



# **The Power Handbook**

# Power is a Good Thing

First let's get this straight – power is not ugly or shameful. As long as it is not abused, power is good, important and a good thing for anyone who wishes to right wrongs and change society.

Power needs handling with care and with great human insight and wisdom. We've seen what happens when men themselves have been given power. Men cannot manage it. They need more good female examples among the power wielders. This is the only way abuse of power can be stemmed.

Women must therefore assume the responsibility for half the power in all decision-making bodies. A decision taken by men alone is a non-decision, and non-decisions ought to be declared legally invalid.

With power we can influence and change society, while at the same time we must be prepared to take responsibility for the decisions.

If you are a woman and prepared to assume more power, read on: you'll reap great benefit from it.

Think carefully through what more power involves. Start getting used to showing clearly that you are prepared to assume a position of power. Don't duck power – help yourself.

### *Do this:*

- » Imagine yourself as a board member in a housing association, a council committee or whatever.
- » Imagine yourself as the Chair.

## Learn the Rules

Much power can be lost when people do not know how decisions are made. A counter-proposal is not the easiest thing to follow if you haven't carefully studied how different proposals may be set one against another. A good way to prepare for such surprises is to have preparatory meetings before the important ones. Make sure to include a woman who has been around long enough to know the ins and outs of decision-making. She can tell you how the matter should be presented and what the women on the committee can themselves propose.

Important decisions may get rushed through if no-one is on their watch to ensure that the decision is taken differently. Meeting procedure and formalia are not matters women can overlook.

Practise being chairperson. Start in a secure group, then in a larger context. Make sure you have the names of capable women up your sleeve when a chairperson is to be elected at meetings.

Meeting procedure is not half as complicated as it may seem. The instructions on a dress pattern are much more complicated.

It is important to know the details of how decisions come about. If you don't, all your fine preparations may come to nothing.

***Do this:***

- » Arrange preparatory meetings where you go through possible situations in detail.
- » Establish good contacts with politically experienced women from whom you can learn.
- » Start a study circle in advanced meeting procedure.
- » Practise as soon as you get the chance.

## Half of Every Group - Women

Analyse carefully the power structure of your council or organisation. Where are the most important decisions taken? Is there a shortage of women there? The answer to the latter question is often yes. Make sure that women are introduced and nominated at that particular decision level. Draw up a clear strategy for what power positions must be held by women and how women can most successfully be launched for

that particular job. Who's most suitable? Check and list qualifications and experience.

Remember that no man was born to be a council member. No woman either. But both have just the same claims to become one.

***Do this:***

- » Find out what the most important levels of decision are.
- » See if there is a lack of women there.
- » Develop a strategy for how women can be better represented in that grouping.

## Volunteer to Join the Election Committee

One of the most significant functions one can have is as a member of the election committee. The election committee proposes who should hold the various positions of trust, and this is why more women must be on these committees. The women on the election committee must draw up a joint strategy for how women are to be introduced and what women should be supported. Here, careful preparation is most important. Ring round to various candidates in good time and prepare them.

List all experience and qualifications. Bring the lists with you to the committee meeting. Make sure that the women in the meeting take the floor and back up the proposals you are agreed on. Women must support each other better in all respects.

***Do this:***

- » Make known your interest in joining the nomination committee.
- » Make sure that more of the election committee are women.
- » With the other women on the committee, draw up a joint strategy for how to bring in more women and which women you're going to propose.

## Put Forward Women Candidates

After careful consideration, select one or more candidates whom you wish to support. The selection must be realistic and the probability of winning must be fairly large. Launch your candidate in good time before the meeting at which the decision on new members or chairperson is to be taken. Check and list the woman candidate's experience and qualifications. In good time before the meeting, ring round and present the arguments in her favour to

the other women who will be at the meeting. Make sure women will be in the majority at the meeting. If possible, seek male allies.

It may be wise to launch your candidate early in the local press, making it harder for the self-appointed man to be (re-)elected. Make sure she gets a good debate article published a day or two before the election. Back up your candidates clearly. Make sure they are visible. Write to the press and speak well of them.

Arrange courses in meeting procedure for future members. It is important for all to know what is involved in the job. Recently it's become clear that many people who sit on committees do not fully realise the importance and responsibility the job entails. It takes much time and hard work to become a fully fledged committee member. Of course we women must take our responsibility.

***Do this:***

- » List all possible candidates and their qualifications.
- » Contact good women journalists.
- » Take good photos of your candidate(s) for use in the media launch.
- » Arrange press conferences at which your candidate(s) is/are presented.

## Women to Head the Lists

Prioritised lists are fine, but they must be headed by women as often as by men. A list in which a man comes first produces a troika of two men and one woman. This troika is most often a presidium; that is, the forum in which matters are prepared, in which the agenda is fixed, in which many decisions are taken without reaching the committee/council.

Another important reason for women heading the list is that perhaps only the first name will actually be elected. If all lists are always headed by men we will never gain a just distribution of seats however much we order the lists. Heading half the lists with women is therefore a must.

### ***Do this:***

- » Propose a rule under which there are always two lists, one headed by a man and one by a woman.
- » Have as a demand that the party or organisation take central responsibility for establishing an equal distribution of lists headed by men and women respectively.
- » Launch your leading women in the local media with good pictures and with names. This will surprise everyone since it is unusual.



» Make your leading women known. Make sure that they are in circulation a fairly long time before the election through debate articles, letters to the press, statements, etc in the local media. This is not difficult.

## Take the Chair

The job of chairperson includes controlling meetings, deciding what is to be put on the agenda and taking certain decisions on her/his own. The chair possesses considerable power. Half this power belongs rightfully to women, so make sure you prepare the election of chairperson well.

List all the women who could be good chair-people. Gather all those on your list at a meeting where you present the strategy. Make sure all on the list get full information on what being chair-person involves and how they are to be launched. Many are afraid of chairmanship; that it may be too difficult or take too much time.

Choose a mentor, an already-established female chairperson. Her task is to teach, support and encourage the new female chairpeople. She'll be proud to be mentor!

You can seek help from a good woman journalist when launching the new candidate for the chair.

Journalists know how your candidate can be most effectively launched through the media. Women must get used to being seen, must give themselves stronger profiles. They must also make crystal clear what they intend to do with their position of power.

Short, repeated courses in public speaking, media and the art of writing good articles are something we all need. Get on with arranging a course like this. Women, not only the future chairperson, are sure to come if you invite them personally.

***Do this:***

- » List all the chair candidates and their qualifications.
- » Arrange a chairpeople's course in public speaking, writing skills and media strategy.
- » Choose a chair mentor.
- » Launch the candidate for the chair according to the rules of the game.

## Gain power in the parties

Several parties realise that their lists must be arranged equally between genders. But some fail to realise that this is not enough for their party's

credibility. A party that orders its lists but continues to be represented outwards by a male leadership, a male language without female examples; and that does not know how to pick out what is interesting and important for women in politics, will not win women's confidence. Standing in the wings is not enough.

The parties must be consistent in the distribution of power throughout all their power structures, formal and informal. It's not good enough to choose strategic working groups or campaign groups with only men responsible at the top and a few women permitted to take part in the work or discussions. Nor is it good enough to have an unequal gender distribution among the representatives and political secretaries, i.e. background figures but with a good deal of informal power.

The people responsible for advertising, propaganda and information about the political parties are today predominately men. Thus men form the image of politicians and parties and make important selections of what political messages are to be purveyed. This power centre is one that it is vital for women to conquer. With female PR managers the picture of our parties and politicians would be different. And more fun.

# The Five Techniques for Dominance

There are methods men often use – consciously or unconsciously – to ensure themselves power over women and women’s culture. Professor Berit Ås in Norway has classified these methods into five groups:

1. Making invisible
2. Ridiculing
3. Withholding information
4. Double penalty
5. Ascription of guilt and shame

Learn to identify what these methods represent. And learn the number of each method so that, with one or more fingers raised, you can point out to your comrades which technique for ruling is being used. Here follow brief descriptions of each technique:

## 1. Making invisible

This nonverbal technique for dominance is the one men use when they do not listen to what women have to say, when they start shuffling their papers, talking to one another or going to the toilet instead.

We women often raise other issues than men do since women live under different conditions than men. Men do not recognise themselves in women's descriptions and elect to avoid listening or becoming involved.

Making invisible is a devastating technique of dominance. A person who is not seen or listened to feels reduced and is perhaps reluctant to continue her commitment to change.

***Do this:***

- » Show clearly that you are aware that the method is being applied and that you do not accept it.
- » Demand attention and that everyone listen to you.
- » If they do not understand what you are getting at, you can apply the technique to a man the next time he speaks. Do it extremely clearly so that everyone sees what you mean.

## 2. Ridiculing

It's easy to recognise this refined technique when men make fun of something at women's expense. The technique is based on belittling women and women's work. In this category we find a broad

battery of disparaging assertions about silly girls and hysterical females. Examples are superfluous.

***Do this:***

- » State clearly that you do not accept such treatment.
- » Never laugh along, not even when the joke is about another woman. Take responsibility for one another.
- » Stare in astonishment at the ridiculing man or react with a yawn. See that a painful silence ensues. Turn to another woman and ask her, perhaps, "Whatever d'you think he means now?"

### 3. Withholding information

By withholding information from someone you effectively keep that person ignorant. This often afflicts women. In the sauna and at the match much is settled among the boys, consciously or unconsciously. What then happens at the meeting – with women present – is that the matter is quickly pushed through. The women are not given the chance for proper discussion of what the men have already covered in a smaller circle. Men do not understand why women must always make

difficulties and prolong everything, or why women can't be a little more "decisive".

***Do this:***

- » Demand full background information for the decision-making.
- » Demand postponement of important matters that require further time for reading up.
- » Try to obtain the necessary information through other channels, through your own women's network.

## 4. Double penalty

Whatever you do is wrong: this is the core of the double-penalty technique. Women always suffer from a bad conscience in all directions. You should actually be somewhere else, not where you are – your job, the kids, your husband. The resulting stress is unbearable. What's worst is the feeling of inadequacy. Women are accused – often implicitly – by those around them of being inadequate as mothers when they become involved in working life and politics, while at the same time they are considered too little committed if they elect to put a higher priority on home and family. Choosing

both only creates dissatisfaction in both quarters.

Women want to combine family and working life and have every right to say ‘no’ both at work and at home without being punished for it. As opposed to women, men are seldom subjected to this type of double penalty. For them it is mostly self-evident to accept things at work and decline things at home. This is unacceptable and unjust. Women must have the same right as men to both work and family life.

***Do this:***

- » Be extremely particular in your choice of husband.
- » Be extremely particular in your choice of boss.
- » Demand of your boss the right to say no – or yes – without this being followed by the customary penalty in the form of e.g. missed promotion.
- » Work out how long the housework takes and then come to an agreement with your husband so that you share equally.

## 5. Ascription of guilt and shame

Ascribing guilt and shame is the most elusive of them all. A woman subjected to disparagement or ill-treatment of some kind herself gets the blame



for this happening. People say she can only blame herself for what she is like and how she behaves: she almost asked for it. This type of judgment can eventually make the woman feel that this is in fact the case. “I suppose the fault is mine. I must blame myself”, she thinks, and takes the blame for what has happened irrespective of whether this is warranted.

What is needed here is rapid analysis to see what actually happened, discovering that there is no reason to take the blame.

***Do this:***

- » Get help from a wise friend to analyse what happened.
- » Quickly shake off the feeling of guilt by trying to see the pattern clearly.
- » Tackle whoever put the blame on you. Show what actually happened.
- » Defend other women who have had guilt and blame laid on them.

## How to gain real influence and power of our own.

Women nowadays are taking power into their own hands. But as women approach real power it has a strange tendency to shift somewhere else. We shall find out where.

There are many pitfalls along the path to greater and equitable power for women.

The Power Handbook identifies the traps and sees how we can avoid or remove them.

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S-kvinnor are Social Democratic feminists who place the class struggle side by side with the struggle for increased gender equality. Our association is for women throughout the whole of Sweden. Together we fight for increased gender equality in society and in our own Party.

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