

The School of Power #1—Introduction

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*It is not necessary to understand things in order to argue about them
~ Pierre de Beaumarchais*

“Let me start with a question,” said Dr. Quigley. “Was there ever a leader who came to power who did not want to be a leader?” The boys considered this, but no one answered.

“There have been a few reluctant presidents who took office only because they were asked to do so, but in general your silence is correct; no one ever comes to power unless they want it. Nothing of significance ever happens by accident. One of the most amazing things about human life is that much of it is a self-fulfilling prophecy. In general, you will become whatever you desire to become, and each person tends to reach whatever goals he or she sets for him or herself. No one can truly motivate anyone else. The best that a teacher or a coach can do is to encourage their team to motivate themselves. The strongest limits are not the ones placed on you by others, but those that you place on yourself. You will never exceed your own goals.

“Some of you are here just to learn about power, but have little or no ambition to exercise it yourself, and that is fine—society needs people at all levels. However, others in this class may have strong personal desires for power, and it is primarily to the latter group that this class is dedicated. Power and leadership involves many things, and we will not take time to discuss the mechanics—how to win elections, how to build coalitions, how to set tax policy to get as much money out of people as possible, and so on. Those things you can learn later. Here we will consider more basic things such as how power works in today’s world, and the personal characteristics that are necessary if you want to seek it. We shall first consider the character and personality of those who have come to power in the past, because understanding the past will enable us to make sense of what is happening in the present, and to better control the future.”

“If we look at ancient civilizations, the first major one we come to is Babylon, of which the greatest ruler was Nebuchadnezzar. He was a fighter—tough, mean, ruthless, determined, disciplined, and egotistical. He believed that he could rule the world of his day, and for the most part he did. His egotism then led him to build a statue of himself and demand that everyone worship him, setting a precedent for other rulers later in history who would demand the same thing. But then his whole world came crashing down when he went insane for awhile and he became like an animal in the woods. Egotism is paradoxical and interesting; you will never come to power unless you are egotistical, but that same characteristic has led many rulers off the cliff to their own destruction, and it is hard to strike the right balance. Hitler’s Third Reich was supposed to last for a thousand years in a counterfeit of the Biblical millennium, but it was crushed in five primarily because of Hitler’s own egotism. There are many in history like him.”

Henri thought of his own fighting skills and abilities. Guillem had helped him to become a good swordsman and he did not shrink from a fight, but he had never been one to seek conflict. It was clear to him that there would be much more controversy in his future, and he needed to prepare himself for it.

“Determination and the willingness to fight when necessary are requirements for leaders, but being a ruthless fighter and having a big ego is not enough to bring someone to power, especially in today’s world. If that is all you have, you might wind up being just a grunt in the army. A true leader also needs mental skills—the ability to respond to challenges and to out-plan and out-think his opponents. He also needs communication skills—the ability to speak with power and to effectively communicate his desires to others. He must be smart as well as ruthless.

“Mental and communications skills along with determination and toughness may carry you far, but still will probably be insufficient to get you all the way to the top. At least one other quality is necessary: namely, your pedigree, wealth, and family influence—your ‘right to rule’ in the perception of other people, as well as the riches and authority of your family and friends. It is the combination of these three groups of characteristics—your determination, your mental abilities, and your pedigree that form your charisma that will convince others to follow you.

“We have considered these qualities in the abstract, and now let us look at some real examples from history and put some meat on these bones. In the past power was more straightforward—the strongest, cleverest, most determined, and the best-connected man won and subdued his enemies. A good example of this kind of conflict is the War of the Roses in England in the 1400s between the forces of York, the white rose, and Lancaster, the red rose. Gaining power was simple and deadly; nobles battled each other to the death—the winners seized power, and the losers were beheaded or fled into exile. The conflict continued until the people grew very tired of war and a leader arose who had sufficient stature to compel everyone’s respect. Henry the Seventh and his son finally united England and crushed his opposition, so the War of the Roses came to an end. Thus we see the importance of those personal attributes in the leaders who ultimately prevailed, and if you want to prevail, you will need to possess and cultivate the same characteristics.” Dr. Quigley paused and again adjusted his glasses.

“However, there is one more factor in gaining and holding power, which is dangerous and can sometimes backfire, but is nevertheless very effective when employed skillfully, namely the use of trickery, deception, lies, subterfuge, and propaganda. In today’s world these are employed in very subtle and powerful ways, but let us start with an example from a simpler time, that of Charles Martel and his father Pepin.”

Henri’s ears immediately perked up because Charles Martel was one of his historic heroes—a man of chivalry and great personal courage.

“Charles lived in France in the early 700s during the last days of the Merovingian kings. His father was, Pepin the Fat, was the major domo, or—to use a modern term—the prime minister of the king, and thus responsible for all of the administrative affairs of the kingdom. Because the major domo had a tremendous degree of responsibility on his shoulders, he resented the fact that the king got all of the glory and power, while he was left to do the king’s dirty work. Pepin was a greedy, power-hungry and calculating man who—seeing that the Merovingian kings were vulnerable—was determined to seize power for himself. Dagobert II, the Merovingian heir to the throne, had been exiled to

Ireland as a baby years earlier by Pepin’s uncle Grimoald, who preceded Pepin as major domo. However, when Dagobert came of age he sought to return to France to claim the kingship. But Pepin was aware of this and struck first—he had Dagobert secretly assassinated with an arrow through his eye, and so by careful planning and treachery Pepin gained control over much of Merovingian France.

“Charles was the son of one of Pepin’s concubines, and had grown up in the atmosphere of intrigue, hostility, and back-stabbing of Pepin’s court; he was therefore very familiar with politics as it was done in that day. He was twenty-six when his father died, and in the turmoil that followed he was thrown in prison by supporters of his brother, but he escaped and ultimately defeated them. He then fought many victorious battles to gain and expand his power, culminating in his greatest victory of all, the Battle of Tours against the Moslems in 732. It was after this battle that he was called Martel—the Hammer. But Charles Martel was not the first to defeat the Moors. They had invaded southern France in 718 and were defeated by Duke Eudes of Aquitaine, whom you probably have never heard of, because he did not publicize his victory very well. Unfortunately, the Moors came back in 731, overran Aquitaine, and Eudes had to ask Martel for help. After Charles Martel defeated the Moors in 732 he made the Duke subservient to him and added Aquitaine to his kingdom. Then, in an act of cleverness, he widely proclaimed his victory, yet he refrained from taking the title of king because he was concerned that some would feel he was usurping Merovingian power. Instead, he kept the last of the Merovingian kings under house arrest, paraded him with his long hair in front of visiting ambassadors as if he were a zoo animal, and had stories invented about how weak the Merovingian kings were. The Merovingians were thus eventually deposed for perceived uselessness and incompetence, which was untrue; but given the strength and determination of the Carolingian propaganda machine, it became the reality. Here is a children’s rhyme that supposedly dates from the time of Charles Martel making fun of the Merovingians:

Le bon roi Dagobert
 Avait sa culotte à l’envers
 Le grand Saint Eloi lui dit: “O mon roi!
 Votre Majesté est mal culottée!”
 “C’est vrai,” lui dit le roi
 “Je vais la remettre à l’endroit.”

Le bon roi Dagobert
 Chassait dans la plaine d’Anvers
 Le grand Saint Eloi lui dit: “O mon roi!
 Votre Majesté est bien essoufflé!”
 “C’est vrai,” lui dit le roi
 “Un lapin courait après moi.”¹

“It has often been said that the perception is the reality, and this is a good example of how reality can be manipulated by those with money and power, which we shall explore in more detail later. Martel’s son, Pepin the Short, was finally given the title King of the Franks by doing a deal with the pope, thus gaining legitimacy for what became the Carolingian dynasty of kings. Pepin’s son was Charlemagne, who eventually became the most powerful king of them all because he had all of the attributes we discussed—

determination, intelligence, and pedigree. Thus we see that the long-standing Merovingian dynasty was overcome by the Carolingians not merely by personality or force of arms, but also by treachery, deception, and propaganda.

“You may be wondering at this point—am I in this school so that I can learn how to lie, cheat, and steal in order to get ahead? The answer is ‘no’ because if you are caught it can be fatal to your career, or even to you personally. Nevertheless, we need to understand that the struggle for power is potentially the bitterest, cruelest, and deadliest game of all, played by those who have the largest egos and who are therefore some of the most intelligent, hypocritical, and deceptive people on the face of the earth. Consider carefully before deciding to play this game.”

¹ The good king Dagobert
Has his underpants on backwards.
The great Saint Eloi said to him, “O my king!
Your majesty is wearing your underpants wrong!”
“It’s true,” the king replied;
“I’m going to put them on correctly.”

The good king Dagobert
Was hunting on the Plain of Anvers.
The great Saint Eloi said to him, “O my king!
Your majesty is all out of breath!”
“It’s true,” the king replied;
“A rabbit was chasing after me.”