

KORDA
 Michael

Paying the Price of Power Play

Reviewed by

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As the vice president of a New York publishing house, Michael Korda has undoubtedly lived through some harrowing power struggles. In one sense his book is a survivor's manual on the techniques of corporate skirmishing; in another, it examines the art of self-confidence, not in the style of Dale Carnegie but Albert Camus and Carlos Castaneda, the heroes of the counterculture.

Having power is largely a matter of creating the illusion of having it. In a world where appearance is reality, walking small never makes the grade. As Korda points out, the roots of power lie in militant, but controlled, self-interest. "Thus, trivial as power games may sometimes seem," he writes, "they are a means of defining who we are, of preserving both our freedom of action and our ability to effect change."

The urge to exercise control over others, whether it reveals itself in international trading or a barroom argument, is imbedded in the life of civilized man. "Wherever I found the living," Nietzsche once observed, "there I found the will to power." Yet because it is also a game, the demands of power-playing are mythic as well as real. A powerful person dramatizes himself. His "act" is the thing that places him beyond anyone else's command.

Knowing how to succeed in business, as elsewhere, means knowing how to perform necessary rituals yourself — rather than having them performed on you. Along these lines, Korda offers an ingenious system of "power spots," the most effective positions to occupy in open-space offices, meetings, and cocktail parties. (Corners are desirable places to be; the center of the room is for losers.)

To extend his influence within an organization a power-player should lay claim to territory. Korda

Book World

POWER! How to Get It, How to Use It. By Michael Korda

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suggests that this is done most easily through symbolic action. For example, influence can be signified by appearing to know more than you do (silence is the best prop); also by color schemes. The object is to spread hints of your favorite color, and at the same time your power, around the office.

If the old stereotype of power driving men mad no longer prevails, reaching for power and fighting to hold on to it still have certain drawbacks. Bob Guccione, one of Korda's "success stories," worked his way up from a dry cleaner's assistant to the owner of Penthouse magazine. But now he feels gloomy about the price he's had to pay. "When a man really makes a success of his life," he says, "99 per cent of his friends vanish. I have never changed, but I feel rejected by the peo-

ple I used to know and love." The room at the top is a lonely address.

"Power!" is full of helpful and witty tips on "making it": how to use guilt, rumors, and showdowns to get promoted; how to wield the symbols of achievement; how to "put Gucci (loafers) on Florsheim feet" and get away with it.

An elementary truth about our lives and about making a living is that we are dependent much of the time upon surfaces and appearances, and it is to these that we must learn to attend with greater sympathy and imagination. Michael Korda's informative book fills the bill in this department. Together with "The Peter Principle" and "Death of a Salesman" it should be required reading for anyone interested in learning about the real business of business.

