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## TEN WAYS TO BE POWER POSITIVE

### #10 STAY HEART CENTERED

What does it mean to stay centered in your heart while standing in your strength? In my early days as a psychotherapist, I had the mis-guided idea that I needed to choose between power and compassion. Not wanting to cause harm, I often chose what the Buddhists call “stupid compassion” because I would join my clients in their pain or confusion, allowing my own energy to be sapped in the process. I thought I was being caring and empathetic. But it was like joining them in a sinking ship rather than throwing them a line from the shore. I learned that power actually has two aspects: strength and heart. One doesn’t have to choose. It takes both strength and heart to stand on the shore and throw someone a line.

#### EXERCISE:

To get a felt sense for these two aspects of power, you might like to try this experiential exercise before reading any further. You will need a partner. Stand facing each other and find your inner connection to power as strength. Now push hands with your partner, each of you using your strength. You can be strong and playful. You aren’t trying to push each other to the floor. You are simply meeting each other from your strength. Talk a little about what this aspect of power feels like. Take a clearing breath. Now just focus on your connection to compassion and push hands from this aspect of power. Again, check in about the qualities of meeting from compassion. Take another clearing breath and in this third round, find both your strength and your compassion and push hands meeting each other in both aspects of power at the same time. Talk about what you notice.

Read this part after you have tried the exercise. Most people in my classes find that meeting in strength is energetic, vibrantly engaging, and surprisingly satisfying. Meeting in compassion is, in contrast, quieter, more sensitively connected and satisfying in a different way. They also find that strength without compassion is power-over and compassion without strength is kind of a dead end. Putting both strength and heart together offers movement with safety and sensitivity. And since the essence of power is relational, (the definition of power is the ability to have an effect or to have influence, which involves relationship), combining both heart and strength creates a more sensitively attuned relationship.

Martin Luther King talks about this same idea: *“One of the greatest problems of history is that the concepts of love and power are usually contrasted as polar opposites. Love is identified with a resignation of power and power with a denial of love. What is needed is a realization that power without*

*love is reckless and abusive and that love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice. Justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love."*

Staying centered, strong, and in your heart can be challenging. When we get triggered by a person or event, we tend to lose or abuse our connections with each other, as well as with ourselves. When we have increased power through a role such as teacher, psychotherapist, police officer or supervisor, our brain chemistry tends to change in ways that can decrease our access to our empathy. We lose heart when we think of power as a thing or an isolated role rather than a relationship. We lose our center when we aren't taking good care of ourselves by owning our power and staying in our strength.

Here are some recommendations for staying centered and in your heart.

- 1) Take three slow breaths. A lot can shift in three breaths.
- 2) Learn to recognize your triggers and work with them internally or with outside help.
- 3) Create several soothing rituals, like expressing gratitude or listening to meaningful music.
- 4) Don't use texting to try to resolve interpersonal difficulties or express strong feelings.
- 5) Find a practice that suits you for quieting your mind.
- 6) Sleep well and exercise regularly.
- 7) Practice forgiveness for yourself and for others. Let go when you've done what you can.

In my husband's and my book: *Living in the Power Zone*, page 12, we say: *"When the generativity and responsiveness of our power is guided by loving concern for the well-being of all, we will have an ethical and sustainable world. Power directed by heart. Heart infused with power. This is the key to right use of power."*

May you find new ways to stay equally centered in your strength and in your heart.

*Dr. Cedar Barstow*