

How Did Frank Underwood Become Vice President? (Road To Power In Season 1)

Description

How Did Frank Underwood Become Vice President? What was his road or path to power?

Answer: Underwood became VP through a series of manipulative and strategic moves. He was able to get the VP to resign by enticing him with a Governor position. He was able to get himself on the short list for VP by helping the President's secretary with a personal issue. Underwood was selected after all the other candidates were not good enough and the President's friend supported the nomination. There are many more detailed steps so keep reading to understand better how Frank Underwood became Vice President.

Frank Underwood, a charismatic and trustworthy servant of democracy is sworn into the vice presidency at the beginning of season 2 of house of cards. But how did he go from unknown yet ambitious to public servant to becoming vice president? What were the stops on his road to power? In addition to answering those questions, we will also drop a few hints on how you can practically copy some of his moves in your own road to power.

Let's start at the beginning.

Underwood became one of the youngest senators of South Carolina ever, faithfully serving the people for a few years before running for congress. He was so skilled as a politician that he not only won, but he did so 12 times. These skills eventually led him to become the house majority whip, a position where we first meet him at the beginning of season 1.

Up to now, Frank has used his influence as the Whip to bargain for a position on the new president's cabinet. How did he do this? Typically people who run for president need various favors in order to win. For example Governor endorsements in key swing states are very valuable. Endorsements help swing voters. People who can deliver these and other favors will be able to trade their influence for positions in the upcoming administration. Frank probably used his power as Whip to convince people to publicly support the upcoming President. In turn, the upcoming president promised Underwood a position as secretary of state.

But after the election the president reneges, choosing instead to place Michael Kern as the secretary. We can speculate that the President chose Kern because Kern provided better political connections or favors in exchange for the position.

There is one other reason the President chose Kern. If Frank Underwood was placed into the Secretary Of State position, the party would have lost an effective Whip. This could have caused issues when bills needed to be passed. Thus, another reason the President didn't select Underwood is because of how effective Frank was at his job. Kern was less useful in his position, so the benefit

reward scales tipped in his favor.

There is a quick power lesson to learn here you might not expect. Don't be too good at your job. How does that even make sense?!

Often, in an effort to build their Expert Power, people focus on working hard and excelling in their job. Engineers spend hours after work honing their programming skills. There isn't anything wrong with this if you are looking for promotions within your current position. For example, to Senior Engineer. But if you are trying to move out of the current promotion path, to a non technical position like team manager, this could cause issues. Promoting you could leave the company with a hole that is difficult to fill. Why would they make you a manager, a position that usually does no or little programming, if you do such a good job as an engineer?

Frank falls into this trap by being an extremely good Whip. The President even tells him how the party didn't want to lose him as in the Whip position. This is of course partially an excuse, and partially the truth. But the bottom line stays the same. Losing Frank as Whip would leave a less effective person in his place. This would make it more difficult for the President to pass his initial bills.

So how do you get promotions without being extremely good at all parts of your job? The key is to be good at certain elements of your job that your next position requires, while being average or passable at the elements of your job that your current position requires. You must incentivize your superiors to put yourself in the new position while minimizing the cost of promoting you. In our engineering example, this means being an average engineer while excelling when given leadership opportunities. Show them you can do the next role without making it costly to find a replacement for your current one.

Now that Frank's plan to become Secretary of State has been thwarted, he needs to continue to build his power before he makes another attempt for a better position. Frank's first move is to undermine the Secretary of State nomination so he can instill his own ally. We will see this ally become useful in season 2. Placing an ally in the current administration will build Underwood's referent power. Referent power is his ability to influence because of the favors he has done for his connections.

In order to place his ally in the Secretary of State position, Frank needs to drive a wedge between the nominee, Michael Kern, and the President's agenda. If Frank can make Kern appear to be contrary to the President's platform, the president will have to choose someone else. To do this, Frank leaks an anti-Israel article through his reporter mole Zoe Barnes. While Kern didn't write the article, Frank manages to make it appear like it. He does so by indirectly convincing the editor of the newspaper. The editor then claims that Kern wrote the anti Israel article. The press finds out that the President's nomination for Secretary of State is anti Israel and the negative attention begins to pour in. President Walker is then forced to start looking for another Secretary that more aligns with his platform.

Now with Kern out of the way, Underwood needs to get his ally Catherine Durant chosen for the position. Underwood leaks to his reporter friend that the president is considering Catherine Durant. The President wasn't considering her, but because she perfectly aligns with the president's platform, the press is enthusiastic. This puts pressure on the President to select Durant for the position. He capitulates. Now Underwood has an ally in a powerful position in the current administration instead of a competitor.

What can we learn from this? One thing to learn is that you should always be looking for leverage on

the people around you if you are playing the power game. Frank had bad information on Kern because his associate dug it up. Had Frank not had this information power, he would not have been able to install his ally.

It might appear to be difficult to apply this power move in your social climb to power. It isn't. Keep track of everyone's dislikes and likes. You can use contrasting likes and dislikes to create tension between people. Bring up points of disagreement to create chaos, fighting, and to make people appear as not part of the group.

Underwood now has an ally, so he sets his sights on the Vice Presidency. But to do this, Underwood needs to accomplish a few things. First he needs to make himself politically appealing to the President's platform. Then he needs to get the Vice President to resign. Finally he needs to get the President to select him as VP.

Frank makes himself appealing to the president by offering to help write and Whip votes for the President's new bill. If Frank succeeds, he ingratiates himself to the President while also increasing his power. Aligning himself with the President's number 1 priority gives him power. Since Frank controls the details of the bill, he can influence the provision of what goes into it. He can use this ability to extract actions and promises out of other politicians. If a politician wants their constituents to get finances or accommodations in the new bill, they better do what Frank wants.

Underwood needs to get the bill approved by all the powerful groups if he is to be appealing to the President's platform. But as Frank moves to orchestrate a successful bill, he hits a few roadblocks. The Teacher's Union doesn't like one of the provisions in the bill.

Knowing that the Teachers are going to benefit vastly from the bill, Underwood has decided to play a bit of hardball. Frank knows how much value they will get from the bill, so he added a collective bargaining provision. The teachers really don't want that provision. Frank himself doesn't even want the provision, but he plans on using it to get more concessions out of the Union during negotiations. But as he negotiates with the teacher's union, they push back and decide to strike. Their hope is to turn public support against the President and the bill. If the public supports the Teacher's Union, the President will have to give them more of what they want.

A quick note about power. Part of Underwood's power and the President's power comes from public support. This is called legitimate power. Legitimate power comes from a publicly appointed or supported position. It comes with the ability to direct people to act a certain way, lest they lose the good will of the people. Therefore, Underwood has power to tell people what to do as long as the public supports the agenda.

The Union's first move is to publish bad press. This press makes it look like Underwood and the President want to drive a bad deal for the teachers. This begins to put pressure on the President's power. To stop this issue, Underwood needs to change the narrative to make it look like the teachers are out of control. If the Teachers look out of control, the public won't support them. If the public won't support them, they will have to comply with more of Underwood's desires. If Frank has more control over what is in the bill, he can use that control to gain further political power and allies. He does this by exchanging bill provisions for future and current favors.

To change the narrative and save his chance at making himself appealing to the President, Underwood

orchestrates an attack on his home. This attack allows Frank to frame the strike as an out of control movement. He wants to label them disorganized labor. This changes the press narrative for a while and Frank is able to continue pushing the bill forward.

Then Underwood goes to put the final nail in the coffin. He goes on a political show to debate the union leader and swing public opinion all the way in his favor. But he chokes. This makes Frank and the President look bad. The President even requests that Frank give into most of the Union's demands. In a ballsy move, Frank refuses.

Frank seizes on a current event. A boy died during school hours. Frank argues that the boy wouldn't have died if he had been in school. Since school was closed because of the strike, public opinion begins to swing back in Underwood's favor. Now he is in a strong position, so he asks for a meeting with the Teachers Union boss to nail down the final bill provisions.

In the meeting, Frank gets the Union Boss to assault him. Underwood then leverages this assault by blackmailing the Union boss into accepting the remaining changes to the bill. Thus the bill is passed. This success builds Underwood more leverage, favors, and goodwill with the White House.

Now Frank Underwood is an appealing Vice President because he was a major force in passing the popular education bill.

What can we learn from these events? First let's talk about negotiation power. Often, there are conditions in a deal that you don't actually want. But you can keep them in because your opponent doesn't want them even more. This gambit is very useful because it allows you to get concessions for something you didn't want anyway. You must be careful though, if the opposition finds out, they will make you pay.

Second, we see another key to Underwood's power. He plans all the way to the end. Had he not known what his goals were, he wouldn't be able to do most of the power plays we've discussed. He uses his current power to build alliances with people who will be useful to him in the future.

Finally, we see Frank Underwood use a similar [negotiation strategy](#) as Thomas Shelby from the Peaky Blinders. Since we covered that strategy in [another Power Analysis post](#), we won't go into much depth here. But basically Underwood only attempts to negotiate when he is in a more powerful position. This gives him more negotiation leverage.

Most importantly, passing the education bill makes Frank a good VP candidate. This is because it perfectly aligns Underwood with the desires of the people who support the President. Thus the strength of the President's support will only increase by selecting Underwood for VP. But there is one problem. The Vice President is still in office.

Frank Underwood needs to remove the VP by getting him to voluntarily resign. To do this Frank does two things. First, he needs to drive a wedge between the president and VP. He also needs to make the VP want another role more than his current one.

The VP is frustrated that he has been held on the sidelines. He doesn't have much power in his office. Frank takes advantage of this chasm by relaying the VP's complaints to the President. Likewise, the President begins to get annoyed with his Vice President. Over the course of a few episodes, the two's dislike for each other grows.

A quick note. This is a cautionary point about power. Be careful who you get information from. Ask yourself what incentive they have to relay the information. If you aren't careful you could end up being manipulated into attacking or unfriending a class ally because of misinformation.

Now that Underwood has made the relationship between the President and Vice President unpleasant, he needs to entice the VP to resign. Since the Vice President is frustrated because of his lack of influence, Frank reminds him of a time when he was once influential. The Vice President used to be a powerful governor in an important state. Frank convinces the VP to help a congressman who is running for Governor in the VP's old state. The VP agrees and goes on the campaign trail. The campaigning reminds the VP of what he is missing. This increases the Vice President's desire to be in a powerful position again.

Now the VP wants a different position and the president isn't really getting along with the VP. The time has come for Underwood to spring his trap. If Frank can get the congressman to stop running for Governor, he can convince the VP to take his spot. Frank knows the congressman has serious addiction issues, so he uses that to take him out of the race. After a long night of drinking, the congressman shows up on a talk show and causes a scene. News spreads and his campaign is over. In a brutal final blow, Underwood even goes as far as to kill the congressman.

Since the current runner for Governor in the state is dead, the party needs a replacement. The state is very important to the party's power. Frank uses this to convince the president and VP of his plan. The Vice President should step down and run in the Governor's race, a race he has won many times in the past. All of Underwood's strategy culminates in this moment. The President and VP don't really like each other. The President needs his party to have a strong ally in the Governor's office. The Vice President wants to return to his old influential position. Both agree. The VP will resign.

This is another important power note. Frank's ability to align the VP's desire for more political influence, with his own desire for the VP to exit office, shows us one major reason he is so powerful. He is able to pull this off primarily because of his information power. He knows what the VP really wants. This allows him to align their desires. Once you get really good at spotting what people want, practice aligning their desires with your own.

Now the President needs a new Vice President, and soon. So he has his chief of staff suggest some names for likely candidates. Frank needs his name on the list. He also needs the other names to be dismissed. Fortunately, Underwood foresaw this. He created an ally with the President's Chief of Staff.

The Chief of Staff was having an issue getting her son into Stanford. Underwood heard about this in an early episode, and did her a favor. He contacted connections and pushed her son's application through. Thus, she is in Frank's debt.

Underwood goes to her and asks for help. She agrees to put unqualified names on the list. The

President then goes through the list and is displeased with the names. He rejects them all. Now time is running out. The Chief of Staff then suggests Frank's name. **The President is desperate and begins to consider Underwood.**

There is, however, one final obstacle. The president has a serious campaign donor who needs to approve of the VP nomination. His name is Raymond Tusk. Tusk however, will only give Underwood his support if Frank agrees to owe him a favor. Underwood refuses, so Tusk refuses to

Frank's nomination. Both Underwood and Tusk make attempts to lever the other into subservience, but neither succeed.

Fortunately for Frank, the President is running out of time. He needs to select a Vice President soon. Because of this, Tusk is forced to support Underwood's nomination. The two end up agreeing to leave each other alone on the condition that they operate as equals. Tusk sees how pragmatic Underwood is. Tusk realizes it is better to do business with an effective person he understands rather than have an unknown wildcard in the position.

This move references back to the second law of power which is to learn to use enemies. Tusk realizes that Underwood is governed by self interest, something that can be understood, bargained with, and occasionally predicted.

If you want to learn about the second law of power, check out our brief video on the subject, [here](#).

We also learn an important lesson about time. Time can become anyone's ally in a negotiation or power situation. Figure out what time constraints your opposition has and then slow down negotiations when you get close to those time constraints. This will build you additional leverage.

So at the beginning of season 2, Underwood's plan has come to fruition as he is sworn into office as the Vice President. Now we know how Frank Underwood became Vice President. But this is just the beginning of his journey to power. Underwood wants the presidency.

[Bonus Content](#) For Members Only.

Category

1. Strategy

Date Created

September 7, 2021

Author

admin