

SOFT POWER: WHY THE BEST STORY WINS

by Glenn Williams



ONCE UPON A TIME

Whereas traditional power tended to focus on coercion ('sticks') and payment ('carrots'), it is time to think more creatively about getting others *to want what you want*. This is achieved by focusing our efforts around creating a new narrative, rather than on 'who wins'.

Nye describes this as 'soft power' (Nye, 2010). As the Professor of International Relations at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, he looks at two types of power-change in relation to how the political and economic landscape is changing.

The first, is '*Power Transition*'. Literally, how power transfers from one state to another state (e.g. from west to east). The second is '*Power Diffusion*'. This is how power moves throughout the world, not merely from one player to another.

He debunks the common theory today that there is a key power transition from the U.S. to Asia, as he believes we should emphasize the 'Recovery or Return of Asia.' In 1800, more than half of the world's population lived in Asia and produced more than half of its products. In 1900, more than half of the world's population still lived in Asia, but it only produced about 1/5 of its products. The Industrial Revolution was the catalyst behind this significant change. It is projected that in the 21st Century, there will be a return to Asia producing more than ½ of the world's products.

The diffusion of power and influence is predominantly centred on the removal of traditional restrictions. Whereas once you needed to be wealthy, today you need to be connected and have access to networks and the flow of information.

What's the bottom-line?

Nye argues that we need to change the narrative away from the rise and fall of countries—and which business or leader wins—as it is often misleading and unhelpful.

New narratives are established through organizing networks and building collaborative alliances that focus is on a win/win scenario, rather than 'I win, you lose.'

With today's dominant, all-encompassing media and online social networks, compelling narratives are fast becoming more powerful than the traditional uses of power in acquiring new markets.

How well are you and your business using the art of storytelling to convey the value of partnership?

References

Nye, Joseph. (2010). "Global Shifts of Power" (video).
http://www.ted.com/talks/joseph_nye_on_global_power_shifts