

14 Power Moves to Dominate Anyone

The Power Moves | 21 June, 2020 | by Lucio Buffalmano

The [definitive dictionary of power](#) defines a “power move” as:

A power move is a sentence, action, or combination of the two, most often conspicuous and memorable, that increases the power of the agent and, often but not always, decreases the power of the receiver(s)

To be lexically correct, *any* action that alters the [social power dynamics](#) is a power move.

However, as it’s most often intended, a power move tends to be conspicuous and flashy.

The difference between a “power move” and generally [dominant behavior](#) is that dominant behavior is baseline behavior. Such as, it’s constant, and it’s more understated.

Power moves instead tend to be “concentrated displays of power”.

They can be:

- **Intellectual power moves:** quips, well-placed jokes, or perfect rebuttals that display mental superiority -or, at least, wins the debate-.
- **Negotiation power moves:** negotiation gambits or high-risks threats, veiled or not, that display your full negotiation leverage ([see an example here](#))
- **Raw muscle power moves:** displays of power to show that, if worse gets to worse, you win the fight or war. Weaker parties can also pull raw muscle power moves with fearlessness, indomitable fighting spirit, and/or the ability to inflict damage
- **Status power moves:** displays of higher rank within a hierarchical structure, a social group or, generally, within society. Money, friends, and titles all show superior status
- **Social power moves:** anything that displays higher confidence, higher self-esteem, higher social skills, and mastery of social power dynamics

The beauty of good power moves is that **a single well-placed power move can change the whole course of an interaction, or completely change the way you look at someone.**

Sometimes a great power move can “flip the scripts” and catapult you from the subservient party to the dominant one.

These power moves also tend to be memorable.

So, done with the intro, here are 14 proven examples of effective power moves.

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1. “I Can F*cking Own You” Power Move

I love this one.

Money is the true equalizer.

Money doesn’t look at your dress, your skin color, or your appearances.

If you got lots of money, you can always pull a power move that propels you from the bottom to the top. As a matter of fact, **the best moment to execute this power move is right when people are looking down on you.**

Why?

Because with this power move, you are basically telling them:

If me, someone whom you think is unworthy of respect, can fucking buy you and your all mothafucking establishment, what does it say about you?
It says you must really be a fucking nobody, dude.

Look at an example here:

Bartender: (dismissive, looking down on him, implying he can’t afford it) The Latour is 400 pounds a bottle
The Saint: Then we will have two bottles. (hands a wallop of bills) There, you count it

However, there is an art on this power move as well.

You don’t want to flash credit cards at women like rich Arabs do. And you don’t want to look like you are throwing money because you have been emotionally unsettled by people, [like in this scene](#) from “The Wolf of Wall Street”.

To execute this power move correctly:

- Pick among the most expensive items on the menu
- **Remain calm and collected in front of perceived slights:** as a matter of fact, smile a little, as if you’re thinking “LOL, if this poor loser only knew the gulf that exists between me and him”
- **Take out a big wallop of money:** the bigger, the better. And make sure it’s big notes
- **Handle money as if it were paper, almost with disdain:** most people are careful around money, you treating it like paper highlights the difference between you and them -and like you got so much you couldn’t care less-
- **Always say “keep the change”:** researcher Deborah Tannen notes that waiters are offended by very large tips because it communicates you are almost seeking to “show them” ([Tannen, 1994](#)). Exactly what you want! Show them you could buy them and own them, if you wanted to.

Alternative ways:

- **Bring a guy with you who handles the payments for you:** If you got someone paying for you, the power move is already executed, so you can even tell your man, casually “don’t tip them, they’re very rude”. Then leave

Lots of money also show the power of independence.

As Nassim Nicholas Taleb says:

This is sometimes called “fuck you money,” which, in spite of its coarseness, means that **it allows you to act like a Victorian gentleman, free from slavery. It shields you from prostituting your mind and frees you from outside authority—any outside authority.**

That’s the type of money I always wanted: the money that buys me freedom and mental freedom.

Money Power Move on Dates

Some weeks ago I sat at what I thought was a bar to order two drinks.

But it was a restaurant.

So the waitress said something like “sorry, you also need to order food here”.

But the way she said it bothered me. It was as if to say “you’ll need to leave”.

So I opened the menu, pointed at the first food item, and said “bring us this one”.

The waitress told my date in the local language: “foreigners don’t usually like this one”.

I said “bring it anyway”, and handed her the menu back.

Noticeable spike of attraction from her side.

F*ck You Money For Women

Women can best pull this power move [while remaining feminine](#), since femininity empowers women.

Women can do it with more of a “[coquette style](#)”.

Not without taking out a wallop of money, but with a single bill that’s 10 times the size of the check.

See Charlotte executing it to perfection:

Friend 1: Charlotte, this is really inappropriate

Sidney: Yes, you’re such a...

Charlotte: What, what am I, Sidney? (stares them with a power gaze, drops a note inside the glass, walks out owning who she is)

This worked well because she engaged in the [“frame dominance” technique to control frames](#).

Such as, faced with a shame attack delivered from a judge position, she refused to backtrack and *owned* the accusation with pride.

2. Remind Them They’re Lower Class

AKA: “social class” power move

It’s a nasty power move.

It seeks to attack pain points one might be insecure about, which in this case include:

- Family status

- Country of origin
- Racial background
- Physical shortcomings
- Lack of formal education

Mostly though, **it's resentful people who use this power move.**

They resent that someone whom *they* think should be beneath them is instead more successful than they are.

And they seek to “put them back in their place”.

Unluckily, this power move can work because many people feel somewhat inferior for their background (instead of being proud for having it done *in spite* of it).

“I’m higher class” power moves can also be used [to control relationships](#). See for example Elvira doing it with Tony in the movie “Scarface”:

Elvira: can’t you stop saying “fuck” all the time (=you’re a boor). Can’t you stop talking about money all the time (=you’re nothing without money). Frank never talked about money (“[triangulation power move](#)”).

Tony: Oh, that’s because he was so smart (he bites)

Elvira: you’re an immigrant spic millionaire (=lower class, in spite of the money)

Tony Montana deep down felt pain for being “lower class”, and Elvira seizes on that personal pain point to frame herself as the higher-class relationship prize.

Beating The “Social Class Power Moves”

There are two ways to counteract the “I’m higher class” power move:

1. Show them for the nasty people they are
2. Remind them of the current power structure

The former is better, and far more effective in social settings.

But for a short brush off, the latter can work as well.

Here is an example:

James Bond: Red wine with fish, that should have told me something (= “you don’t know the rules of civilized eating, you’re a boor, I’m higher class”)

Russian: You may know the right wines, but you’re the one on your knees (=you might be more civilized, but I’m still one-up)

3. Rub Their Noses In Your Wins

Double power if you can also remind them of their *losses* as you do it.

Jorge Lorenzo used it against Valentino Rossi.

Valentino Rossi, a formerly dominant racer, called the new young guys “pussies” for being afraid of tough racing.

Unluckily for Rossi, the “pussies” were finishing ahead of him, so the power move came natural:

See Obama engaging in this power move:

Obama: I have no more campaigns to run. My only agenda.

Republicans: (interrupt with applause, cheering) Yeeeeeah

Obama: I know, because I won both of them (=suck my winning dick, losers)

The secret to doing it well is to move forward right after you deliver the power move, lest you look narcissistic, too into yourself, and emotionally thin-skinned.

Note: Winners Don't Overreact

Here's a power nugget of wisdom for you:

Look at the video above again.

And note *who* goes wild at Obama's joke.

It's the backbenchers and the smaller players who truly go wild.

Why?

Because the bigger players know power dynamics.

They know how to act powerfully (see: [exec skills](#)), and they know that overreactions signal low-power. They also know that Obama's win is not *their* win, they don't submit themselves to the leader, and they prefer to be seen as men who can soar above the political divides. (also see: "[don't tie your ego to the group](#)" and "[how not to be a second-tier beta](#)").

4. Show Your Disdain With Body Language

Nothing says "I'm better than you"... Than saying it without words.

[The law of social effort](#) says that the least effort you expend, the more powerful you look.

So when you cut off or ignore people without saying a word, you naturally come across as superior.

Some tips on how to pull off this power move:

- Exhale emphatically
- Roll your eyes upward
- Show disgust with facial expression
- show disappointment with facial expression

5. Let Them Wait (With Royal Attitude)

[Letting people wait is an obvious power move](#).

As a matter of fact, it's *so* obvious, that I do not recommend it.

It's petty, and typical of what I call "dickhead stage of power".

However, if we are dispassionately discussing power moves, then there is one way to execute it well.

How?

The secret it's doing nonchalantly, like it's the most normal thing in the world, and like people are *supposed* to wait for you.

Wanna see an example?

Look at how this man from the movie "Il Marchese del Grillo" does it.

Note his tonality, and his body language:

Marchese: Oh yeah, that's captain Blachard, let him wait, I had even forgotten about him (and stays seated talking to his mother)

This is how old royalty moves and thinks.

They think like they are *owed* power, and that it's actually fair for people to wait for them.

6. Ask A Question, Then Contradict Them

This is typical social power at play.

And I love this example from "Meet The Parents".

Guys who "met her parents" know that there is always a certain power tug of war between husbands and fathers in law.

If the two meet before marriage, the father in law can:

- Be territorial with his daughter
- Seek ways to "test" the new man
- Make a point that he remains the big cock of the house and he isn't going to be dethroned by this new man

On the other hand, the groom-to-be wants to be liked by the family, which can put him in a subservient frame of mind that gives all his power away.

In this example, De Niro displays his power with lots of [verbal signals of power](#).

And caps it all off with the "contradict power move":

Jack: Let me ask you a question, Greg: can you really trust another human being, Greg?

Greg: (thinks about it) Sure, I think so

Jack: No, the answer is that you cannot

Greg: (does not reply, looks away, owned)

7. Make Them Nervous, Then Tell Them to Relax

Making people nervous with your presence, questions, or jokes is a dead giveaway of dominance.

To avoid breaking rapport after you made people anxious, you can then say you were "just joking".

Denzel Washington does it in a few of his movies.

And De Niro does it here:

Jack: Oh, you'd be surprised how accurate they are. I can tell fairly easy if one is lying or not

Greg: (Squeaks and sweats)

Jack: Relax, relax

7.1. Make Them Anxious, Then Release Tension

Similar to the above.

There are two ways of doing it:

1. Pretend you were serious, make them nervous. Then say you were joking

2. Pretend you were joking, make them laugh. Then say you were serious

Albeit the two take the opposite approach, the effect and the power dynamics are the same.

When people follow your lead, you display power by showing that you control the frame.

And if you do that while also making them anxious, that's double power.

A famous, 60-seconds long power move to highlight this dynamic:

Henry: You're really funny

Tommy: What do you mean I'm funny?

(the frame starts changing from light to serious)

Henry: You're funny, you know, the story, it's funny, you're a funny guy

Tommy: (turns fully serious now) What do you mean, you mean the way I talk? What?

Anthony: (seeks to rescue Henry and build bridges) Tommy no, you got it all wrong.

Tommy: Oh, oh, Anthony. He's a big boy, he knows what he said (dispatches the external help, communicates he does not want bridges)

(puts the pressure back on Tommy)

What did ya say? Funny how?

Henry is in constant retreat, squeaking and fearful under pressure.

That scene shows that Tommy was the top dog.

8. The “Offer They Can’t Refuse” Power Move

This was previously “cat and mouse” power move.

Why?

Because when the cat plays with a mouse the frame is this:

I can destroy you at any time

And there is nothing that will make your negotiation partner more pliable and amenable when you can show that you can:

- **Reach a favorable outcome with or without them** (flaunting other options)
- **Take what you are negotiating through negotiations or with nastier means** (violence, hostile takeover, replacing them, etc.)
- **Make them pay a very high price if they don't negotiate as you please**

See “The Godfather’s negotiation” as an example for the latter:

Animal cruelty aside, these types of power moves are actually classy.

They say:

We can get to you easily, but for this time, we just wanted to warn you.

You can play ball with us and get your fair value back, or your will force us to use force.

We hope you choose to negotiate in friendliness.

Usually, they choose friendliness :).

9. Let Them Try to Lead You, Then Make a Show of NOT Following

| **AKA:** never adapt to others, always let others adapt to you

Who adapts to whom is all about power dynamics.

And when people try to “teach” you about their culture, they are indirectly saying that you should learn their culture because it’s important.

The moment you start following them, not only you empower them, but you also become, well... The follower.

And power players don’t follow.

The real power players refuse to follow and take the lead, instead.

See here a great example:

| **Streisand:** L’chaim! L’ha-ha. Like you have popcorn stuck in the throat. It’s a...

| **De Niro:** (looks away, smiles derisively, as if to say “fuck you and your BS”) OK, to family (takes back the lead)

| **Everyone:** laughs

10. Offend People With a Back-Handed Compliment

Nothing screams “power move” like offending people with a compliment.

Billy Bats does it well here:

| **Billy:** This kid was great.

| They used to call him “spitshine Tommy” (LOL)

| I swear to God, he made your shoes look like fucking mirrors. He was the best. Made a lot of money, too (you don’t make a lot of money shining shoes, it implies Tommy was poor and working hard for a pittance)

| Salute, Tommy!

This whole dialogue is an attack masked as a compliment.

It’s covert-aggression (albeit not *too* covert).

It’s far more annoying being on receiving end of covert aggression. If you get angry without playing their same game you look over-reactive because it was not overt aggression -plus the attacker can always say “take it easy it was just a joke”-.

11. Use Humor-Frames to Destroy Their Authority

There is nothing like harsh truth framed as a joke to show people for talking out of their asses.

Even more than covert aggression, humor makes it hard for them to challenge you back.

If they do, they’d look over-reactive.

| **Joe Rogan:** you want people to walk down the street with a mask on?

| **Bill Burr:** let’s not start this, Joe

Joe Rogan: do you, though? Let's start it

Bill Burr: I'm not going to sit here with no medical degree, listening to you with no medical degree, with an American flag behind you, smoking a cigar, acting like we know what's up better than the CDC

Ouch!

In that same interview:

You don't have the body fortitude. Your fu*king knuckles would scrape on the floor

= You're like a dumb gorilla

Oh God, you're so tough with your fucking open nose and throat. G.I. Joe and his five o'clock shadow. This is a man over here.

= you're a [posturer](#) pretending to be tough

And later:

Now is the bitch Joe. Now is the bitch
(Joe laughs with hissing sound)

= In the end, you're not even tough.

This whole scene effectively framed Rogan as a big mouth, without credentials, making big claims about things he doesn't understand.

It took away all of Rogan's authority.

It robbed him on any credibility, present and future, to talk about anything outside of, maybe, combat sports.

From then on, people will listen to Rogan talk about things he has no expertise on, and laugh.

Humor is a technique that suits people like Bill Burr especially well. Since it's his job to make fun of others, you cannot attack him back easily.

Also see "the jester" role in [Power University](#).

12. Use Covert-Aggression, Make Your Enemies Look Thin-Skinned

Here is a basic law of power:

Your external power will always seem undeserved unless you first gain power over yourself.

If you don't show you have healthy self-esteem and strong control over yourself, people will always think that you don't 100% deserve your power and success.

And you also become an easy victim of what I call "psychologizing attacks". Such as: he chased success because he's actually just an insecure boy.

Ben Shapiro is very good at this power move:

Piers: and you can smirk at me as much as you want

Shapiro: I'm not smirking (and keeps smirking)

Smirking is a derisive power move that says “you’re so ridiculous, I can’t even take you seriously”. That often gets under people’s skin.

This power move works with most anyone, but it works *especially* well with:

- People with low verbal abilities (they feel outgunned and lash out)
- People more prone to aggression
- Thin-skinned people

These people will want to forget the debate and *physically* wipe the smirk off your face ([that’s how Shapiro became famous](#)).

Little later:

Shapiro: you demonize people by standing on the graves of dead children

Piers: (barely containing his anger) how dare you

[Smart alics](#) also use this technique a lot.

To do the same:

- Behave like a smug
- Look down on them
- Smile/smirk as if to say “you make no sense”
- Look like you are amused by them

In written exchanges, you would lose “LOL” a lot.

“LOL” is an effective, derisive power move.

It frames you as superior, looking down on them and laughing *at* them.

Advice: Ditch Covert Aggression

I recommend people to avoid covert aggression.

Why?

Because **covert aggression** always reeks of [passive-aggression](#).

It’s a [bitch-style power move](#), it feels like you don’t have the guts to speak assertively and have to resort to underhanded, low-power tactics.

Personally, I used to use “LOL” a lot, but I’m actively removing it from my vocabulary. It breaks rapport, it’s disrespectful, and it’s also low in power.

13. Dropping Hints About Your Power

[Machiavelli](#) said it first:

Every one sees what you appear to be, few really know what you are.

What’s the point of having power, if you cannot flaunt it?

Of course, there is an art to displaying power with power moves. Some people do it with a bragging attitude, looking like big roosters puffing up their chest.

That makes them come across as boastful, “too big for their boots”, and, overall, reduces their social

power through isolation.

Instead, you want to do it in one of two ways:

1. with full confidence, as if to say “this is the reality of things, friends”
2. As if you’re trying to hide your real power.

Here are some examples of this power move:

Random guy: So, what do you do?

Her: I do some charity work to help less fortunate people (= I’m rich, I don’t need to work)

And:

Random Guy: Where are you from?

Me: Originally, Italy, but I live in Germany during summers and most of the times... I travel the world (=I live life my way, free of any confines, and you can’t put me in a box)

And:

Him: if you had to choose between a man who’s rich, handsome, or one who is poor and average but a good fit for you, what would you choose?

Her: Well... Frankly speaking, I have a lot of money and don’t need any help there. So the rich goes out. I’ve also been around models for many years, and beauty does not impress me in the least. I prefer men who keep it real, who have the confidence of being who they are, flaws and everything (= your stupid and low-value criteria don’t apply to me. I have all that you crave and I go for chemistry *because I can*)

The above guy is trying to put her in a typical female box that reduces her power. She switches the power tables by making him come across as petty and low-value. And speaking of switching the power tables...

14. Switch the Power Tables

This the power move per excellence.

When you’re down on power... Act like you’re top dog.

Here are some examples:

- When you feel like you don’t belong somewhere, act like you own it
- When chances are slim, act like victory is a foregone conclusion
- When accused of something, accuse back of an even bigger crime
- When you’re walking towards your death... Smile. There is nothing like going out with a power move ☐

See James Bond pulling a “switching the power tables”:

This is unwritten dialogue that’s going on:

Minister: I got the power and can kill you

Bond: No, I got the power and you’re a traitor

[An even better example](#), the power move while going towards your own death, turning a hostile crowd

into a fearful one.

Of course, these types of power moves will sometimes fail. And then, you might look like worse off than if you had not tried it at all :). But power moves are not for the faint of hearts. And some incredible unexpected wins will come your way.

14.1. Switch The Power Tables With Fake Powerlessness

This power move is so disarming as it is powerful.

But it's a different type of power move.

It feigns not having power, and it refuses to fight.

Instead of fighting power with power, you let them have their win, walk out on them (with all your leverage with you), and make them feel terrible for even having tried to pull a power move.

Charlotte: do you know how lucky you are to have me? Do you know what people think when they are seeing us together? (power move)

Harry: Yeah, I know (refuses to fight). I just didn't think you were one of them (walks out, leaving her feeling twice as bad for everyhint tried to "show him")

Bonus: Revenge Power Move

Effective acts of revenge are also good power moves.

A good revenge says:

"you had power over me. Now I got power over you".

That's what revenge is all about, in power dynamics.

My point of view on this: don't be afraid of wanting revenge (*as long as that person was unnededly mean*).

Real power players never forget.

Yes, they *move on*. Maybe they even *understand*. And, possibly, they don't even give a fuck anymore (they work on an [antifragile ego](#), so offenses will not fester within them).

But they still don't *forget* those offenses.

And if the opportunity arises, they'll be glad to even the scores.

See a good power move revenge here:

Jane: I don't know. I get a nose bleed anywhere around 86th street (= wherever you can afford to leave, it's cheap for me)

Joan: (fake smile)

Jane: God, it's so good to see you (= we hate each other, and I love getting my revenge, you bitch)

Jane: Oh, I have a tiny favor to ask you, they are doing construction and my driver will be circling. If you can have one of the girls run down at 1:15 and flag him down (= maybe you used to task me and give me orders. But now *I* give you orders)

And you must also love the way Nigel Farage did it:

(20 years later)

Farage: Well, you're not laughing now, are you?

And then they said “you’ll never leave the EU”



Bonus: Power Move Fail

I’m sorry to tell you this:

Power moves are awesome.

But there is no shortcut for acquiring personal power, consistently achieving high rank within groups, and becoming a well-liked and respected individual to most anyone you meet.

Even with power moves, to be effective at them, you must deliver them with good timing, which requires emotional and social intelligence.

And you must deliver them with conviction and confidence, and from a strong frame.

All that requires knowledge and mastery of power dynamics.

I’ll give you an example:

The High-School Power Move Fail

Back when I was in high school, we had very poor toilets for students.

Not for the professors, though.

They had fresh towels and good soaps, and had their own clean toilets. Which were all conspicuously marked as “reserved”.

Well, rebel me didn’t like that two-caste system, so I used the “reserved” bathroom.

I was doing exactly that one morning when the school principal tried to use the bathroom, only to find it locked from the inside by yours truly.

I made a mistake of going out too early, and the principal was still in the hall, holding court right smack in the middle of a bunch of students.

He immediately stopped me:

Principal: Hey, was it you in the bathroom?

Me: Yeah

Principal: (between angry and shocked) What? What were you doing there
(note: that's "social attack mode", he seeks to make me backtrack, justify, or apologize)

Me: Using the bathroom (I do not backtrack)

Principal: (he expected an apology, so he starts getting more agitated, and starts mumbling)
But, what were you doing, didn't you see the sign? It's reserved
(here comes the power move!)

Me: Yeah, but it doesn't say reserved *for whom*

Well, I thought that was a GENIUS power move, a memorable [frame control power move](#).

I was expecting people erupting in laughter, and my name to soar at the top of the list of the cool kids.

Well, it didn't turn that way, though.

The truth is that I didn't deliver the line well, it was lacking conviction and power.

The result?

Nobody laughed.

It fell completely flat.

The principal only got more irritated, failed to see (or ignored) the joke/power move, and started lecturing me on the meaning of "reserved" and what were the right toilets for students.

That framed me as an idiot who couldn't understand basic social rules.

If I had had more personal power, and a better understanding of power dynamics, I could have still turned that situation around, even after the initial failure.

But that took me some more time to develop.

If you want a shortcut:

- [Power University](#)

Summary

Most power dynamics are negotiated subtly and without any major power move (that's why most people need to study this stuff).

However, in some rare times, it's a big show and display of power or dominance that affects the power dynamics.

Those big displays of dominance are the power moves per excellence.

At the most general level, a power move is an action, that changes the power dynamics of a social interaction.

However, a power move is usually defined on the *positive*.

So a power move, as it's most often understood and as it's defined on this website, is anything that increases your power, asserts dominance, or allows you to defend yourself against abuse or disrespect.

This article was more on the hilarious and light end of the spectrum.

However, just like its cousin "[office power moves](#)", it's also based on solid principles of power dynamics.

So you can read it for a laugh, but also to help you deepen your understanding of power dynamics.

And maybe one day, you can pull a power move just like one on this list :).

Also read:

- **[10 Office power moves to dominate at work](#)**

Notes: The original Lorenzo's quote said "shame to be beaten by *kids*". He didn't know the meaning of "pussies" and someone translated it for him into "kids". I fixed the quote to make for a better example (and he would have probably used the right word, had he known its meaning).

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