Laws of Power: Reputation

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Table of Contents Hide

- 1. Introduction
- 2. Building up your Reputation
- 3. Sustaining your Reputation, and Enemies
- 4. Further Reading

"A reputation once broken may possibly be repaired, but the world will always keep their eyes on the spot where the crack was."

Joseph Hall

Introduction

Your good name speaks before you, and unaided reputation can terrify and triumph. If you are careless with your reputation, however, your vulnerability will be utilised from all possible angles. Your reputation, therefore, must be cleverly being shielded from all possible fronts. Your reputation is the basis of your power and if you start on the inadequate footing, everything will cave in eventually. Repute can be so powerful that it can hurl enemies into submission or put them on the defensive before the real conflict ensues. Intimidation and stature can stir up immense terror, transforming an army's strength into vulnerability.

"Even those who argue against fame still want the books they write against it to bear their name in the title and hope to become famous for despising it."—Montaigne

Repute has that remarkable power of making you seem larger than life, it elevates your spirit and reinforces your strength. In the eyes of others, good name makes you seem more significant, amplifying your self-image into one that commands respect. Everyone values repute, even if they are in denial about it. Where their self-interest is concerned, it rules over them and if they oppose it, they will still unconsciously seek it. As a matter of fact, reputation will never be portioned. You can share your virtue, but not your renown, as no one has conferred his reputation to someone else.

Building up your Reputation

"Regard your good name as the richest jewel you can possibly be possessed of. For credit is like fire; when once you have kindled it you may easily preserve it, but if you once extinguish it, you will find it an arduous task to rekindle it again. The way to a good reputation is to endeavour to be what you desire to appear."

Socrates

A man with a bad name is usually detested or loathed by the people. Someone who has an inadequate moral sense but has not injured his reputation is more manageable than a man that is detested or loathed by the public eye. This is eye-opening; people miscalculate the impact of good name, for they rely much on appearance. A firm reputation delivers you from exerting much energy, it grows and amplifies your presence and overstates your power to an elevated state. Furthermore, a good name also commands respect and makes you an engrossing figure. It is the most ideal form of social proof you can have.

<u>www.TheRedArchive.com</u> Page 1 of 4

However, one momentous error and your reputation is injured, and you don't necessarily know whether you will recuperate from it or reclaim it.

During the emergence of your name, you should make yourself renowned for a distinct quality that outshines all others, this could be your magnanimity or your transparency. If you got a good name for honesty, for instance, it will serve as an ideal smokescreen for all your methods of artifice. This particular feature will be the central quality people will ascribe to your good name, and thus it should be loudened to be heard. If you base your reputation on a simple formula, and not make it more difficult, you shall get better. The appeal you get from your spirited quality will make you known. You shall guard your reputation rigidly during your disclosure, to avoid unnecessary conflict that will obstruct your course of action moving forward. If you know you can avoid a conflict, do not oppose, you are until now growing your name.

Remember: Your reputation is one of the most sumptuous treasures. Once you have it, it is not difficult to sustain. However, if you wipe it out through error, it is taxing to regenerate.

Be considerate and assemble your reputation without haste, for this should not be hurried. If it is established at full tilt, it will not stand firm, and a foundation which is not secure will tumble soon enough. You shall learn to be forbearing with your reputation, putting your name out there among many people in an understated yet daring manner. Do not be one of those people who invites himself, in the most straightforward manner, to an event or social gathering. Conceal your scheme, and find an alternate route that is oblique. The roundabout method will make your state of affairs more reputable, it does not rouse unnecessary trace or make you seem too eager. Know how to be subtle, then, to avoid dispute and misgiving.

"As a general rule, a reputation is built on manner as much as on achievement."

Joseph Conrad, The Secret Agent

Those people whose name is already established invariably have a higher standing, personifying their firm foundation and good name. If you know they are acclaimed and the right people are on their side, you should rub shoulders with them. You shall remember, though, that their public perception should balance out with yours. Your relationship with reputable people will amplify your status, and moreover, it will breed new opportunities to meet other highly regarded figures. As a consequence of this, your social network expands and so does your good name. Your network determines status in various ways, you shall not mingle around inferiors whilst building up your renown. Respected people present you with the possibility, time and again, to develop your character. It comes down to your determination, then, to seize an opportunity when it reveals itself.

There are, nevertheless, those favourable moments where another man's reputation is worthy of assailing. Primarily when you have less to lose than he does from a state of affairs. In such a situation, you have more to gain from it, and he has more to lose. It is a potent weapon that can be exercised on those figures whose renown and status will be advantageous and useful for your stature. This does not mean that it is pertinent to every higher-ranking person, though, there are those persons with a supreme status that should not be pounced on, their callous nature will destroy much of what you have built, and your recuperation is not warranted.

The moral, therefore, is to not be foolish and be mindless in your affairs, you should approach this undertaking with modesty and courtesy, organising your artifice in the most covert means available to you. If you conduct yourself like a man who is endowed with nobility and self-respect, many doors will be opened for you because you got those exceptional traits that are attributed to the superior.

<u>www.TheRedArchive.com</u> Page 2 of 4

Sustaining your Reputation, and Enemies

I shall discuss, in this section, how to preserve your reputation circumspectly, procedures you can apply to break down your enemies, and manner of conduct that alleviates potential injury to your good name.

Being careless of how others perceive you is not macho, it is somewhat thoughtless. For your self-image should be controlled by none other than yourself, if you pay no attention to how you are being discerned, someone else will, and they will gladly cast you in an inferior light. Disregarding your self-image in the face of the people is like being indifferent to your name. Reputation is conditional on self-image to a considerable extent, and thus paying no attention to it is counter-productive to sustaining your good name.

If you are being criticised or censured, resist the temptation to oppose it in a self-justifying or defensive manner, this will motivate them to further mock you. It will be like adding more fire to the flame, you make matters worse. Learn to alleviate your reactivity, it will prove advantageous to preserving your reputation and evading an entanglement that may harm your good name more than promote it. If you do not have mastery over your emotions, they will rule you and weaken your position, this is ever so relevant in matters of stature where a serious omission may lead to your demise.

If you get flustered over trivial matters, it is a demonstration of weakness. You ought to control and govern your temper and shun away from minor retribution that is of no use. Your temper is the gauge of your good sense and prudence, therefore, do not discount it. If you are to break down an enemy, do so in a calculated fashion, or else not at all. Considering you have a firm reputation, there will be possible strikes thrown your way, you shall know how to exterminate them before they become pervasive. [Niccolo Machiavelli] expressed it in this way; "One must be a fox in order to recognise traps and a lion to frighten off the wolves." To be heroic, then, is not adequate. You shall adapt your character to have heightened perception and excellent foresight to identify stratagems and snares plotted against you. To have the capacity, in a set of circumstances, to alter your outlook and take a bird's-eye view, taking the cautious and necessary steps that will cripple the enemy.

You knock down an enemy by exploiting their flaws, creating openings in their reputations that weaken their position to oppose you. Every enemy has his shortcomings, to leverage them, though, you shall first recognise them without uncovering your own. A definite place to start is through subtle and clever stratagem, such as mockery or derision. The ideal smokescreen to carry out such stratagem is a superficial charm. Superficial charm allows you to mock a person without coming off resentful, bitter, or inferior and it safeguards your likability. This is known as *The Fake Hypnotism Demonstration*. Note: your mockery should not be hostile, as this will not do your name any good. If through ridicule, you manage to put your enemy on the defensive, your reputation will heighten, under the condition that you have an elevated status that is esteemed.

To add to the previous section, courtesy, modesty, discretion, and circumspection will be of great import in maintaining your good name, as these are traits that epitomise a superior man. In addition, you must also have a capacity for immorality when circumstance necessitates. This is not to say that you are by disposition dishonourable or corrupt. However, it is better to be feared than loved, and thus you should have a capacity to be a great deceiver and liar when called for.

Moreover, spreading false gossip about your enemy is another such method that rouses threat. The rumours that you stir up can intimidate your subject to the point where their self-defence becomes the product of various miscalculation. You put your subjects in a tough predicament with this method, for if they are to point out the falsehood, they may appear self-justifying and as a consequence, generate misgiving. On the other hand, if they are to set it aside, it may very well worsen their condition depending on the state of affairs. Lastly, never overlook your high standing and do not allow your good name to

www.TheRedArchive.com Page 3 of 4

grow uninteresting, for variety is the spice of life and you shall breathe new life into your character to keep it bright.

Further Reading

- 48 Laws of Power, Robert Greene
- The Prince, Niccolo Machiavelli
- The Art of Wordly Wisdom, Baltasar Gracian
- The Book of the Courtier

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<u>www.TheRedArchive.com</u> Page 4 of 4