


COMMUNICATION, POWER, AND HOW THE WORLD ACTUALLY WORKS

WHAT I WISH I UNDERSTOOD EARLIER IN MY CAREER



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THE VP MOMENT



If a Tree Falls in a Forest...



In-Class Activity on Miro!

The Truth

What I believe: if I do good work, I will succeed



The Truth Lie

What I believed: if I do good work, I will succeed

What I noticed: great work often gets ignored.
Average work often gets ahead.



If a Tree Falls in a Forest...

If you do amazing work and nobody sees it, does it matter?

Doing good work is necessary. It is not sufficient.

"The best way for people to know what you are achieving is to tell them" — Pfeffer

Don't be a foundations guy





Why This Matters for You

You're learning state-of-the-art agentic development

The people who can communicate these things will lead

The ones who can't will be replaced by someone who can



Activity: "When Were You Invisible?"



Think (1 min): When did your great work go unnoticed?

What specific mechanism made the other person more visible?

Pair (3 min): Share and compare patterns

Share (2 min): What did the visible people do differently?



If you Control the Story, you Control the Room

And people's brains are wired to let you.

People don't process information. They process meaning

We remember what connects. We ignore what doesn't.

The person who frames the narrative holds the power



The 5-Second Moment

Every great story is about one moment where meaning changes

"Jurassic Park wasn't about dinosaurs" - the real story is always smaller

Start at the opposite of your ending. Change is the arc

The secret to the big story: make it little, make it relatable, make it simple





Activity: "Find Your 5-Second Moment"

Write (2 min): The instant your interpretation of a situation changed

Not what happened — the moment meaning shifted

Tell (4 min): Groups of 3, 60 seconds each

Debrief (2 min): What made the best stories work?



Facts Don't Change Minds

"No one made a decision because of a number" — Dicks

Being told you're wrong = same brain response as a bear

Your beliefs ARE your identity

When challenged, we become preachers or prosecutors

What Master Negotiators Do Differently

— Grant, Think Again

Spend 1/3 of their time finding common ground

Use fewer arguments, not more

Ask questions ~20% of the time

Express curiosity instead of conviction

"Wearing down an opponent is not the same as convincing them"



The VP Moment

New tech lead. Two VPs. Their idea won't work.


The problem: how do you tell them they're wrong?

The instinct: be right, show data, push harder

What actually happens: the room closes

What I did: showed them something better

Don't tell people they're wrong. Show them something better.





Activity: "The VP Challenge"

You can't tell them they're wrong

How do you get them to reconsider?

Questions, not assertions. Framing, not arguing.



"Power is an icky subject" - Me

It can be Machiavellian. It can be unethical.

But ignoring it doesn't make it go away.

Understanding how people use power helps
you navigate it








Why You Need Power

Job control correlates with health and life expectancy

"If you want to do good, you need to be in a position of power"

"Companies aren't democracies"

You are agents to act, not to be acted upon



Hard Truths

Performance is not enough. Being right is not enough.

Keep your boss happy, or your performance won't save you

"Don't expect justice. Justice happens in movies." – Me 😊

Ask for things. Get in the rooms where it happens. Show up.



7 Qualities That Build Influence

Ambition: wanting to move, not waiting to be moved

Energy: showing up with intensity, not just hours


Preparation: laborious gathering of knowledge and skill

Focus: staying in one domain long enough to matter

Self-knowledge: honest assessment of strengths and gaps

Confidence: "Authority is 20% given, 80% taken". Get & Belong in the room!

Conflict tolerance: willingness to have hard conversations



KNOW WHICH RULES TO BREAK

Ethical rules — don't break these. They define who you are.

Structural rules — often outdated, often reversible

Social expectations — where most opportunity lives

If it's not morally wrong and it can be rolled back — go for it

Activity: "Power Audit"

How visible is your work to the people who matter? (1-10)

Who is most important to your career right now?

When did you last invest in that relationship?

Pfeffer's 7: your biggest strength? Your biggest gap?



This is a Practice, Not a Lecture

Storytelling, persuasion, visibility, power — skills built by repetition

Stream of consciousness writing. Journaling. Practicing storytelling.

You don't need an LLM to think

You can present on your toes, without notes, in front of anyone





Your Final Presentations

Your audience will process meaning, not information

Give them something closer to a story, not a report

You can't tell them your project is good. you have to show them





One Thing


What is one thing from today you will apply in your presentation?

Not: "I'll be more confident"

Yes: "I'll open with a 5-second moment instead of an agenda slide"

Yes: "I'll cut my slide count in half and tell the story instead"



The background is a dark blue gradient. In the four corners, there are decorative white and light blue circuit-like lines with small circles at the ends, resembling a stylized PCB or network diagram.

I started my career thinking
doing good work was enough.

It's not.

Your career is shaped by what people see,
what people understand,
and how people experience you.

Your work does not speak for itself. You do.