



INTRODUCTION

Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power.

Abraham Lincoln

"YOU'RE FIRED!"

Thanks to Donald Trump, these words have become a part of the American lexicon. Unfortunately, these were also the words I heard from across a table on a Monday morning many years ago. I was stunned. I had two hours to pack my office and leave. It was the first big failure in my life. But as I look back now, it was also a time of learning from God.

Truth be told, I was miserable in the job. When I interviewed for the position, one of the questions I'd asked was whether they functioned well as a team. The answer had been a resounding *YES*, accompanied by stories of their support of each other. The reality, however, was something very different. Brittle laughter could be heard in staff meetings when a joke was cracked—usually at the expense of another staff person. They didn't know how to function as a team, and I didn't know what to do about it. I had been hired to bring change into this organization, but at that point in my career I didn't know anything about leading change. And I was the first outside person they'd hired in twenty-three years.

I dreaded going to work Monday mornings, and as time wore on, each Sunday evening found me in tears. I was not a quitter, though, and I was determined to see this job through.

Eventually, I was told the position would be eliminated and I'd be given time to find another job. I had negotiated an agreement for sufficient time to look for a position that would fit my needs, and within a couple of weeks I got a call to interview for a position in Chicago's inner city. This not-for-profit organization was in turn-around mode, and the leadership had a reputation for making tough, business-minded decisions that were often perceived as ruthless.

Surely God didn't want me to go there?

I decided to go to the interview, if only for the experience, but I was hoping to discover some redeeming qualities during the interview that might give me the courage to accept the position if it was offered to me.

The Friday interview was a one-day process and as fast and tough as I've ever experienced; half-hour slots with various leaders and board members; little time with the people I would lead; and an offer of employment at 3:30 that same afternoon. I told them I would let them know my decision by the end of the weekend. I prayed, I wrestled—and I decided God surely could not intend for a young, white woman from a farm in Indiana to go serve in an inner city housing project. And so I turned down the position on Sunday evening.

On Monday morning I heard the words, “You’re fired!” I had been offered a position and apparently my organization wasn’t willing to let me wait for another offer. I called my husband, who came over with some boxes and we packed up my office. In the middle of packing, the phone rang—it was the leadership in Chicago, wondering why I had said no and what it would take for me to reconsider. My heart pounded so hard I was sure they could hear it over the phone.

How do I sound nonchalant and calm, considering what I’m going through, and tell them I would love to reconsider?

I explained how hurried I had felt through the interview process and requested permission to come up and spend time individually with each person I would be supervising.

That same week, while driving to Chicago for the second interview, the story of Jonah came on a radio program I was listening to in my car. Jonah—you know, the guy God told to go to Nineveh. Instead he said no and ran the other way? God let him spend some chill time in the belly of a fish in order for him to see the light. I realized God was speaking to me as directly as He ever had in my life—I was supposed to go to Cabrini-Green, one of the worst inner-city housing projects in the United States.

I accepted the position at the second interview, and that position became the best experience of my career. It was a delightful place with plenty of diversity and people who really cared about each other. We learned how to function as a team and how to serve others.

THE UPSIDE OF BEING FIRED

Some of my greatest lessons as a person and as a leader have come from the experience of being fired. One of those lessons revolved around *power*. I had tried to use the power of my position to make others respond. While I wasn’t a dictator, I also didn’t understand other forms of power that had to be earned by being worthy of respect and acting with integrity. I had no clue about “power centers;” no understanding of the impact of my decisions and how they were compounded by my actions and the actions of other people. I hadn’t applied critical thinking before accepting the position from which I was fired, nor was I wise to the politics of power. Over time, I learned that I had never really led with integrity, because the values I claimed to have were not seen in my actions.

The upside of my “You’re fired!” experience was that it sent me on a quest to learn all I could about true leadership, power, and integrity. As I applied the principles I learned about power, intelligence, and integrity, I began making more of an impact in the lives of those I served. I made better decisions, I stood for what I believed in, and I became fanatical about integrity.

Recently, I had an opportunity to design and teach a course at Belmont University in Nashville, Tennessee. I chose “Using Power with Intelligence and Integrity” as the subject of my class. Its purpose was to impact young people as they learn to challenge everything they see and hear; to analyze both sides of an issue or argument; and then live their lives according to the principles they learn from the decisions they make. I was not concerned for them to espouse my values, as long as they took the time to think through what was important to them, consider both sides of issues, and then make choices that were congruent with their values.

*Power tends to corrupt, and
absolute power corrupts
absolutely. Great men are almost
always bad men.
John Dalberg-Acton*

POWER DOES CORRUPT

Look at the world around us and you'll see examples of men and women who have fallen from grace after they've been given power. You'll also find people in roles of power who have stood firm and are admired for their contributions to society. Why does one group of leaders fail the test of character while another group does not? What is it that enables people to use power intelligently and with integrity despite everything we see, hear, and learn that attempts to lead us otherwise? This particular dilemma is called the Dichotomy of Power®. In other words, power can easily be divided into two (usually contradictory and mutually exclusive) areas: thought versus action. What I want you to take away from this book is that power—affirming, resonant, positive, and other-centered power—flows out of intelligence and integrity. The two do not have to be mutually exclusive.

In the following pages you'll find exercises to help you explore topics such as inspiring others, voting, and change—both personal and professional. At the end of every chapter you'll be encouraged to watch and discuss a relevant movie, read a book that will point you to lessons in power, and to find connections in these books and films that will help make the examples of responsible power real to you. You'll find questions designed to challenge your assumptions and encourage you to examine and identify the power you have, acknowledge it, and exercise it with intelligence and integrity. Take time to do the exercises and puzzles, watch the movies, and make the connections. I want you to look with fresh eyes at your core values and beliefs, and at your exercise of both. I want you to find the moral courage to do what you know is right. Then I want you to share what you learn here with someone else.

Each chapter has a section called A Biblical Perspective, which is a snapshot of a man or woman in the Bible who faced similar struggles when using power. Power, intelligence, and integrity are not issues new to modern times; the dichotomy between thought versus action is evident throughout history. We can learn from these flawed humans what it means to wield power for the greater good, even at the price of personal sacrifice.

Thank you for joining me on this journey of exploration into the world of power, intelligence, and integrity. I hope it challenges you to live, think, and act differently. By doing so, you will make our world a better place for all.