

**Power**



# **POWER**

## **THE FREEDOM TO SERVE**

Paul Ch. Donders - Florence de Leyritz

**Power**

© 2023 xpanD edition

Authors: Paul Ch. Donders - Florence de Leyritz

Editor: Marja van der Linden-Taal

Typography and design: Renate Rijnberg - [www.renaterijnberg.com](http://www.renaterijnberg.com)

Year of publication: October 2023

Publication house: xpanD edition, Zeist, The Netherlands

[www.xpanD.one](http://www.xpanD.one)

ISBN: 978-90-830445-5-2

NUR: 808

No portion of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means – electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, scanning or other – except for brief quotations in critical reviews or articles, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

From Paul

*I dedicate this book to my son Jeroen.*

From Florence

*I dedicate my contribution to this book to Marc.*

# Table of Contents

<b>Preface</b>	<b>8</b>
<hr/>	
<b>1. Power is At Stake!</b>	<b>12</b>
<hr/>	
<b>2. What is Power?</b>	<b>24</b>
<hr/>	
1. Power is universal and we all use it all the time	26
2. Power is neutral	27
3. The use of power makes you personally responsible	27
4. Power gives us a kick	28
5. Power can corrupt me	29
6. Power needs balance	30
7. Your story with power	31
<b>3. The Shadow Side of Power</b>	<b>44</b>
<hr/>	
1. Hubris/Pride	47
2. Self-centredness	52
3. Laziness	56
4. Cowardice	63
<b>4. Redeemed Power</b>	<b>76</b>
<hr/>	
1. The co-essentials	77
2. The healthy leadership grid	82
3. Power = the freedom to serve	87

<b>5. Refocus Your Power</b>	<b>100</b>
1. My positive journey	103
2. My negative journey	107
3. My destructive roots	110
4. My road to reconciliation	113
5. My unique style	119
<b>6. Train the Essentials</b>	<b>136</b>
1. Humility	140
2. Empathy	143
3. Discipline	153
4. Courage	169
<b>7. Use It or Abuse It</b>	<b>204</b>
1. Discover my story	208
2. Reconcile my story	210
3. Refocus my style	212
4. Design my training	213
5. Share my power	216
<b>8. Toolbox</b>	<b>222</b>
1. The 15 Leadership Qualities Toolbox	223
2. Power 4.0 Scan	241
3. The Literature Toolbox	248
<b>Literature Reference List</b>	<b>254</b>

# Preface



# Power: The Freedom to Serve

As we, Florence and Paul, started this journey to develop a process that will help you to handle power, it was March 2022.

Now in August 2023 we are even more excited about this topic: how can we handle power in a healthy and intelligent way?

When we conduct trainings with leaders from a wide variety of sectors in society we always ask them, “What comes to your mind when you hear the word ‘power’?” These leaders could come from the business, the political, the healthcare, the government, and the medical world. No matter how different their background is, they will all come up with positive as well as negative connotations.

On the positive side words like influence, authentic authority, energy, opportunity to give direction or autonomy will pop up. On the negative side: abuse, manipulation, destruction, dictatorship or narcissism pop up. And when we are honest and follow the media storms it is mostly the abuse of power by corrupted leaders that grab the headlines. That is a challenge. Because many of the leaders we have encountered all over the world in the last 35 years of leadership development programs that we have conducted in more than 25 countries, rather avoid speaking about power. It seems that it is a topic that is like opening a Pandora’s box where all the ills of the world are boxed in, safely under a closed lid, contained in one big jar of evil.

But not talking about it is not helping! You could make the statement: “Use it or abuse it.” Every human being has a wide variety of power, and each one of us is using power all the time. Any decision we make, big or small, is an act of power. Every act of power has an impact on others and on ourselves. So, the ostrich approach: “I stick my head in the sand and pretend not to see anything” will not work here. Because even if you do not want to talk about power you will still use it all the time. The bad news is, for each act of power, each decision you make, you are personally responsible.

So we invite you to join us in this journey of discovering how you can intentionally use power in a constructive way without the destructive elements of abusing your power.

This book is written specifically for each woman and man in any leadership position. If you lead a project, a team, professionals, taskforces or complete organizations, this is your book!

You will find very practical tools on how to handle power in a constructive way. But also tools on how to handle yourself while handling power.

This is also a book for you as a professional who wants to grow in your mastery and take the power to grow to your own next level of craftsmanship or expertise.

So please be invited!

Both Florence de Leyritz and Paul Donders have a long-term expertise in coaching, training and consulting leaders at all levels and in a wide variety of areas of society. We are both members of the board of xpanse international together with Janny Budding and Ricardo Wiedenbrüg, where we are very privileged to serve our international xpanse community of trusted advisors, trainers and consultants.

We decided to write this book together to bring the feminine and masculine elements of using power deep into the roots of each chapter.

The content from Florence will focus more on the systemic challenges and opportunities from the use of power in organizations. Her text in every chapter is always in a blue background. The content from Paul will focus more on the personal challenges and opportunities you will encounter as a leader on every level of the organization. So you can even choose in every chapter to focus more on the systemic or personal elements of using power. Obviously, we both believe that both factors are essential for you and your organization to create an organization that will empower all people involved.

Chapter 8 is our toolbox for you. Both of us are excited readers of books. Being members of such a great international community of experts, we are blessed with a never-ending stream of book tips on a wide variety of topics.

So, in the toolbox we present to you our selection of the best and most practical books on the various topics of power we can cover in this book.

You will also find there some training tips to develop each of the competencies you need to handle power well.

Finally you will find our Power 4.0 Scan where you can evaluate how strong your destructive forces (pride, self-centredness, laziness and cowardice) are.

As well as the opportunity to evaluate how great you are in the four virtues that establish a healthy way of handling power: humility, empathy, discipline and courage.

So, there is a lot to discover. You made your first step by acquiring this book. We invite you to join this exciting journey and hope to see you somewhere in the future to hear your stories, how you tackled and used your power to serve!

*Florence and Paul*

**“The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.”**

*– Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. –*

Chapter 1

# Power is At Stake!

*“The difference between what we do and what we are capable of doing would suffice to solve most of the world’s problems.”*

– Mahatma Gandhi –

*“Our moral responsibility is not to stop the future, but to shape it. To channel our destiny in human directions and to ease the trauma of transition.”*

– Alvin Toffler –

*“What could be more noble, more generous, more beautiful? An orator has the power to rescue supplicants, to lift the downtrodden, to bring deliverance to those in need, to free the oppressed from danger, and to stand up for the rights of citizens.”*

– Cicero (How to run a country) –

Today I start this book on the challenge of using power well on the 5th of May 2022 in Iceland.

On the 5th of May we celebrate Liberation Day: the day of Freedom, in the Netherlands. We celebrate the end of the Nazi terror in Europe and all over the world. The end of World War II, the war of so much abuse of power in almost all nations of this beautiful planet earth.

And today, the 5th of May 2022, we witness a new outbreak of terror, while Russia is attacking a sovereign state, Ukraine, with all the false reasons to abuse millions of Ukrainian and Russian people under the leadership of a small group of powerful leaders.

I am writing this book in Iceland. A small and beautiful country in the far north of Europe, with 350.000 people who live in a democracy since 1100. Obviously with ups and downs, because I do not know any person, community or nation that is or was able to handle power only in a positive way.

The beauty of this small country lies in the co-existence of this unique people, the Icelanders, and this unique nature.

Their strengths lie in the respect that they have for each other, for healthy values and for the nature all around them.

They are well rooted in their history that started in 600 when Irish monks established the first settlements in Iceland, and continued with the Vikings that landed and built new settlements in 900.

But they also have a sense of belonging and community and started a great renewal movement, led by parents, to serve, train and motivate their teenagers some years ago. And finally, they live with a great vision to create a healthy future for their island and nation, by using the natural resources they have and distributing them wisely among all Icelanders.

It is no surprise that Icelanders are always among the top 5 happiest people of the world (out of 225 nations).

It is interesting that they learned to handle power in their own unique way over the last 1400 years. This cultivated a culture where people can thrive and live in peace and harmony.

Obviously there are people in many more nations, who were able to create a healthy culture that respects the value of each human being, young and old, poor and rich, strong and weak; who limit the abuse of power by means of healthy and serving structures on national, regional and local levels; and who have established values that enable families to be safe places where each member is allowed to be themselves, with a mutual responsibility for themselves and all other members of the family.

At the same time we see all around us the most bizarre expressions of the abuse of power in almost all areas of life.

### **Political abuse of power**

We see in many nations of the world how political leaders abuse their power, given to them by their people, in visible, or often hidden ways. Many citizens do not trust their political leaders anymore, after so many scandals that came to the surface in our pursuit of total transparency. I am very much for transparency, but not so excited about the gossip-media and political games that political leaders are using to discredit their colleagues. In all of that, all players are using and misusing their power: the political leaders, the gossip-media and the political opponents who play their games.

### **Media abuse of power**

I am so excited about the freedom of press and the professional journalists who fight for honest and objective news. At the same time there is a huge level of fake news in all media channels: from social media to state media, to established media.

Basically, everyone pursues his own agenda, and has become more professional in how to influence people with wild numbers, heartbreaking individual stories and political storylines.

So, who can we trust? And how can we learn to think for ourselves again? This is not new at all. In Cicero's time, more than 2000 years ago, they were already masters in manipulation and miscommunication in the whole Roman Empire. And the last 2000 years basically show us how media and writings were used to inform, educate and manipulate at the same time.

All of this is handling power: in a constructive or destructive way.

### **Sexual abuse of power**

What a blessing is the #MeToo-movement! After centuries of open and hidden sexual abuse of women and children, we are slowly coming to an open and clear condemnation of this extremely abusive behaviour. Where women, men and children are sexually abused, people are so deeply hurt and destroyed in their spirit, soul and body, that they need years and sometimes generations to get healed again.

This abuse of power is one of the most destructive ones, and every healthy community and family has to find a way to handle sexuality in a healthy way. Because sexuality is a form of power that can be used as a blessing or a curse.

### **Racial abuse of power**

Since humankind is exploring the world, nations have developed their own culture, where people feel safe and at home. The beauty of many cultures is that we can learn from each other and complement each other. At the same time there is a deep fear in every person for the unknown, for the other way, for the loss of control. People are not very open to somebody else bringing a new culture to their home, their community or their people.

So those who are different are often perceived as dangerous, or at least seem to be difficult for me to handle, living in my own culture. So, we just need to learn to understand, appreciate and trust the others and their culture. Unfortunately, it is not so simple. Because when one group starts to dominate and subdue another group, they misuse their power over the others.

And then the racist abuse of power starts to grow and infects the whole culture and people who live in that culture. The Jewish people experienced this racist abuse of power for more than 3000 years. All over the Middle East, all over Europe and basically, all over the world. The miracle is: they still survive and thrive, as a people and as a culture. In spite of all these persecutions, manipulations of societies against them, mass murder, and outspoken hate: they still are a people with their own distinct culture. So, they found the power to handle the centuries of abuse of power against them.

The many different people from Africa are abused by Europeans, Arabs, Chinese, and other African tribes, for over more than 1000 years. What an immense abuse of power against so many African people!

### **Powerless by a pandemic**

As long as people lived on earth, there were pandemics, again and again. The latest one, COVID-19, had such an impact because almost all people on earth were affected by it. And we all felt “powerless.” Something or someone took away the freedom, the power to make our own decisions. It felt as if we were all “powerless” against this creepy giant. Also here: power is at stake! We do not only need to find ways to stop “abuse of power,” politically, sexually, racially and by the media, we also need to find ways to handle situations where we are and feel “powerless.” Something has gained power over us.



Now we need to stop this and get our power back. But should we get our power back at all costs? And who do we trust to be in charge to give us this power back?

The situation of being “powerless” needs a healthy strategy for how we take that power back.

The same “powerless” principles as in a pandemic, we find in the lives of billions of people who become addicted to drugs, alcohol, sex, work, games or social media. We gave our own personal power to something else: that slowly but surely gladly takes over that power and control. And in the end, we feel abused by exactly that thing or system to which we initially gave the power: and feel “powerless.”

### **Is it all negative?**

Not at all! In my work as a consultant and coach I have the privilege to meet so many beautiful people who invest their life to create beauty, to create healthy businesses, to create work opportunities for millions of people, to create non-profit organizations that use their power to heal, to restore and to transform.

Unfortunately, we mainly hear the news of that one criminal mind that abuses his or her power. But seldom we hear the stories of the 99 beautiful people who use power to serve and create well.

In this book, I want to invite you on an expedition to discover the “land of power.” We will see the horrors of the abuse and misuse, but we will also see the beauty of the healthy use of power by so many people, throughout all of history.

### **This journey is very personal**

The super interesting element of this expeditions is: you will discover your own story with power. The good and the ugly. And do not be afraid to discover this: then you will find your own unique way to redeem and restore your own story with power. Even more, you will find tools how to grow in handling your power in a healthy, serving and creative way.

Then we will discover your story with power, how you handled power over yourself and over others. But also, how others handled power over you and others.

You will uncover roots and systems in your life and community that lead to a positive or destructive way of handling power. And finally, you will design your own training plan to grow in a more constructive way of handling the power that is given to you.

Healthy power is possible!

I truly believe that healthy power is possible, because I believe in the free will of human beings. Obviously, our will is not absolutely free, because many things in life influence and shape us. But basically, we have the ability to take decisions, and by doing so, create new realities.

We can create concepts in our minds, we can reflect on things that happen to us, we can stop for a moment and take a decision. We can take responsibility for all those choices we make with our own will, even if this will is limited in its freedom. I also believe that healthy power is possible, because I have met literally thousands of people in my now 66 years here on planet Earth – people who used their limited free will to make serving, creative and responsible decisions. Most of them were inspired and driven by serving, creative and responsible values.

Are there perfect role models? Those who always use their power in a healthy way? I don't think so. But despite their imperfection there are many known and unknown heroes who did their best to handle power in a healthy and life-enhancing way.

Let me introduce you to several of them. And even more: you yourself are one of these heroes, who can and will make a difference in this wild world full of challenging opportunities. Please join this expedition: together we will prevail!

*“Trials and successes are not the ultimate test of a personality. Power is.”*

## **1. Introduction: Why this book? - My concern about power**

The invitation to contribute to this book came at the best and the worst of times. It came at the best of times because my inner journey, combined with my professional life over the past 15 years working with leaders and CEO’s of companies and not-for-profit organizations, has helped me mature in this topic. It came at the worst of times, since my energy level and my personal and work commitments did not exactly make it an easy project to fit into my priorities. Underneath my life circumstances, an inner struggle may have also taken place in a semi-conscious way because the topic reaches deep into my psyche, as it probably will with each of us.

At the age of 54, I have experienced some of the highs and lows of life, and touched some of my own limits: limits of my strengths, my energy, my capacities, of my will and of my personality. So when a new request comes in, my personal heuristic question is: “If I died in 5 years, would I have liked to work on this?” The answer to that question was a resounding “yes!”

I agreed to raise the sails for five reasons.

### **1. Great role models**

The first one is that my co-author and colleague Paul Donders, the founder of xpend, exercises his power over himself and over others in a way that I respect and that has inspired me for almost 20 years, with humour, hard work, passion, lightheartedness, discipline and generosity. His willingness to both lead and serve, to open new ways and to support the ways of others is one of the best embodiments of healthy power I have seen in my life.

Other people have also been role models for a healthy exercise of power. In my own family, my grandmother and my dad are both great examples of powerful personalities, with strong intellects and personal discipline, respect for expertise and experience, resilience to hardship, and contributing to the common good through their work. My dad also modelled good long-term commitments to causes that serve the community. They illustrate the

power to build themselves, their loved ones, and their community. My uncle and aunts, in very different careers (my uncle is an entrepreneur, my aunts were French and English teachers), are role models by using their talents to the full in a consistent way, with a strong sense of purpose. My mother, in a more introverted style, embodied the power of presence, of creativity and imagination.

I have been married for 25 years to a powerful man, Marc, who achieved considerable prowess through his visionary capacities, his boldness and relentless work. His relational competencies made him unforgettable to people who met him only once and for a short time. He was alive in such a way that in death, he is still more alive than many living persons. His warmth, magnanimity, intelligence, intuition, passion and wry humour make him an amazing role model for our 5 children and for me. At the same time, his inner struggles and complexities, all totally inseparable from his greatness, led to self-inflicted ailments and rocky relationships. I continue my earthly journey in a soul dialogue with Marc and I dedicate my contribution to this book to him.

## **2. Functional and dysfunctional power systems**

Another immediate reason for my yes to this project is my experience of dysfunctional systems, including the context of the power abuses in the Catholic Church. Trying to help with governance and leadership topics, I have realized over the past ten years that the less people talk openly about power, the more risk there is that the dark side of power is acted out (abuse, confusion, harassment...). Contributing to a conversation on power and making power conscious is my purpose in participating in this book project. Any organization where the topic of power is taboo, or where power is seen in a unilateral way, puts its members at risk. The larger context of French and European politics also places the polarities of power/powerlessness, and the legitimacy of power at an individual and collective level at the forefront of my daily reflections.

## **3. Struggling with personal power**

In my profession as an executive coach, many of my clients are either leaders who feel that they lack in authority or legitimacy, or strong leaders grappling

with the risk of being too powerful for their system or too controlling.

Typically in coaching, I support people in their goals and challenges at 4 levels: the intra psychic level (I do not dare enough, I do not see risks, I cannot chose between priorities), the relational level (I do not see eye-to-eye with the chairman of my board, I cannot find the right way to work with my CEO), the managerial level (there is an epidemic of burnout around me), and the organizational level (I want to change the culture of my company). The question of power presents itself at all those levels in an executive coaching journey. We all have an inner work of maturity to accomplish, from unconscious power to a conscious one. The female leaders I coach, often share about how they struggle to position themselves in the power continuum and strike the right balance between their relational aspirations and their professional goals. Many of them are fighting against their desire for perfection, a desire that can undermine their self-confidence and leadership.

#### **4. The actor and the system: island or archipelago?**

Finally, during both my school years and in my professional life I have been fascinated by the interaction between the individual person and the systems in which we take part. At some points in my life I wanted to believe that each of us is an island, a unique and self-contained beautiful jewel, a hero navigating our own odyssey and destiny. Then I realized how much we are defined by the systems we belong to (our family, school, groups at work). I saw that those systems can either crush the individuals or elevate them. I needed to think in terms of archipelago more than islands, and in terms of healthy versus unhealthy systems.

#### **5. Powerful systems or powerless systems?**

My first professional experiences in the United Nations, for the French government and for an NGO, also had me ponder about powerful systems and powerless systems. I felt in my NGO life that although we were a small underfunded organization, our power of initiative and execution seemed much more satisfying than the inertia I witnessed in international or national level systems. The power of a system is not just about resources, but about scale, complexity and vision. The issue of revitalizing a powerless system, a system in which the actors do not believe they can

make a difference for their good and for the good of the whole system, is a hot topic in our society and our organization, whatever their type. This is why I hope to bring a systemic perspective to Paul Donders' very robust approach to dealing personally with power. In this book, I will bring a counterpoint composition to Paul's approach. On your experience of reading, you might read it sequentially, or decide to read Paul's reflection first and my counterpoint ideas afterwards, whatever is easiest for you.