

Radio Talk Show Interview - Sample Questions and Answers

On Barstow & Feldman's *Living in the Power Zone—How Right Use of Power Can Transform Your Relationships* (2013)

by Dr. Reynold Ruslan Feldman, Co-Author

Introduction: Today's guest is Dr. Reynold Ruslan [pronounced Roos-lahn] Feldman, co-author with his wife, Cedar Barstow, of a new book on how to use our power with greater wisdom, sensitivity, and skill. Ms. Barstow is a psychotherapist and consultant on ethics, and Dr. Feldman is a retired university English professor, dean, and academic vice president.

Q. Welcome, Dr. Feldman. It's a pleasure to have you on the program today.

A. Thank you, _____ [name of host]. I'm happy to be here to talk about our new book and the larger issue of right use of power.

Q. First of all, what do you and Ms. Barstow mean by "power"?

*A. We follow the dictionary, where *power* is defined as the ability to have an effect or to have influence.*

Q. Many people think of power as something negative, dangerous, and harmful. What do you and your co-author, Cedar Barstow, say to them?

A. Power, like atomic energy, is value neutral. It simply can be used in better or worse ways. Everything depends on how you use it. Many people, at least sometimes, use it in negative, dangerous, and harmful ways. Often good people are unaware that they are causing harm. That's why Cedar and I teach people how to understand more about power so they can use the power they have in a better, more effective manner.

Q. Well, wouldn't it be easier to avoid using power altogether?

A. Actually, no. You can't avoid using power any more than a running car can avoid using gasoline or a battery. The minute you wake up and put your first foot out of bed, you're using power. When you say, "Good morning!" you're using power. Even when you're sleeping, you're using power. Power

is like gravity. You just can't avoid it. After all, power means having an effect. Power is what makes that effect happen.

Q. Power seems pretty basic to everything we do. Why don't we learn more at home or in school about how to use it?

A. This is a key question. When you think about it, most of the really important things we need to know for living a good life are never taught anywhere—not even in kindergarten. Think about it. Who teaches us how to relate, how to find a mate, how to love, how to be intimate, how to be effective in life, how to relax, how to listen, how to develop ourselves spiritually, how to relate across cultures of all kinds, how to collaborate, how to deal with money (make, save, and spend it wisely), how to be generous, how to live balanced lives, how to give advice, and—not least—how to own and use our power with sensitivity and skill? So, Cedar and I are trying to reintroduce this last subject as a really important missing basic. We have a growing array of ideas and practical techniques we teach that can help everyone use their power more wisely. Our book, *LIVING IN THE POWER ZONE*, is simply our latest attempt to get the word out.

Q. So getting back to your new book, you and Cedar Barstow describe four kinds of power. What are they?

A. Personal, Role (or Positional), Status, and Collective Power.

Q. I'm guessing our listeners can get a sense of what these are just from the names, but to give them a fuller idea, can you define each one briefly?

A. Sure. *Personal Power* is what all of us have just by being alive and interacting with others. When an individual has a lot of personal power, "charisma" is one of the ways their power shows up. *Role, or Positional, Power* is that extra measure of power that comes with a role that places one person above others. So, supervisors have power over their employees, doctors over their patients, parents over their kids, etc. *Status Power* depends on the power societies ascribe to different groups. In East Asia, for example, elders have status power, or in India higher castes have status power. In many countries of the world, sports or entertainment idols have status power. Finally, *Collective Power* means the power of like-minded groups like

voting blocs, workers' unions, or sports teams. A Japanese proverb says that one stick is easily broken, but ten sticks banded together are much harder to break. That's collective power.

Q. When you mentioned role power, you said that it gives you power "over" others. Can you say more about this?

A. Yes, a lot of people these days think of *power over* as bad and harmful. We mean "power over" in the sense that certain roles put you in charge of others. For instance, doctors, psychologists, managers, military officers, and supervisors have increased power and responsibility. With their role power they have the capacity to hire and fire, promote or demote, praise or shame, empower or manipulate, use or abuse. This authority puts those in what we call the "down power" role into a more vulnerable position. We hope people who read our book will understand, though, that hierarchy is not the enemy. We can have hierarchy, that is, people who are above or below one another on the power chain, and still have collaboration and mutual respect. Power doesn't need to be abused.

Q. You also talk a lot in the book about the "Power Differential." What does that mean?

A. Well, in most situations in which there are two or more people, at least one is generally "up power" while the rest are "down power" from them. The division manager calls a meeting. Her supervisees are down-power to her. She's the boss. The employees are required to show up. That's what we call the "Power Differential." The right use of power is how well we negotiate that differential whether we are in the up- or down-power position.

Q. Once you are in an up-power position, do you always stay there?

A. Well, ask any elected official who's ever been voted out of office! Actually, though, even the President of the United States or the Queen of England when they go in for their annual physical are suddenly down-power to the doctor. When she tells them to lie down on the examining table, they have to do what they're told. Of course, once the exam is over, they go back to being Mr. President or Her Majesty. Or think of a janitor, a fairly low-

power position in society. But when that janitor goes home, he or she is suddenly up-power to the kids.

Q. In the book you mention something called the “150% Principle.” What’s that?

A. This is one of the most important ideas in our book and program. Basically, in any relationship both parties have 100% responsibility for its health. However, when one party is up-power to the other (like a boss to an employee, a teacher to a student, or a parent to a child), that individual has 150% responsibility, since he or she can do greater good or greater harm to the relationship through their actions than the down-power person can. If a parent tells his child, for example, that it will never amount to much in life, that single statement can have a lifelong negative impact on the child. So it behooves the up-power person to be extra-sensitive about what they say or do with regard to persons down-power from them.

Q. You call your book Living in the Power Zone. What’s the “Power Zone”?

A. Thank you for asking that, _____ [Name of Host]. It’s a very important question. Some people think in terms of extremes when it comes to power: The dictator or autocrat on one extreme and the doormat on the other or, in the case of actions, extreme ones like punching someone out or allowing yourself to be punched out. The Greeks and the Buddha talk about moderation or the Middle Way. But we use the term “Zone” because every situation is different, and while you never want to be a tyrant or a doormat, you don’t simply go to the exact middle and stay there either. Some situations require being more forceful. For example, often you need to set clear limits or boundaries with others or, as a supervisor, give your employees explicit instructions or expectations. But in other cases, it might be best to say nothing and simply bide your time. Our book and the Right Use of Power training programs in general are all about helping people learn how much power to apply in different situations.

Q. In the Appendix section of your book, you offer readers twelve resources called “Try This,” from learning games to “Power in the Movies.” The third

one, for example, is called “Power Parameters.” That seems to be related to your “Power Zone” idea. Can you talk a bit about “Power Parameters”?

A. I’d be happy to. You’re right to associate these parameters to living and working in the Power Zone. I think your listeners will get it immediately when I give examples of these two extremes. For instance, imagine a line from one side of a page to the other with Extrovert written on the left side and Introvert on the right side of the line. Where would you place yourself on this line? We discuss a number of other sets of extremes in the book, but I don’t want to confuse the audience by listing them off. The point is, you may have to go outside your comfort zone on occasion to use your power with wisdom and skill. Even the quietest introvert will sometimes have to speak up, or a spouse who goes to work early, comes home late, and routinely works weekends may have to start building in more quality family time to keep things harmonious at home.

Q. How can someone stay in the Power Zone or help someone else do so?

A. The answer here is *feedback*. Now most of us are afraid to give and especially receive feedback, since it seems to be another name for unpleasant advice or criticism. But helpful feedback is really necessary for anyone to stay in the Power Zone. Of course, there is an art to giving and receiving feedback, including timing, choice of words, or being brief yet clear. It’s a complicated subject, but the one thought I want to leave our listeners with is that feedback is an investment in relationship. Good, constructive feedback given and received well can help both the individual receiving it and the giver. For example, an editor who improves an author’s book may not only help the book sell better but may become one of the author’s good friends. This sort of thing happens a lot in publishing.

Q. Both in your book and your workshops you have lots of interactive learning games. Do you have any favorites?

A. Actually, yes. We call it the “Push-Hands” Game. And, all of you listeners, if you have someone else with you and you’re at home and not driving a car or busy at work, can play along with us. Anyway, here’s how it goes. Stand facing each other with your palms out. Now, put your palms together with the other person’s and start pushing with strength. Please don’t

overdo it and push your partner down. Okay, now change and push the other person from your heart, or a place of kindness. Notice a difference? Usually the second version is gentler, kind of like a dance, whereas the first is playful, competitive, and more physical. Finally, this time, push each other's hands from a combination of strength and heart. If I could magically see all of you in radioland who are doing this, it would be like you're negotiating something with your partner. It's mutual, with sometimes one person initiating or yielding and sometimes the other. This third way is basically what we are trying to teach—that good relationships are by nature mutual, ongoing negotiations, with sometimes one and sometimes the other taking the lead. With one of our Right Use of Power facilitators, Felix Prieto from Colombia, we've even coined a new word in Spanish to describe this third way. We call it *fuerazon*, a combination of *fuerza* (force) and *corazon* (heart). So, people who learn to balance their power, whether personal, role, status, or collective, with compassion will be using their power wisely and well, whether up-power or down. You don't have to choose between power as strength and power as heart, as we often think. We can—and should—use a combination of both.

Q. Your book has lots of teaching stories in it. Do you have a favorite?

A. Yes, I do. It concerns how an up-power person at work may get into trouble in his or her personal relationships by forgetting to leave that “hat” at work. Here goes. A friend of ours, now retired, was a senior pilot for one of the world's biggest airlines. As captain he was responsible for a large crew and the safety of hundreds of people on his long-distance, over-water 747. In other words, he was used to being boss. So, when he'd come home after a week of intercontinental flying, he would still act like the captain—something his capable wife and teenaged son didn't appreciate. Things started to get a little dicey in the family, but his wife and son spoke up and allowed as how they didn't appreciate being bossed around. The husband and father saw their point, and together they came up with a solution. Whenever he came home from then on, he would ceremonially take off his captain's hat, hang it on a hook, and say, “Your husband and dad is home!” So he learned to set aside his up-power role at work and become an equal member of the family. As you can imagine, things soon improved at home.

Q. Wow, that's quite a story! Now I think our listeners might like to know how you and Cedar come up with all these ideas and techniques for teaching people about best ways to use their power?

A. Actually, it wasn't me. It was Cedar. She's a Hakomi holistic psychotherapist—a newer form of humanistic psychotherapy. Some 25 years ago, when she was serving as the administrator of the nonprofit Hakomi Institute, the Board asked her to develop a code of ethics for individuals practicing this type of psychotherapy as well as a grievance process for clients and a teaching unit on ethics for students of Hakomi therapy. So she started looking at all sorts of corporate and professional codes of ethics and grievance processes. Then one day a friend said something like “Ethics is really just the right use of power.” That was it. From that point on, Cedar starting thinking and writing about this idea and finally wrote a textbook for other helping professionals called *The Right Use of Power—The Heart of Ethics*. After I came along in 2009 and took her workshop a few times, I suggested we write a book together for the general public. It would help the world, I thought, if more and more people learned to use their power with greater wisdom, sensitivity, and skill. So we did that and founded the nonprofit Right Use of Power Institute at the same time. Now an eleven-person board is helping us figure out how to get our program out into the world. And that's really why I'm on your program today, _____ [name of host]. If more and more people buy and read our new book, take one of our workshops, or maybe even become a facilitator of these workshops themselves, then we can make a large positive impact on our troubled, conflicted, but wonderful world.

Q. The subtitle of your book is How Right Use of Power Can Transform Your Relationships. What is your definition of the “right use of power”?

A. Good question. For us the right, or ethical, use of power in human relationships consists of four things: preventing, resolving, and repairing harm; improving relationships and situations; balancing strength with heart; and promoting well-being and serving the common good.

Q. I was fascinated in the book by the distinction you make between intention and impact. Can you say a little about that?

A. Well, most of our listeners today will know the saying about paving the road to Hell with good intentions. What counts in relationships isn't what we intend or sometimes even what we do, but the actual impact of our words or actions on the other person. The distinction between intention and impact is especially clear in cross-cultural interactions. In Thailand, for example, the head is sacred. So a Westerner who patted a little boy on the head there, while intending to do something nice, would actually have offended the child's parents. By the same token, giving someone in our part of the world "good advice" might end up insulting them. The point is that we need to be sensitive to the likely impact of our words or deeds and make sure what we say or do will have the impact we intended it to have. In fact, we could say that paying careful attention to your impact on others is the key to learning to use your power more effectively. This is also the meaning of being empathetic, or really concerned with how another person is feeling.

Q. In the book you have such good stories to illustrate your ideas. Can you share a brief one about the difference between impact and intention?

A. I'd be happy to. It's another airline-pilot one. In this case, a plane makes an unscheduled stop for maintenance. A regular passenger on this route is a blind man, whom the pilot has gotten to know. "Say, Jack," the pilot asks the blind man. "Want to get off to stretch your legs, or would you rather just sit there?" "Well, Russell," came the reply. "I'd just as soon sit here, but maybe you'd like to take my seeing-eye talk for a little walk." "Sure, I'd be happy to, Jack." Now imagine this scene. The other passengers are hanging around the gate when out walks their captain, aviator sunglasses still in place, with a seeing-eye dog in tow. You can imagine the rush to the podium to see if there were any other flights available to take them to their destination.
Intention and impact!

Q. I uh see your point. But then, how does someone make sure their impact matches their intention in personal interactions?

A. Another good question. One of the best ways is what we call "tracking." This psychological term means paying close attention to how the other

person reacts to what we have said or done or are saying or doing. We need to notice not only their words but also their body language. If the other person frowns, squirms, or blushes, we may have said or done something out of place. At that point, we should be curious and ask if that was the case. If so, we should repair the situation right away so that our negative impact won't have a long-term effect or even derail the relationship. Too many people grow old with an estranged sibling or child. It's always better to patch things up before it's too late. As they say in the medical field, early detection gives the best chance for a successful cure.

Q. What happens if we make a mistake in a relationship? What can we do?

A. The Right Use of Power program has a five-step process for resolving relationship mistakes. First, we are always sensitive to the fact that our impact may differ from our intention. Second, we listen without being defensive to the other person's experience. Third, we validate that experience by saying something like, "I understand how you could feel hurt by what I said." Fourth, we explain our intention in a simple way and tell the person what we have learned from this situation. And fifth, we ask what else might be needed to repair the relationship.

Q. Chapter 5 of your books is called "Strengthening Your Core." What does that have to do with using power well?

A. I can see where the confusion might come in. A person's "core" is short for his or her core self. A strong, resilient core is the foundation for living in the Power Zone. Taking good care of ourselves is the best way to strengthen our core. Although self-care may at first glance seem selfish, think of what is announced at the beginning of every flight: If the plane cabin suddenly loses pressure, we are told to put on our own mask first before assisting someone else. By the same token, when we've eaten and slept enough and are in psychologically good shape, we have a better chance of understanding what each situation requires and of responding accordingly.

Q. What should bosses do when they realize they've offended or hurt one of their employees?

A. We also offer a five-step process to resolve and repair a situation like this. First, the boss needs to acknowledge the employee's experience. The latter wants to be understood, validated, and empathized with. Second, the boss should indicate what his or her intention was so the employee can understand. Third, the employee wants a genuine apology, so the boss should offer an authentic statement of regret. After step three is often where we stop when we apologize to someone, but Cedar and I think two more steps are essential. So, fourth, the boss needs to learn how to use his/her up-power position better in the future and indicate as much to the employee. Fifth and finally, the boss should make a conscious effort to repair the relationship so that the two can continue to work together well in the future. A really powerful way to do that is for the supervisor to ask the employee for their suggestions on how best to repair the relationship and make it stronger or on how they might work together better in the future.

Q. Now speaking of bosses, probably no one in our audience, let alone in the working public, has escaped without having had at least one inconsiderate or mean supervisor, the so-called "boss from hell." One of the Appendices in your book offers 28 tips for handling difficult superiors. I'm sure our listeners would value hearing a few.

A. Certainly. For example, here's Tip #4. "Avoid taking something on alone when there is significant risk—join with others for solidarity and effectiveness." It's good to have a witness; otherwise, the meeting where you are lodging a complaint may be your word against the boss's. Also, when you go in with others with the same or a similar issue, it's harder for the boss to explain it away as "your problem." After all, everyone can't be wrong. Yet another reason is a group of you can discuss strategies ahead of time and plan which individual is best able to express which point. Some people are just better than others in speaking forcefully and clearly. Finally, in stressful situations we often forget our best arguments. By going in as a group—or even just with the union steward—the other person or persons can insert the argument you've forgotten. Now all this is just one tip.

Q. Well, how about another?

A. Okay. Tip #2 suggests that we link a complaint with a request for change. The reason is clear. Sometimes supervisors do what they do because they see no other option. If you come in with a few other options which you consider more effective (and less hurtful), the boss is more likely to listen. After all, that way you're not just complaining—you're helping him or her out.

Q. On the issue of balancing power with compassion, or heart, you tell an interesting story about Henry Ford. Could you briefly recount that for us here?

A. I'd be happy to. A hundred years ago, when he had founded the Ford Motor Company, Henry Ford had a dream of making motorcars broadly affordable for Americans. That was the genesis of his Model T. But the story doesn't end there. He also doubled his line workers' pay to \$5 a day, a huge amount at the time—something for which other manufacturers criticized him. But Ford knew what he was doing, since with that daily wage, his own workers were all soon able to buy Model T's themselves. Ford invented back then what today we call the Triple Bottomline: He won, his consumers won, and his employees won. It was win-win-win. This kind of enlightened self-interest—and from our perspective, right use of power—seems lacking among many of today's industrialists and is at the roots of the current battle to raise the minimum wage, reinstate workers' benefits, and fully fund pension plans.

Q. Henry Ford was clearly a masterful leader. I notice that you and Cedar devote an entire chapter to leadership in your book. What are a few of the things you say there?

A. Our radio audience won't be surprised to learn that using one's power wisely and well is a chief characteristic of good leadership. If you define the term, *leadership* means the ability to use power effectively with others and even one's self to achieve goals. As we see it, there are four kinds of leaders: Those who lead from information (the leader as “teacher-in-chief”); those who lead from their selves (the charismatic leader); those who lead from connectedness (the relational leader); and those who lead from the whole (the visionary leader). All four types can be effective. The best leaders,

however, have a combination of all these elements, although these individuals are likely to be strongest in one or two of the areas.

Q. The general idea is that leaders are always those on top. Is that really true?

You're right. We usually think of a leader as the person on top—say, the CEO of a company. But it's important to remember that there are leaders further down the ranks like middle managers or noncommissioned officers. Also, believe it or not, there can be down-power leaders. The person who takes the initiative to get her disgruntled fellow workers together to go meet with the boss and lodge a collective complaint is a good case in point.

Q. Getting back to Henry Ford, that story took place a century ago. Nowadays it seems like we don't trust anyone in positions of power to do right by the rest of us. Do you have any more recent stories of positive uses of power?

A. Certainly. There are plenty. Here's one that was reported by Simon Romero in the *New York Times* of January 4, 2013. It's about the current President of Uruguay, José Mujica. After he was elected in 2010, President Mujica refused to live in the presidential palace but preferred to stay in his modest village home. Not only that, but he personally makes tea for his guests. During his administration Uruguay has sharply boosted use of renewable energy sources like wind and biomass. Of course, since we're speaking of Latin America, listeners might be reminded of Pope Francis I, who also has a track record of living modestly and using his power on behalf of the poor.

Q. Well, our time is just about up, and I know we've only touched on some of the ideas and techniques in your practical, handsome new book. So, I'm pretty sure some of our listeners would like to know how they can get a copy. So, folks in the radio audience, you might want to have a pen and piece of paper handy.

A. It's simple. All they need to do is go to our website: www.rightuseofpower.com or www.rightuseofpower.org to order their book. (We are in the midst of switching from our dot-com to dot-org URL as a

result of our Institute’s new nonprofit status.) Once we get your order, we’ll send the book right out. A single copy costs \$15 plus shipping and handling. There are also discounts for two or more copies. Plus there’s a lot of free information on right use of power at the website, and folks can sign up there for our complimentary monthly newsletter. And, with over 240 trained Right Use of Power facilitators around the world, your listeners may want to participate in or even set up a Right Use of Power workshop near where they live or become facilitators of the program themselves and help spread this forgotten basic, using our power wisely and well, to their friends and neighbors.

Q. To repeat, folks, you can get your own copy of Living in the Power Zone—How Right Use of Power Can Change Your Relationships and learn more about other opportunities at www.rightuseofpower.com or [.org](http://www.rightuseofpower.org). That’s www.rightuseofpower.com or [.org](http://www.rightuseofpower.org). Meantime, thank you, Dr. Reynold Ruslan [pronounced Roos-lahn] Feldman, co-author with Cedar Barstow of this fascinating new book, and co-leader in spreading this important work.

A. Thank you, _____ [name of host], for this opportunity to be on your show and share with your listeners some of our ideas and techniques for changing relationships and eventually the world for the better.

Note: The above should be enough material to fill a half-hour radio interview. For a shorter interview, the radio talk-show host is invited to pick those questions that would be of most interest to his/her audience and would fit the time available. Thank you. RF