

# Redefining Power and Leadership in the 21st Century: The Four Pillars of True Power

by Joe Weston, Mobius Transformational Faculty and Executive Coach

At the heart of Respectful Confrontation® is the belief that it is possible to stand in your power, speak your truth, hear the truth of others, and get your needs met in a way that won't harm you or others. Many of us have negative associations with confrontation; we think it is the same as conflict. However, by exploring the principles and exercises of Respectful Confrontation®, you will discover that confrontation is nothing more than openhearted engagement and ultimately the most effective way to avoid and resolve conflict.

New trends in leadership are advocating the use of vulnerability and transparency as an effective way to manage a team and lead a company. The hierarchical approach is giving way to a more circular, inclusive model where the insights and unique skills of employees are honored. People are the building blocks of every organization and their interactions form the cement. Doing *business* differently requires dealing with *one another* differently.

Respectful Confrontation® fosters communicating with others from a place of self-respect and transparency

while tapping into your own assertiveness and vulnerabilities, yet respecting others' points of view. It teaches you to communicate in terms of what you need instead of what you think others should be doing. It provides new perspectives on and examines the differences between aggression and assertiveness, brute force and true power, conflict and confrontation.

There is a direct connection with personal power and how you view yourself in the world, your level of comfort in engaging with others, and your ability to assert your needs. Personal power is also related to your self-confidence, how much of an impact you have on the world, and how much you are able to fulfill your life purpose and live out your true potential.

In order for you to open fully to your own potential and to other people, a distinction needs to be made between *true power* and *brute force*. Most of human history has been shaped by a false belief that power is limited to something outside of us. Using brute force to obtain power and resources became commonplace.

And in personal and professional relationships, we see the same dynamic played out with manipulation, gossip, deceit, financial scandals, and secrets. The old-fashioned view of power is not what I would call *true power* but rather a strategy to use brute force to impose one's will and ensure one's success at the expense of others.

By tapping into your true power, you discover that you are more vital and capable than you thought you were. You discover that your own personal power is unlimited and you overcome limited perceptions of yourself and the world around you. This leads to a renewed sense of confidence in yourself and others, and the ability to respect, understand, and creatively collaborate with others.

I have used all my encounters with cultures around the world and all my life experiences to examine what real power is. If true power is not just brute force, what is it? Yes, strength is an important aspect of power, but what else is involved? I looked to martial arts to find my answer. I thought about the different ways my teachers trained me to develop my

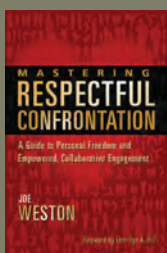


## About Joe Weston

Joe Weston is an international workshop facilitator, author, consultant, personal life coach, creative social activist, and advocate for peace. His book, *Mastering Respectful Confrontation*, is selling throughout the world.

Born and educated in New York, Joe lived in Amsterdam for 17 years and now lives again in the U.S. He is committed to helping others embody their true power, and supporting them on their journey towards personal fulfillment and freedom. Joe brings a wealth of insight to his work based on many teachings, including Tai Chi Chuan and a variety of ancient traditions—plus his experience in theater and various organizational trainings.

He also volunteers for the Liberation Prison Project, teaching Buddhism to inmates. He is the founder of the Heartwalker Peace Project, initiating various Heartwalks (peace rallies with routes in the shape of a heart) and peace vigils to create opportunities for connection, discussion, and creative collaboration.



technique and improve my form. I thought about the masters who, in their eighties, can still defeat opponents half their age or younger. How do they do it?

I concluded that to truly be in your power, *strength must be balanced with grounding, focus, and flexibility*. Although they are developed separately, they support and enhance each other. Strength is one of the Four Pillars of True Power, but it is not necessarily the most important.

To be in your true power, you must have an equal mastery of all four qualities. Without this, you will be out of balance and have challenges to accomplishing your goals.

When you are secure in your grounding, focus, strength, and flexibility and you know you have reached a certain level of proficiency in these areas, you will walk through life with the confidence needed to achieve anything you choose. Having talents like physical strength or great focus are valuable assets on your path to fulfillment and reaching your goals, but they can only go so far. Not only do these four qualities improve your performance and how you function in the world, they will help sustain you when you take on challenges and take risks, increasing your probability of success and personal fulfillment. Mastering the Four Pillars of True Power is essential when communicating with others, especially in challenging confrontations.

### Pillar One: Grounding

Let's start with the power of grounding. Like all things in life, building something requires starting with a strong foundation. When your foundation is strong, then you have the confidence to grow, take risks, build on your experiences, and reach for your highest potential.

All martial arts begin with establishing a relationship between you and the ground. Many beginning exercises help you to develop a strong sense of balance, a sense of sure footing, a comfort in falling and getting back up, an awareness of gravity, and the benefits of working within that force.

When a martial artist feels grounded, she is confident to do leaps, to kick, to take risks and “fly” because she knows she will always land with secure footing and find her stability. The more confidence she has in her grounding,

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the bigger the leaps she will take.

The dynamic of grounding is *downward-moving*. The lower body is engaged and we use this downward force to stay balanced, unwavering, and unmovable when necessary. The element that is associated with grounding is *water*. If you observe rivers, you will see that they flow from higher to lower altitudes. All sources of water manage to find their way to lower ground.

Grounding provides a sense of connection with the earth and a feeling of being at home in the world. It leads to an unwavering self-confidence and conviction in what you do and believe. With a strong personal philosophy, you can't be easily swayed from your beliefs. It is hard to be manipulated when you know what you believe; you stand strong and always land on your feet when challenged.

Grounding helps you to find flow in your life and can even support you in harnessing gravity. Gravity is a powerful force. To go against gravity takes enormous amounts of energy reserves. When you learn to yield

to gravity, you let go of unnecessary holding and align with the natural flow of things around you.

Master grounding and you will develop a stronger relationship with yourself, with your surroundings, and with others. You will develop a keen awareness that allows you to be more alert to the signals around you. This will assist you in fending off tensions at work and confidently engaging in opportunities that lead to growth, success, and connection. You will replace hyper-vigilance with natural, relaxed awareness. You will walk through the world in a centered, confident way.

### Pillar Two: Focus

Now that you have started the process of grounding, you will notice that you are more aware of what is happening around you. You will be more sensitive to impressions, feelings, opportunities, energy, power, creativity, the actions of others, and your surroundings. You'll notice all the sensations in your body, all the emotions flowing through you, and all the thousands of thoughts running through your mind at any given moment. You will feel how vibrant and inspiring life can be.

However, that's a lot to take in. What do you do with all this? Having so many options can cause you to freeze, get distracted, and not take action. This is where focus comes in.

The innate force within focus manifests in two ways. The first is to find the stillness amongst the chaos; the second is to give direction to one's efforts. The role of focus is to unify and stabilize all the impressions, creative energy, and experiences of life, and subsequently create a channel for this to flow in a constructive, intentional way. This leads to success in communication, as well as realizing life goals.

The dynamic of focus has two directions. First, it has an *inward movement*, bringing you inside yourself to gather your own personal resources and channel your energies. Secondly, that inner focus is then taken *upward and outward* to reach desired goals with clarity and precision.

The element that is associated with focus is *fire*. Fire brings clarity to those things that are unclear, sluggish, and “wishy-washy.” When you look at fire, it has the ability to hold your attention (inward focus). At the same time the force within the fire moves upwards through the flames and the smoke.

The wisdom of focus understands that life is never static; it never stands still. The most successful way to navigate through life is to have a clear idea of where you are now (inward focus), establish a clear picture of where you want to go, and then consciously plot the course of least resistance to get there (upward, outward focus). It is not the force of focus that actually gets you there. The power of strength—discussed in the next section—propels you forward. But in order to get somewhere, all the force in the world won’t lead to success if you don’t start with mental stability, precision, and a clear idea of where you are headed.

Think of the image of a boat out at sea. You may notice that your mind is like a stormy sea of emotions, thoughts, fears, doubts and insecurities. Or you may notice that somewhere on your journey you get thrown off course and distracted. The inward force of focus first calms the waves of your mind to ensure smooth sailing. Then the upward, outward force of focus provides you with the rudder and sails on your boat, as well as a compass, and all the navigational tools and equipment you need, to plot a clear course towards your goal. This gets you to your des-

tinuation in a quicker, more efficient way. Even if you get distracted for a moment, you know exactly how to get back on course.

When you tap into the power of focus, you use less energy to reach your goal and you develop the skill of mindfulness. You become aware of the state of your mind, you have certainty about your life direction, you approach things with precision and lightness, and you communicate in a way that is intentional. With clients of mine, I have seen how this new approach led to efficiency in communication and reduction of miscommunication, resulting in a more productive work culture and increased profit.

The power of focus is essential for someone who practices Respectful Confrontation. Harm and conflict can only surface when we are mindlessly reactive or not conscious of the thoughts, feelings, and impulses that are arising. The Buddha said, “Whatever an enemy might do to an enemy, or a foe to a foe, the ill-directed mind can do to you even worse.” Just think about how much of an influence you have on your surroundings, on the people around you, and on yourself. Have you noticed how you, or a family member or work colleague, can quickly affect the overall mood with words or even with facial expressions? Someone who has mastered the power of focus chooses to be responsible in creating a better world by staying mindful and lessening their reactive, harmful behavior.

Mastering focus in your communication is also an important tool in business settings. In a study from the University of Maryland’s Robert H. Smith School of Business, researchers put a price tag on the cost of poor communication in American hospitals at \$12 billion per year. We are vague, we waste energy to push

to our goal, and we often have to repeat things before we finally get them done. When we clear our mind, focus on the desired target, and channel our energy, we don’t need so much effort and our first attempt has the necessary impact. Energy saved! Efficient results!

While others are running around aimlessly, distracted by the slightest thing, overcome by emotional stress, arguing, and burning out, you will walk through the world with calm, ease, determination, harmony with others and your surroundings, and see the slow, steady realization of your goals.

### Pillar Three: Strength

Developing the powers of grounding and focus gives you a strong foundation to start with. You have mastered within yourself stability and efficiency. However, it is the power of strength that propels you forward. With a renewed sense of self, characterized by confidence, awareness, stability, calm, centeredness, clarity, and presence, it is now time to interact with others and realize your goals.

The power of strength takes you out of stasis and brings you into movement, adventure, and exploration. The dynamic of strength is *forward-moving*, and the element that is associated with strength is *earth*. Like rocks and the denser parts of the earth, your body is the densest part of who you are when you take into account your emotional, mental, and even spiritual aspects. The better you can make use of your body, and the more you can open to your courage, the more you will tap into powers that will help you manifest your goals and finish what you start. You will feel more confident about taking care of yourself and find it easier to engage with others.

The innate force within strength is expressed in two ways. The first is the *courage* to move out of your safe space and into the unknown, and the second is the *physical force* needed to accomplish your goals.

The power of strength offers you the courage to take risks, the courage to speak your truth, and to hear the truth of others. To be held accountable and to assert yourself in ways that are productive and welcoming are the true aspects of strength that lead to strong character and an increase of success in all endeavors. Keeping your promises and asking for help are important parts of building lasting relationships and require the power of strength.

When you let go of brute force and mindfully use the true power of strength to manifest your goals, open to your courage, and maintain good physical health, you avoid the destructive factors that have caused so much harm in the past. When strength is balanced with grounding, focus, and flexibility, there is no need to fear your own power; you embrace the forward-moving force that throws you out of balance and into the dance of life.

### Pillar Four: Flexibility

So far you have developed a strong sense of awareness, you've learned to channel your forces, and you have committed to moving forward to manifest your dreams and connect with others. However, with all this powerful force asserting itself without stopping or yielding, you will create conflict and waste a lot of energy pushing against things that aren't going your way. Why? Because you haven't brought in the powerful force of flexibility.

There is an ancient Taoist story where the master asks the student, "Which is stronger, a mighty oak tree or a blade of grass?" The conclusion of a long discussion is "that in a heavy

monsoon, the mighty oak will snap like a twig, but the blade of grass will always persevere." The Taoist master, Lao Tzu said, "A tree that is unbending is easily broken." In some situations, the strength of an oak tree is needed, and in other situations, the flexibility of a blade of grass is stronger. It is your task to develop both kinds of power and then have the wisdom to know which of the two to implement.

The element that is associated with focus is *air*. Air may not seem very substantial compared to earth or the other elements. You can't seem to get a hold of it. Yet, within air is oxygen, the most essential element necessary for survival on this planet. Also, air has the power to keep an airplane in the sky or blow down houses in a storm. Like the force of air, the power of flexibility is not to be underestimated!

Of the four pillars, flexibility may be the most illusive and challenging. However, I believe it is the most powerful of the four and the one that takes you to your highest power. The potent force of flexibility will lead you to the next level of your evolution. The doorway to understanding and compassion, it is the only force that can eventually overcome brute force. American poet and leader of the Transcendentalist Movement, Ralph Waldo Emerson, said, "Before we acquire great power we must acquire wisdom to use it well."

While the dynamic of strength is forward-moving, the dynamic of flexibility is *backward-moving*. Again, this is not to be underestimated. Making the empowered choice to move backward does not mean you are weak or defeated. Standing your ground and still choosing to yield requires tremendous courage, strength, and skill.

The force of flexibility results in swiftness, agility, receptivity, cunning, wisdom, and "street smarts." Those who have mastered flexibility have the

ability to stretch and bend, to twist and turn, to match any attack, and to overcome any obstacle. You master the use of the skillful means to adapt and positively influence all situations with ease and conservation of energy.

Flexibility allows you to yield to, and cooperate with, a constantly changing world. If you look at nature and all things in it, you will notice that the only way to ensure the survival of a species is if that species is able to adapt to its environment, seek support, alliance or cooperation, and develop new ways to persevere. As long as we hold onto an idea that adapting is weak, things will never change.

When you use the power of flexibility, you use the wisdom to know that you are not always right, that your way isn't always the best way, and that true collaboration means that the end result is partially your contribution and partially that of others. You learn to utilize the circumstances presented to you to move you forward and you don't have to use as much energy to get things accomplished because there is no need to push against obstacles.

In fact, in the process of adapting and yielding to what is presented to you, you grow and get stronger. With every encounter, you are asked to use certain skillful means unique to that situation. If you are in familiar surroundings, you have an "arsenal" of ways to make that situation work for you. Each time you find yourself in a new situation, you have to use your creativity and power and increase your skill set; it's like you are upgrading your own internal "software." The larger your skill set, the wiser you become, and the more your true power is revealed. This is the key to successful leadership! ■

*Practices for cultivating the four pillars of leadership can be found in the resource section of the Mobius website.*