson

TODAY'S LANGUAGE

Power: influence · power base · leverage · zero-sum

Getting noticed: visibility · track record · stand out

Qualities: ambition · self-assurance · empathy · tolerate conflict

Where to start: niche · status carries over · the 'just-world' belief

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.

Next lesson: her argument against Pfeffer + the next chapter's vocabulary