

Authority is defined as the power, the right, the clout to influence people and get them to do what you want and need them to do. A leader has to have authority. The question or the challenge is how do they garner that authority? How do they capture that authority in the most productive way?

If authority is the ability to influence others – we can think about the different sources of authority – where we can glean our authority from as we work with others. What leaders need to recognize is that there will be different impacts, and a different level of effectiveness, depending upon where we have gained our authority from.

## 5 Sources of Authority

|                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| <b>Legal</b>    | <i>The ability to influence others based on your <b>official authority and position</b></i>         |
| <b>Expert</b>   | <i>The ability to influence others based on your <b>knowledge and expertise</b></i>                 |
| <b>Reverent</b> | <i>The ability to influence others based on your <b>behavior, manner and approach</b></i>           |
| <b>Reward</b>   | <i>The ability to influence others by <b>giving or withholding rewards</b></i>                      |
| <b>Punitive</b> | <i>The ability to influence others by <b>imposing a penalty for fault, offense or violation</b></i> |

## Impacts of Different Sources of Authority

### Legal Authority

When a leader uses their position and title as the primary source of their authority, people often do what they need to do because they “have to” not because they want to. This results in a lower level of motivation and engagement.

Many new leaders think once they have a title people will automatically respond to them and respect them. What they often learn is that respect has to be earned and authority that comes from a place of respect is much stronger. Depending on your title/position as your source of authority often leads to an authoritative leadership style, and the resulting consequences of that approach.

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A title doesn't do much – it's what you do with it. However – there are some organizational cultures that are very title driven. So this would have an impact on one's authority.

## Expert Authority

Being an expert and “knowing your stuff” is important. People will respect that. However, as a leader of people your main goal is not to know everything.

Your main priority is to bring out the best talents and skills of all of your team members to achieve the best results. Knowing all the answers and being an expert may be comforting to some, but is not an effective long term strategy to be able to influence people to get them to do what you want them to do.

You certainly need some subject matter expertise to gain respect – but not as a primary source of your authority.

## Reverence Authority

This is how you “conduct yourself” as a leader – how you behave, your manner, in general your approach. This is a very effective and important source of authority.

Certainly leaders need to “know their stuff” (expert), and it doesn't hurt to hold an important title (legal), but how one conducts themselves is most important.

Reverence is the human component. How you interact with others, communicate, listen, engage, respond, etc. If people feel valued by you, they will respond in kind.

## Reward Authority

Garnering influence because you can reward people. Overreliance on using rewards to influence people leads to multiple problems.

- People begin to only do what they need to do based upon the reward associated with the task.
- People may also get “fussy” and particular about the rewards, continuing to want something more, or more to their liking.

This is not a sustainable approach as a primary source of authority. Certainly important from time to time. And most important is that the rewards given are significant and meaningful to the individual recipient.

## Punitive Authority

Most people agree that taking a punitive approach on a regular basis is ineffective. Constantly finding fault, criticizing, imposing restrictions, etc. decreases motivation, creates a poor working environment and provokes fear.

Some people believe fear can be an effective motivator. If so, only sporadically and in certain circumstances. Ex. if one has fear of losing their job because of poor market conditions – this may be an effective motivator. However, fear of ridicule from one’s boss is wrong.

## The Ideal Sources of Authority to Focus On

|                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| <b>Legal</b>    | <i>The ability to influence others based on your <b>official authority and position</b></i>         |
| <b>Expert</b>   | <i>The ability to influence others based on your <b>knowledge and expertise</b></i>                 |
| <b>Reverent</b> | <i>The ability to influence others based on your <b>behavior, manner and approach</b></i>           |
| <b>Reward</b>   | <i>The ability to influence others by <b>giving or withholding rewards</b></i>                      |
| <b>Punitive</b> | <i>The ability to influence others by <b>imposing a penalty for fault, offense or violation</b></i> |

It’s Important to note that managers should not lead from any single source of any of these authority bases too much.

The combination of Reverence and Expert provides the best mixture of authority and in that order of importance. People want to follow someone they find credible and authentic and who also has some level of knowledge and expertise to be effective at guiding the team and providing direction.