

The Five Bases of Power in the Workplace

Coercive Power – This is a negative type of power. An example would be when a superior says “Do this or you will be fired,” or demoted, or forfeit something.

Expert Power – A person in an organization who has advanced knowledge or information that is highly regarded, such as an engineer who developed complex code for the company’s IT systems or one who has knowledge and access to high level security, financial data or confidential information.

Legitimate Power – An example would be someone in authority such as the CEO, or other C-suite officers, Directors or Vice Presidents who have a certain level of control over the business, as well as the ability to hire, approve major expenses, or implement systems or innovations which can have a major impact on the organization, its employees, public reputation, or customers.

Referent Power – An example could be someone in the organization who knows everyone, is well-liked and one whom others confide in and/or trust. That person may also be in a position where they are more visible or have greater employee interaction than most others (such as: the company fitness center trainer, the main receptionist or security officer, a chef in the company cafeteria). In multi-level marketing companies, such as Tupperware or Mary Kay, referent power is used to sell goods at parties to those within a person’s social circles.

Reward Power – An example would be a sales manager who creates contests and awards to sales representatives for exceeding quotas.

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Reference: Kinicki, A., & Fugate, M. (2016). *Organizational Behavior: A Practical Problem-Solving Approach*.