

The Power To Ask

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Administration has rapidly become a science in recent years. Those who are placed in any position of responsibility will have been prepared with concepts of supervision, delegation, authority and responsibility, correct handling of personnel problems and many other areas of management. In all of this, there are concepts that are difficult to grasp and to put into practice. The concept of correct use of authority is often one of the most difficult. Yet, this is one of the most essential factors in good administration.

Regardless of the type of work to be done, all persons in administrative positions have at least one factor in common. That is, they must ask other people to do work. This is necessary in the hospital. The nursing superintendent, the supervisor or the head nurse cannot possibly give personal bedside care to each patient. In order to achieve the aim of patient care they must ask others to carry out activities which will ensure care for the individual patient. It is from the necessity of asking others to do something that the concept of authority arises. The type of authority one uses varies with the situation in which he is working. However, in this instance we wish to think of authority as merely the power to ask others to do something that will help in achieving the aims of a larger group. Several ways in which this type of power is frequently misused and how this can be avoided are stated below.

Authority is used as a status or power symbol. The authority necessary for a specific administrative position is temporary in nature.

It is of value for that person only when he is participating in that role. When this same authority is carried over to and exerted in another area of life (such as religious, community or social) it is being used as a symbol of power. Since most people change roles frequently even within the span of one day's activities, care must be taken to prevent exerting authority where none exists. The power to ask others to do something must be related to the specific role in which a person participates within each of these areas.

Authority is used to ensure personal security. The person who is emotionally or professionally insecure will use authority to increase his sense of confidence. Correcting a person in the presence of others, speaking loudly or sharply to personnel, berating others or exaggerating the role of "boss" are among the mechanisms used by this type of person. Through this behaviour, he attempts to improve his picture of himself and therefore, gain more confidence. Feelings of insecurity are difficult to change but certainly not impossible. This same person can readily gain acceptance by others if he knowingly changes his behaviour to that reflecting a "quiet confidence" (not timidity) in personnel relationships.

Authority is used to achieve personal aims through inhibiting freedom of expression by others. There is a natural element of fear in the relationship of a subordinate to his superior. Because of this the subordinate will often overtly approve of everything expressed by his superior or he will attempt to ex-

press only what he thinks will be approved by his superior. The person in authority is often not conscious of this. At the same time, however, he does use his power to support his own viewpoints when there is a decision to be made by a group. He merely has to express his viewpoints and the decision is on its way! In this way he does not ask others to do something: he tells them what to do or what to decide.

When authority is used in this way for a long period of time, it serves very effectively to inhibit freedom of expression by others. The creative element of individual participation slowly disappears as the group becomes more and more a just reflection of the opinions of those in authority. This can be avoided by a greater flexibility on the part of those in positions of authority. A certain amount of fear can be eliminated if constructive suggestions are treated with respect and consideration and participation in certain decision-making is encouraged on all levels. It may be necessary at first for the person in authority to withhold expression of his own view points until others have expressed opinions. When he does express an opinion, it can be done with a manner of conviction but also with an attitude of acceptance and understanding of other view points.

Authority is a very necessary tool used in management or administrative situations in order to get a job done. Care must be taken to use it only for what it is needed. The correct use of this type of power is essential to the satisfaction and happiness of all personnel involved.