Chapter seven examines management theories about interpersonal power and the management skill of influencing others. There are few, if any, places that both involve people and are apolitical. For all practical purposes, we pursue our careers in a workplace that is characterized by unequal distributions of power, different agendas, and efforts by people to get their way. The interpersonal concept of power describes one’s relative potential to influence another, or in other words, the capacity to get them to do what you want them to do. Power comes from many different places and can be used to a greater or lesser degree. When used in accordance with official channels and formal organizational rules it is called authority. When used informally to supplement or bypass these arrangements then it is called politics. For better or worse, Machiavelli’s ancient aphorisms about the importance of power continue to play out today from Main Street to Wall Street. Put simply, it is hard to get anything done without the necessary clout and the skills to use it well. A stark fact of the business world is that managers who get ahead are not necessarily the most knowledgeable but instead are often those most adept at leveraging their power bases and playing the political game. Therefore in this seventh chapter we look at how one can better use power and influence people.

7.1 Appreciating the Importance of Power and Influence

Ask Yourself: Is it important to have power? How does it feel to be powerless? Do you always use all of your potential power in the most effective way to maximize your influence? What happens to performance if the
wrong people get too much power? To what lengths might people go to gain and keep their power?

**Management Theory:** Power is the potential to influence someone, or get them to do what you want. People in organizations ideally aspire toward a shared goal, the company’s, but in reality they come at things with different personal agendas and interests. It is for this reason that a proper understanding of power is so important. Let us make some things perfectly clear about power. First, it is a noun, not a verb. It represents a potential so, as such, might be realized to a greater or lesser degree. Indeed most people systematically underappreciate and underutilize their power. Second, power often has a negative connotation. This is misleading. Power is a tool that can be used to benefit a company or misused for personal gain. It can be amassed or drained. It can be applied or wasted. It can be uplifting or corrupting. Third, power is found not only at the top of organizations but instead can reside anywhere. Seasoned veterans, connected secretaries, clever technicians, popular rank-and-file employees, well-placed gatekeepers, hardworking subordinates, intimidating bosses, smart colleagues, appointed office-holders, engaging coworkers, and resourceful clerks all wield different forms of power and thus the potential to influence others. Fourth, power is not a side-issue or distraction but instead a natural and essential element in any social or interpersonal setting. It is simply a reality of managerial life. And people will go to great lengths to acquire and keep it. High-performing managers cannot ignore the dynamics of power because being powerless is seldom a useful or enjoyable position. The trick of course is to distribute and use power in a way that promotes versus inhibits organizational objectives. Our story is by a manager observing the promises and pitfalls of power in her small company.

**In Action [Case Study]:** It is important for a company not to let a single group or persons have too much power. I work in a small family business that has been around for over a hundred years. Recently I experienced what power can do in the wrong hands. The problem is with the bookkeeper who has been here for more than forty years and all financial aspects of the company go through her. She is at retirement age but she refuses to train anybody. The owner wants to make sure someone else knows how to do her job because a lot is dependent on it. When a person was brought in to assist she refused to teach her anything and did not give her any responsibility. Eventually the new person left. Then the bookkeeper complained about being overly busy but still did not allow anyone to help her. Another problem is that the bookkeeper did not want to change anything about her job and only do things her way. This is a problem because we are in the process of installing a new computer system but she refused to conform by playing dumb and stalling. She has power