B2 · BOOK CLUB · CLASS 3 · STUDENT WORKSHEET

Power: Setbacks, Costs & Staying Power

A speaking class on Jeffrey Pfeffer's 'Power' — Chapters 9 to 13

Name: _____ Date: _____

1 Warm-up: the comeback

SPEAKING

This leader lost his government job in his fifties. He spent about ten years 'in the wilderness' — criticised, ignored and out of power. Then, at 65, he became his country's prime minister. **Who was he?**

My guess: _____

DISCUSS What other comebacks do you know — in business, politics or sport? What do they have in common? Did you send your email to someone senior? What happened?

2 Reading recap: in your own words

READING

What is the main idea of each chapter? Write one sentence.

Chapter 9 · Overcoming Opposition and Setbacks

Chapter 10 · The Price of Power

Chapter 11 · How — and Why — People Lose Power

Chapter 12 · Power Dynamics: Good for Organizations, Good for You?

Chapter 13 · It's Easier Than You Think

3 Vocabulary: 12 words for setbacks, costs and staying power

VOCABULARY

Word	Meaning	Example
setback	a problem that stops progress for a time	*The rejected budget was a setback, not a defeat.*
pick your battles	choose which conflicts are worth fighting	*Pick your battles — you can't win every argument.*
back down	stop insisting on something; give way	*She refused to back down on the risk limits.*
resilience	the ability to recover quickly from difficulties	*Her resilience after the restructuring impressed everyone.*
scrutiny	close and careful examination	*As director, every decision is under scrutiny.*
autonomy	freedom to decide for yourself	*Senior roles bring influence but less autonomy over your time.*
burnout	exhaustion caused by long-term stress at work	*Long hours with no break can lead to burnout.*
overconfidence	believing too much in your own abilities	*Overconfidence made him ignore the warning signs.*
misplaced trust	trust given to the wrong person	*Misplaced trust in one adviser cost him the deal.*
step down	leave an important job or position	*The CEO chose to step down after ten years.*
office politics	the use of power and relationships at work	*Office politics exists in every organisation.*
seize the opportunity	act quickly to use a chance	*She seized the opportunity to lead the new project.*

Also from the reading: competency trap · self-handicapping · hierarchy · morale · leave on your own terms

4 Vocabulary practice

VOCABULARY

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

resilience · autonomy · setback · burnout · back down · scrutiny · pick your battles · overconfidence · step down · seize the opportunity

1. After the merger was cancelled, the team showed real _____ and delivered the plan on time.
2. Losing the client was a _____, but it taught us to diversify.
3. You can't fight every decision. You have to _____.
4. In a pension fund, every investment decision is under _____.
5. Working 70-hour weeks for a year left him close to _____.
6. Years of success led to _____: he stopped listening to his team.
7. After 15 years in the role, she decided to _____ and let someone new lead.
8. When the CEO announced the new role, he _____ and volunteered first.

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

5 Discussion questions

SPEAKING

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

1. **Chapter 9.** Persistence can wear down opposition, but Pfeffer says you must pick your battles. How do you decide which battles are worth fighting at work? — pick your battles
2. **Chapter 9.** After a setback, people want to back someone who looks like a winner. How should a leader behave in public after a failure? — setback
3. **Chapter 9.** Pfeffer warns: never give up power voluntarily. Is backing down always weak — or is it sometimes the smartest move? — back down
4. **Chapter 10.** Power brings scrutiny: every word and decision is watched. How has visibility changed for you as you have become more senior? — scrutiny
5. **Chapter 10.** Leaders lose control of their time, and Pfeffer says the price is often higher for women. Is that fair? What would lower the price in your industry? — autonomy
6. **Chapter 10.** People tell powerful people what they want to hear. How can a director make sure she still gets honest feedback? — misplaced trust
7. **Chapter 11.** Pfeffer says very little power is needed to make people overconfident and insensitive. Have you seen it happen? How do you protect yourself from it? — overconfidence
8. **Chapter 11.** 'Leave before the party's over.' When should a leader step down — and how should they do it? — step down
9. **Chapter 12.** In one survey, 93% of managers said office politics is common. Is it good or bad for an organisation like a pension fund manager? — office politics
10. **Chapter 13.** 'Authority is 20 percent given, 80 percent taken.' Do you agree? What opportunity could you seize in the next three months? — seize the opportunity

6 Language for setbacks and difficult conversations

USEFUL LANGUAGE

Responding to a setback

- This isn't the result we wanted, but…
- Let's take a step back and look at what we learned.
- I'm confident we can turn this around.

Holding your position

- I understand the concern, but I'd like to stand by…
- I'm not ready to drop this yet.
- Can we agree on what would change your mind?

Asking for honest feedback

- What am I not seeing here?
- If you were in my position, what would you do differently?
- Please be direct — I'd rather hear it now.

Stepping back gracefully

- I think this is the right moment for someone else to lead.
- I'll make sure the handover is smooth.
- I'm proud of what we achieved together.

7 Case study: the rejected proposal

SPEAKING

Use Chapters 9–13 to decide your next move.

> You spent six months on a proposal to change how your area works. Yesterday the executive committee rejected it.
>
> One colleague who opposed it is now presenting a similar idea as his own. Some people in your team are worried, and senior leaders are watching how you react.

1. What do you say to your team in the next 48 hours?

2. Do you fight, back down, or wait? Which battle — if any — do you pick?

3. How do you deal with the colleague? (Think: a stake in it, don't take it personally.)

4. What would tell you it's time to move on — and how would you leave?

8 Final task: my verdict on 'Power'

REFLECTION

Complete the sentences, then give a 2-minute review of the whole book.

The idea I will use at work is... because...

The idea I reject is... because...

The book changed my mind about...

I would / wouldn't recommend it to... because...

★ Homework

- Write a 150-word book review of 'Power' for a colleague: one idea to use, one to reject. Use 5 words from the book club.
- Choose one small 'power move' from Chapter 13 and try it this week. Be ready to report back.
- Choose the next book or topic for our classes.