

Breaking rules makes you seem powerful

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When people have power, they act the part. Powerful people smile less, interrupt others, and speak in a louder voice. When people do not respect the basic rules of social behavior, they lead others to believe that they have power, according to a study in the current *Social Psychological and Personality Science*.

People with [power](#) have a very different experience of the world than [people](#) without it. The powerful have fewer rules to follow, and they live in environments of money, knowledge and support. People without power live with threats of punishment and firm limits according to the research team lead by Gerben Van Kleef of the University of Amsterdam. Because the powerful are freer to break the rules—does breaking the rules seem more powerful?

People read about a visitor to an office who took a cup of employee coffee without asking or about a bookkeeper that bent accounting rules. The rule breakers were seen as more in control, and powerful compared to people who didn't steal the coffee, or didn't break bookkeeping rules.

Acting rudely also leads people to see power. People who saw a video of a man at a sidewalk café put his feet on another chair, drop cigarette ashes on the ground and order a meal brusquely thought the man was more likely to "get to make decisions" and able to "get people to listen to what he says" than the people who saw a video of the same man behaving politely.

What happens when people interact with a rule breaker? Van Kleef and

colleagues had people come to the lab, and interact with a rule follower and a rule breaker. The rule follower was polite and acted normally, while the rule breaker arrived late, threw down his bag on a table and put up his feet. After the interaction, people thought the rule breaker had more power and was more likely to "get others to do what he wants."

"Norm violators are perceived as having the capacity to act as they please" write the researchers. Power may be corrupting, but showing the outward signs of corruption makes people think you're powerful.

More information: The article "Breaking the Rules to Rise to Power: How Norm Violators Gain Power in the Eyes of Others" in *Social Psychological and Personality Science* is available free for a limited time at: [spp.sagepub.com/content/early/ ... 398416.full.pdf+html](http://spp.sagepub.com/content/early/.../398416.full.pdf+html)

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