

PITCH ANYTHING

CHAPTER %EXCERPT

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This work recounts real events. Some names and locations have been changed, at the request of the persons involved, to respect the nature of private financial transactions.

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Chapter 3

Status

Status plays an important role in frame control. How others view you is critical to your ability to establish the dominant frame and hold onto the power you take when you win the frame collision. But most people in business and social interactions view status incorrectly. You don't earn status by being polite, by obeying the established power rituals of business, or by engaging in friendly small talk before a meeting starts. What these behaviors might earn you is a reputation for being "nice." They do nothing for your social position—except *reduce* it.

Another common mistake is underestimating the value of status. People confuse status with charisma or ego, which are entirely different things. And they mistakenly believe that working to raise one's social value is foolish or just an act of peacocking. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Unless you are a celebrity, a tycoon, or the guy who just landed your company the largest deal it has ever done, in most cases you

enter a new business setting with a low social position. The harder you try to fit into this social scene, the lower your perceived social value becomes.

Yet fitting in and having high social status are essential. Every interaction is affected by pecking order—who is the dominant group member and who are the subordinates. And the moment you enter a room to pitch is a beautiful example of how the social animal inside you works. In those first moments, the alpha and beta social positions are up for grabs. But it's not a physical skirmish—it's the rapid and sometimes instant assessment of each other's social position. When it comes down to finding the alpha, nobody takes the time to draft a balance sheet of who owns the most assets, who commands the most wealth, and who is the most popular. It's a subconscious and instant recognition of status.

Within seconds, we each need to decide, for the sake of our own self-preservation, *who in this room is the dominant alpha?* And if it turns out that someone else is the dominant alpha and we are the beta, there is a second, even more valuable question: In the short amount of time we have to orient ourselves in this social interaction, *can we switch out of the beta position and take the alpha?*

People will judge your social status almost immediately, and changing their perception is not easy. But it's important because your social status is the platform from which you must pitch.

If you are pitching from a lower-level platform, or low social status, your ability to persuade others will be diminished, and your pitch will be difficult, no matter how great your idea or product. However, if you hold high social status, even on a temporary basis, your power to convince others will be strong, and your pitch will go easily.

What I am saying—and what I have proven to myself and to others—is that you can alter the way people think about you by creating *situational status*. Let's look at how situational status plays

out in a familiar social structure, one we have all encountered at one time or another.

The French Waiter

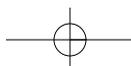
French waiters are respected throughout the world for their skill in controlling social dynamics. From the moment you enter their world, they set the frame and control the timing and sequence events according to their wishes. They wipe your status instantly, redistribute it as they choose, and control the frame throughout the exchange. You regain control only after the check has been paid, the tip has been left, and you're ushered out the front door.

I watched the waiters work their frame magic a few years ago on a bustling boulevard in Paris. I stopped in at Brasserie Lipp on the Boulevard Saint-Germain-des-Pres. My waiter was Benoit, who started there busing tables and washing dishes and moved his way up to head waiter. His father worked at this famous Left Bank *boîfite* before and after World War II, and today, there is nothing about the history of this place that Benoit does not know.

Benoit can show you the table where Ernest Hemingway did much of his writing during the 1920s and can seat you there if he is feeling generous (and senses that you will be generous in return).

There is nothing Benoit cannot tell you about the menu—every dish, every ingredient, every method of preparation. But to ask questions about the menu is a mild insult. Instead, it's better to ask him to recommend something. The same goes for the wine list, which is even longer than the menu. This is his job. He is the expert within the walls of his restaurant.

I entered Lipp's with some friends I'd invited out for dinner. I was the host, so I carried myself with authority and high status.



After all, I was the paying customer about to drop a big wad of cash. I wanted the maître d' and waitstaff to understand my status and give me the best they had to offer. The maître d' gave me a practiced look that said, *Yes, I know your kind. You're all the same to me.*

The restaurant was starting to get busy, but it was not full. We wouldn't have to wait long. The maître d' looked down at his schedule and intoned, "It will be a few minutes while we prepare your table, monsieur. Please wait here." Yet he didn't move. He looked down, scribbled a note on his seating chart, and began to ignore me.

Fifteen minutes passed. I watched as the best tables began to fill. I looked at the maître d', anxious, and he held up his index finger indicating *only a minute more*. I returned to my guests, defending my choice of restaurant and commenting on how good the food is.

"I promise you, it will be worth the wait," I told them.

Finally, when the right amount of time had passed, the maître d' stepped away from his podium and said, "Madames et messieurs, your table is ready," waving us toward our table with an open palm and outstretched arm.

He seated us, handed us menus, and told us that Benoit would soon arrive to take our orders. A trainee brought water and bread, smiled, and then disappeared.

Another 15 minutes ticked by before Benoit appeared, and the first thing he did was flash me a rebellious look. "Do you know what you would like to drink?" he asked, looking at the hand-tooled leather-bound *carte du vin* (wine list) resting near my left hand. I didn't recognize many wines on the list, so I played the part of good host and ordered an expensive bottle for the table.

This was Benoit's opportunity to perform a small but defiant act and to seize control of the high-status position, taking it away

from me. You almost could hear the power transfer, clean and smooth, like the flip of switch:

“Hmm, monsieur, I do not think this wine is the best choice,” he grimaced, taking the wine list away from me.

Benoit turned the page and paused. I was embarrassed, and my face turned red. “While all the wines in our cellar are fine wines, you must select a better pairing for this evening’s meal,” he said. He scanned our table, making eye contact with my guests, ignoring me.

He suggested various meals for my guests and, after several minutes, finally returned his attention to me. He flipped open the *carte du vin*, stabbing his index finger at a wine that would meet his standard. His recommendation was less expensive than the wine I had chosen. So I gave up on my selection and gave the nod to his.

“An excellent choice, monsieur,” he announced to the table, pretending to the group that it was my knowledge—and not his—that resulted in the best choice. I was the butt of the joke, and my guests had a fun laugh.

Benoit flashed me a look that said, *This table is mine!*

The wine arrived, and Benoit carried out the time-honored ritual of corking, testing, and decanting. He executed the steps with precision, tradition, and respect for his craft. My guests were in awe. Only when it had been established that the wine would meet his exacting standards did he offer me, the host, the first taste.

At this point, he could have served me stale vinegar, and I would have said that it was heavenly, just to save face.

I wasn’t sure whether I was angry with Benoit or just amused that he had turned me into a low-status dork. Benoit had simply and effectively grabbed *local star power*.

He had captivated the attention of the table, and now, in full possession of the social power that I once had, he decided to redistribute some of this power to further strengthen his position with my group.

As Benoit settled into a smooth rhythm of frame controls and status moves, I could see the game unfolding perfectly: acts of small defiance; seizing status, redistributing it; taunting me to behave like a beta. I was at the center of a master class on frame control.

As the wine was poured around the table, one of my guests smelled her wine and asked, “Is this a Bordeaux?” Benoit stood tall, placed a hand on her shoulder, and said, “Madame clearly knows French wine. This Bordeaux is from a small *terroir* that most people mistake for Languedoc. Your palate is very sophisticated.” This comment absolutely melted her, and her eyes were sparkling with emotional pyrotechnics. The table was smiling, and again, I was ignored.

Let’s pause to review what Benoit, this practiced master of social frame control, had accomplished. First, he seized local star power by using simple, seemingly innocent and benign acts. And he isolated me by making me wait.

As I discussed earlier, the croc brain is a social organ that craves acceptance and belonging. No one likes being made an outsider, especially when there are guests to impress.

Then, after ostracizing me, Benoit swooped in, using his superior domain knowledge, and made me look like a fool. He then quickly rescued me from a “mistake” he had allowed me to make.

He knew that without first understanding what kind of food the table would be ordering, it would be impossible to order the wine. And yet he asked me to make a wine selection first. No matter what I ordered, my order would be wrong. *Thanks, Benoit!*

He called out my mistake and then quickly polled the table for the information needed to make the correct decision. He chose the correct wine, making sure it was a better wine at a lower price than I had chosen, and then gave me credit for making the proper choice. This was an early masterstroke that secured his control of the social power he had taken from me two minutes earlier.

His next move was to strengthen his position by co-opting one of my guests into his frame, making it impossible for me to attack him without simultaneously attacking her.

He waited for someone to comment on the wine—anyone, any comment—and lavished praise on them to distribute some of his social power to that person. When one person joins his frame, the others will follow. And now the table was his. *Voilà!*

Back to the dinner. As expected, the entrees were superb, and Benoit suggested a second bottle of wine, something a little different to capture the flavors coming from the progressing meal. Benoit appeared more regularly now, floating around the table, collecting information, making suggestions, and basically doing the hard work of protecting his superior social position. My guests told me that this was one of the best meals they'd ever had. I thanked them for joining me and then gave Benoit an appreciative nod. At first, I wanted to smack Benoit, but now I was really starting to like him.

As the plates were cleared, Benoit disappeared. I had an expectation that something more was coming, but what? Ten minutes went by. Where was Benoit? I knew something was up.

I was right about that. Benoit had chosen the dessert. Moments later, a gleaming silver cart was rolled to our table, followed by a cart lined with brandy and cigars. Behind all this was the coffee cart—the attendant filled individual French press cylinders with freshly ground coffee.

“Madames et messieurs, for this evening’s dessert, I have taken the liberty of making something special for you,” Benoit announced. What he meant was, “I have taken over your host’s mind and bank account.”

“*Baba de rhum,*” he continued, “our most famous dessert, a light and delicious cake made with cream, rum, and a little sugar. Please enjoy.”

The table applauded, and Benoit cut the cake with flair. I was so owned by Benoit at this point that it really no longer mattered. I smiled, relaxed, and decided that Benoit was going to get the largest tip he'd ever seen. In fact, the tip is the only power I had left in this situation.

My guests were delighted, and now, as the evening closed over coffee and brandy, Benoit slowly released some social power back to me. For a very good reason: The check was coming, and I was sure it would melt my neocortex.

“Madames et messieurs, it has been our pleasure to serve you this evening,” Benoit gushed. He deftly placed a small silver tray near my left arm. On the tray was a tiny slip of paper turned face down, held in place by a small silver fleur-de-lis paperweight. No itemized bill could possibly fit on this miniscule slice of paper, just a single number would be on it. As my guests warmly thanked Benoit with hugs and handshakes, I managed a peek at the bill, flipping up the corner, like a poker player, not wanting to show any reaction.

It wasn't as bad as I thought.

With the performance Benoit gave, and the control he held throughout the evening, I was expecting him to take advantage. He had the power to do so, but in a final display of total frame control, he chose moderation over self-indulgence. Now I was absolutely delighted, and the large tip I was thinking of leaving him was just raised.
