

48 Laws of Power  
MGMT 637  
Summer 2009, 1<sup>st</sup> Term: May 27 – June 26  
Monday/Wednesday 5:30

Instructor: Ray Grubbs, Ph.D.  
Office: Murrah Hall 109  
Hours: By Appointment  
Phone: 974-1265 (office)  
856-9322 (home)  
Fax: 974-1260 (office)  
E-mail: [ray.grubbs@millsaps.edu](mailto:ray.grubbs@millsaps.edu)

**Course Objective:**

To explore issues in Power and Political Behavior through selected readings.

The purpose of this course is to afford students the opportunity to enhance personal understanding of organizational behavior, specifically the process by which one acquires and holds power in an organization and within groups of people. The primary tool to accomplish this understanding will be the text, 48 Laws of Power, which the author describes as a:

*“kind of handbook on the arts of indirection. The laws are based on the writings of men and women who studied and mastered the game of power. These writings span a period of more than three thousand years and were created in civilizations as disparate as ancient China and Renaissance Italy; yet they share common threads and themes, together hinting at the essence of power that has yet to be fully articulated. The 48 Laws of Power are the distillation of this accumulated wisdom, gathered from the writings of the most illustrious strategists, (Sun-tzu, Clausewitz), statesmen (Bismark, Talleyrand), courtiers, (Castiglione, Gracian), seducers (Ninon de Lenclos, Casanova), and con artists (“Yellow Kid” Weil) in history. The Laws have a simple premise: Certain actions almost always increase one’s power (the observance of the law), while others decrease it and even ruin us (the transgression of the law). The Laws are timeless and definitive.”*

Through active engagement and reflection upon the text and ancient and current examples of power, students should gain further understanding of the organizational implications of the acquisition and use of power. The course is intended to assist students in learning to interpret people and situations from multiple perspectives, to envision multiple possibilities from a given situation, to move beyond literal thinking to metaphorical thinking and to synthesize ideas into meaningful concepts or theories. The course is about inquiry and methodology for understanding power and political behavior in organizations.

In this course, we will address such questions as:

- What is power?
- What is political behavior in organizations?
- What is the process by which one acquires power in organizations?
- What is the process by which one maintains power once acquired?
- What factors determine how power is distributed or concentrated in organizations?
- What is the difference between power and influence?
- How does power and its use relate to leadership?
- What is powerlessness and its consequences?

**Course Requirements:**

Students in this course will participate in several interrelated learning activities. First, you will be required to read the text 48 Laws of Power. Second, you will be expected to actively participate in discussion of these Laws in class and share your insights with other class members. Third, you are to prepare a, not to exceed, two page “thought piece” on each Law indicating your assessment of the Law and its applicability in modern organizations with which you are familiar. (**Note: All written work is to be submitted to me via e-mail to [ray.grubbs@millsaps.edu](mailto:ray.grubbs@millsaps.edu) no later than its due date**). Fourth, you will be assigned to lead class discussion on a selected set of Laws of Power. Fifth, you are to write your own principles of the use of power in organizations and submit to the instructor immediately after the final class. This will serve as your final exam.

**Text:**

48 Laws of Power, by Robert Greene. Penguin Books, 1998.

**Grading:**

Class Contribution/Discussion Board	30%
Thought Pieces on Each Reading and Law of Power	25%
Individual Presentation to class on selected Laws of Power	25%
Principles of the Practice of Power in Organizations	20%
Total	100%

**Honor Code:**

All work submitted by students must be pledged according to the Millsaps Honor Code.

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Class Meeting	Assignment:
May 27	Introduction; Discuss Syllabus; Individual Assignment of Laws for Class Discussion
June 1	Laws 1 – 6 1. Never outshine the master 2. Never put too much trust in friends, learn how to use enemies 3. Conceal your intentions 4. Always say less than necessary 5. So much depends on reputation – Guard it with your life 6. Court attention at all costs
June 3	Laws 7-12 7. Get others to do the work for you, but always take the credit 8. Make other people come to you – Use bait if necessary 9. Win through your actions, never through argument 10. Infection: Avoid the unhappy and unlucky 11. Learn to keep people dependent on you 12. Use selective honesty and generosity to disarm your victim

June 8	Laws 13 – 18 13. When asking for help, appeal to people’s self-interest, never to their mercy or gratitude 14. Pose as a friend, work as a spy 15. Crush your enemy totally 16. Use absence to increase respect and honor 17. Keep others in suspended terror: Cultivate an air of unpredictability 18. Do not build fortresses to protect yourself – Isolation is dangerous
June 10	Laws 19 – 24 19. Know who you’re dealing with – Do not offend the wrong person 20. Do not commit to anyone 21. Play a sucker to catch a sucker – Seem dumber than your mark 22. Use the surrender tactic: Transform weakness into power 23. Concentrate your forces 24. Play the perfect courtier
June 15	Laws 25 – 30 25. Re-create yourself 26. Keep your hands clean 27. Play on people’s need to believe to create a cult like following 28. Enter action with boldness 29. Play all the way to the end 30. Make your accomplishments seem effortless
June 17	Laws 31 – 36 31. Control the options: Get others to play with the cards you deal 32. Play to people’s fantasies 33. Discover each man’s thumbscrew 34. Be royal in your own fashion: Act like a king to be treated like one 35. Master the art of timing 36. Disdain things you cannot have: Ignoring them is the best revenge

June 22	Laws 37 – 42 37. Create compelling spectacles 38. Think as you like but behave like others 39. Stir up waters to catch fish 40. Despise the free lunch 41. Avoid stepping into a great man’s shoes 42. Strike the shepherd and the sheep will scatter
June 24	Laws 43 – 48 43. Work on the hearts and minds of others 44. Disarm and infuriate with the mirror effect 45. Preach the need for change, but never reform too much at once 46. Never appear too perfect 47. Do not go past the mark you aimed for; In victory, learn when to stop 48. Assume formlessness
June 26	Principles of Power in Organizations Due