

## POWER

“Power” is usually defined as the ability to influence the behavior of others, with “force” and “persuasion” the two conventional methods.

Nicolo Machiavelli (whose chief lesson from the Bible, he noted in *The Prince*, was that “all armed prophets have been victorious and all unarmed prophets have been destroyed”) is the protagonist of the first, known as “hard power.” “The end justifies the means” and “It is better to be feared than loved” are other Machiavelli messages.

Dale Carnegie, the author of *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, is the spokesman for “soft power.” “Talk in terms of the other person’s interests.” “Show respect for the other person’s opinions.” “Be a good listener.” “Let the other person feel the idea was his.” — are some of Carnegie’s rules.

Variations on power are common. Robert Moses used his form of “hard power” to create a staggering array of New York’s bridges, parks, highways and beaches, while Jane Jacobs used her “soft power” to prevent him from extending Fifth Avenue through Washington Square Park and from putting an east-west expressway through lower Manhattan.

Today life is more complex; modern thinking focuses not on hard or soft but on “smart power”—the application of the range of tools available to achieve goals with wisdom in considering strategy and shrewdness in selecting tactics. Foreign affairs in a multi-polar world, for example, require diplomatic, military and economic resources and astute use of alliances, partnerships and institutions. In military acad-

emies, along with Clausewitz's classic *On War*, Sun Tzu's 2000 year old *The Art of War*— with its balance of psychology and armament, deception and threat, short term tactics and long term strategy—is on every reading list. Generals Colin Powell and George C. Marshall felt that the thoughtful, balanced insights of Thucydides, the ancient Athenian general, were as applicable now as when they were written 2,500 years ago. (If George W. Bush knew of the Athenian experience in Sicily he might have thought twice about a land war in Iraq and Afghanistan.)

In our current partisan political climate—with the 'legalized bribery' of political campaign contributions, with massive expenditures on television commercials and newsprint advertising, with 'public relations' the art form in which we excel today, the ability to influence the behavior of others is more difficult than ever, but results vary, depending on the cards you are dealt and the skill with which you play them.

Lyndon Johnson passed a Civil Rights bill that John Kennedy could not, an interesting lesson; the differing approaches to gun control legislation of Barack Obama and Bill Clinton provide a rerun of a similar script.

President Obama, an eloquent idealist, has proposed sweeping measures that Republicans have pledged to defeat. The National Rifle Association, with vast lobbying sums at its disposal, is marshaling powerful forces in opposition. Public opinion polls show that the public is now ready for appropriate measures.

Bill Clinton, an astute political operative, points out that passing the 1994 federal assault weapons ban "devastated" more than a dozen Democratic lawmakers in the 1994 mid-term elections, including then Speaker of the House Tom Foley, who lost his job and his seat in Congress. Speaking to Obama's National Finance Committee during the second inaugural weekend, Clinton advised fighting the gun control battle by "using the combination of technology, social media and personal contact the way the Obama campaign won Florida, won Ohio. Really touch people and talk to them about it." Taking a page

from Dale Carnegie, Clinton said, “Do not patronize the passionate supporters of your opponents by looking down your noses at them. Don’t underestimate the emotional response gun controls evoke from people in rural states,” Clinton warned; “I know because I come from this world.” Lyndon Johnson came from the anti-civil rights south, and the story of how he passed the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964 is brilliantly told in Robert Caro’s book *The Passage of Power*.

How he kept Judge Howard Smith, Chair of the House Rules Committee, from keeping the legislation bottled up indefinitely in committee (the south’s traditional strategy); how he played on Senator Harry Byrd’s weaknesses (taxes) and used his strengths, while coopting Senator Richard Russell; how he gave Martin Luther King, Jr. a list of specific Republican congressmen to be worked on; how he brazenly used Brown and Root’s deep-ocean drilling project called “Mohole” as a hostage; how the Steelworkers Union’s 33 lobbyists worked at his behest with those of the Electrical Workers and the Auto Workers; how Roy Wilkins was asked to repeat openly “the NAACP’s intention of purging congressmen who voted against it”; how he pleaded, bullied, threatened—until on December 24th, 1964 at 7:00 AM (so congressmen could get home for Christmas) Lyndon Johnson got the crucial vote he needed.

Will effective gun control legislation be passed soon? It depends on how the “mechanics” are handled, and if President Obama’s team follows the suggestions of Bill Clinton and the approach of Lyndon Johnson.

California’s anti-gun Democratic Senator Dianne Feinstein has submitted to the Senate a stringent ‘winner take all’ bill, while Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid said last week that an assault-weapons ban could not pass the Senate. Senator Max Baucus of Montana, the only Democrat with an A plus rating from the NRA, suggests strengthening existing gun laws effectively before tackling more stringent ones.

Given public sentiment, it seems clear that a deal can be made—if it is handled with political deftness. This is not always the case. Early

in Bill Clinton's first presidential term, I had lunch with an apoplectic Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who had just received from Ira Magaziner a report from Hillary Clinton's secretly-conducted Task Force to Reform Health Care. "This must be passed," said Magaziner to Moynihan, "without changing the dotting of an "i" or the crossing of a "t." Moynihan (in favor of a health bill) nearly wept when he said "Not a chance; not a chance." Pat had just agreed with Republican Bob Dole on a major, but more modest, measure that would have been widely acceptable. As a result of Magaziner's (and Hillary's) intransigence, it was two decades before a major health care bill again was presented.

New York's effective Mayor Michael Bloomberg has achieved many things for the city he loves, but 'congestion pricing was not among them. Had the new revenues from cars coming into Manhattan been specifically designated and promoted to improving mass transit in the outer boroughs (extended subway lines, better bus service), a constituency in support of the bill would have been created. As presented, the proceeds flowed to the Metropolitan Transit Authority, which refused to reveal how the new funds would be used. The public reaction: "Just another tax and the Hell with it." So much desired congestion pricing was never passed.

In the cases of Hillary Clinton's health care bill, Mike Bloomberg's congestion pricing proposal and current gun control legislation, it would be worthwhile to contemplate what Clausewitz, Sun Tzu and Thucydides would have advised.

What should ordinary folks who want to influence public policy do?

The answer is: be active rather than passive, join groups of kindred spirits, write, speak, communicate with public officials. As a centrist appalled by the extreme views of Tea Party types on the right and Occupy Wall Streeters on the left, I recognize their impact and hope that the moderate groups I espouse—"No Labels," "Common Cause" and others—will be heard over extremist din.

Effective activities must have messages and messengers—specific agenda items and vehicles to promulgate them.

Whether on macro issues such as immigration, health care or climate change, or on micro issues affecting your town or borough, your local school or local zoning, your trade or professional concerns, the basics are the same:

- a) Become well-informed on the issues—not just the headline generalities but the specific details;
- b) Think through carefully your long term, intermediate and short term goals;
- c) Know, relate to and cultivate your allies—actual or potential;
- d) Understand the goals, strategies and ‘levers of power’ of your adversaries, especially their strengths and weaknesses;
- e) Confer, consult, seek advice and support from kindred spirits, being prepared to modify your views when necessary to strengthen the general case;
- f) Prepare concrete plans of action subject to revision as unfolding events dictate. (Clausewitz worried about “the fog of war.”)
- g) Persist, persist, persist;
- h) Invite me to your victory celebration.

*The “Big Idea” Workshop  
January 27, 2013*