

Power!

*How to Get It,
How to Use It.*
By Michael Korda.
261 pp. New York:
Random House. \$8.95.

By **RICHARD REEVES**

"By practicing in front of a mirror, it is possible to develop a firm, trustworthy gaze, and a confident, relaxed mouth."

Richard Nixon?
H. R. Haldeman?

Richard Reeves is a political journalist and author of the forthcoming "A Ford, Not a Lincoln."

Wrong! Michael Korda said it on page 17 of "Power!" He not only said that, but he added a footnote: "Facial 'power problems' include licking the lips and biting them, any twitch of the mouth, particularly at the corners, blinking and excessive eye movement. . . . It is possible to prevent involuntary twitching at the corners of the mouth by applying Xylocaine anesthetic ointment before an important meeting, but the effect is temporary, and if too much ointment is used the lips become numb and speech is slurred."

You might conclude from that passage that this is a silly book. It is not a silly book—it is a sad book. It is a guidebook for the upwardly mobile and the numb-lipped amoral—a sort of "Joy of Power" filled with

little tips about how to gain power over your fellow man by conning him at every opportunity, by getting a corner office and painting it blue (the power color) and by being careful not to wear Florsheim shoes (the loser's shoe). There are also eight pages of detailed diagrams on how to move at an office party—I hate to give away the plot, but the secret is that "astute players" start in a corner and move gradually into a "power circle" near the bar.

"All life is a game of power," Korda asserts. "The object of the game is simple enough: to know what you want and get it." So much for children, brotherhood, sisterhood and sunsets. Maybe a lot of people besides Korda believe that—and maybe that's what's gone wrong around here.

KORDA
Michael

1975

Obviously I hated this book and the mentality it projects, so I felt some kind of compulsion to find something charitable to say about it. I found two things. There is a rather interesting five page section on how some people use real or feigned weakness to dominate others, and, in the last few pages, Korda begins to fool around with the idea that self-reliance is preferable to becoming a prisoner of the needs of a community, corporation or life-partner.

But he has not written a book about self, he has written a book about others—specifically, about tricking others, pushing them around. The anything goes in this cruel world attitude of the book is stated again and again in admiring vignettes like this: "One of the best [power] players

I know can talk about himself for hours at the slightest sign of opposition or a demand about to be made of him. Even so, he reveals nothing. Sometimes he gives the impression that he has two children, sometimes three, occasionally none, and he has at various times given people to understand that he was graduated from Yale, Harvard, Stanford and Ole Miss. Some confusion exists as to whether or not he is Jewish or Protestant, since he has claimed to be both, and also crosses himself when he passes St. Patrick's Cathedral. Nobody really knows the truth about him, and he is therefore respected."

Robert Vesco?

Clifford Irving.

If lying is not your bag and you want to get ahead, you might try

the Korda obstacle course to slow down potential opposition: Power lies in how you use what you have, not in the accouterments per se. All the leather and chrome in the world will not replace a truly well-thought-out power scheme. A large office is pointless unless it is arranged so that a visitor has to walk the length of it before getting to your desk, and it is valuable to put as many objects as possible in his path—coffee tables, chairs and sofas, for example—to hinder his progress."

Talent? Work? Kindness? There is no place for them in the "Power!" strategy. The flyleaf identifies Michael Korda as "the vice-president and editor-in-chief of a major New York publishing house." God help the people who work with him. ■

The New York Times Book Review / September 21, 1975

