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Title

**OFFICE- POLITICS, A GAME OF STRATEGY THROUGH
COMMUNICATION SKILLS**

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Abstract:

Communication can make or mar. It is an art which can help us solve the menace of Office Politics. Office politics is all about gaining advantage over others in the work place. Office politics is really about building relationships to get things done. In its simplest form, office politics is simply about the differences between people at work; differences in opinions, conflicts of interests are often manifested as office politics. It all goes down In its simplest form, office politics is simply about the differences between people at work; differences in opinions, conflicts of interests are often manifested as office politics. It all goes down to human communications and relationships. In its simplest form, office politics is simply about the differences between people at work; differences in opinions, conflicts of interests are often manifested as office politics. It all goes down to human communications and relationships. In other words office politics are the strategies that people play to gain advantage, personally or for a cause they support. Office politics is the game of the workplace — the people, the culture and the rules that must be learned. Work place is the source of nearly all the misery in the world.

Almost any evil you'd care to name comes from working place or from living in a world designed for work. After all, we spend one third of our day at work, and having a good day at work makes our entire day a whole lot better. Hence the place where we work for so much time becomes so much significant. In fact this work place is the second home.

The politics has become so much wicked that the people are afraid of it. Perhaps due to the negative connotation, many people want to shun it at any cost. But it is not any solution. The truth is, to ensure your own success and that of your projects; you must navigate the minefield of Office Politics. If you deny the 'office politics' that may be going on around you, and avoid dealing with them, you may needlessly suffer whilst others take unfair advantage. And if you avoid practising 'good politics', you miss the opportunities to properly further your own interests, and those of your team and your cause. The more you shun the Office Politics the more it will vex you. Whether you hate it, admire it, practice it or shun it, office politics is a fact of life in any organization. It's something that you need to understand and master to be sure of your own success. Now your professional success depends on how much efficient you are in tackling with office politics. The sooner you learn it the better it will be for you and your professional growth.

Key words: Office-politics, strategy, communication, relationship and rumour

COMMUNICATION: INTRODUCTION

“Handle them carefully, for words have more power than atom bombs.”¹ --Pearl Strachan)

Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me. You learned it as a child, but more than likely, as an adult, you realized differently. **Words have power** that can create actions. And inspiring words can empower and change life. They can motivate and heal. They can change assumptions. They can tear down and build up. Yet we take them for granted. Les Brown has rightly said, “Your ability to communicate is an important tool in your pursuit of your goals, whether it is with your family, your co-workers or your clients and customers.”² Through the power of words, carefully chosen and thoughtfully used, you can build trust and create the kind of workplace to which people want to contribute their very best.

When was the last time you really thought about what came out of your mouth and the impact it would have? The fact remains; however, when used responsibly and intentionally, words can revolutionize the workplace. So the question becomes: how do you use words to make a difference? There is a myth that the best communication is spontaneous. In reality, the best dialogue is set by some ground rules. In addition, establish companywide agreements as to when and how employees will handle communication. Be clear about how you will communicate with employees and when your communication style might be different and why. For example, routine communications may take place in once-a-week staff meetings in a give-and-take way with a lot of employee input. In a crisis situation, however, communication may be much more top-down and direct. Grape wine communication should be shunned.

For more informal dialogue, an open door policy may well end up being more disruptive than productive. Come to a consensus as to how interruptions are to be handled. All staff should feel comfortable expressing that they are not available at all times. It may be because they are in the middle of a time-sensitive project or simply because they are having a bad day and probably shouldn't be involved in certain kinds of conversations. However, if staff can't talk "right then," it's important to reach an agreement on a time when all parties will be available.

If you have an important message to convey, choose words that you can use consistently and frequently. In order for information to be registered in long-term memory, it must be rehearsed. The more often a person hears information, the more likely the words will stick.

OFFICE POLITICS: INTRODUCTION

Office politics is the game of the workplace — the people, the culture and the rules that must be learned. Work place is the source of nearly all the misery in the world. Almost any evil you'd care to name comes from working place or from living in a world designed for work. After all, we spend one third of our day at work, and having a good day at work makes our entire day a whole lot better. That is why Winston (Leonard Spencer) Churchill said “Politics are almost as exciting as war, and quite as dangerous. In war you can only be killed once, but in politics many times.”³ Hence it is very significant to deal with office politics.

Office politics is all about gaining advantage over others in the work place. Office politics is really about building relationships to get things done. It's about harming people in the back or doing absolutely anything to get ahead. Office politics is about people interacting and building relationships to get things done. They're about getting ahead and accomplishing more, making you more fulfilled in your job. Office politics is who gets what they want, who says nothing, and who gets nothing. In its simplest form, office politics is simply about the differences between people at work; differences in opinions, conflicts of interests are often manifested as office politics. It all goes down to human communications and relationships.

Perhaps due to the negative connotation, many people see office politics as something very much to be avoided. But the truth is, to ensure your own success and that of your projects; you must navigate the minefield of Office Politics. If you deny the 'office politics' that may be going on around you, and avoid dealing with them, you may needlessly suffer whilst others take unfair advantage. And if you avoid practising 'good politics', you miss the opportunities to properly further your own interests, and those of your team and your cause.

Robert Louis Stevenson said, “Politics is perhaps the only profession for which no preparation is thought necessary.”⁴ But it is not so. There's too much fuss going on office politics. Whether you hate it, admire it, practice it or avoid it, office politics is a fact of life in any organization. And, like it or not, it's something that you need to understand and master to be sure of your own success.

REASONS OF OFFICE POLITICS:

"Office politics" are the strategies that people play to gain advantage, personally or for a cause they support. The term often has a negative connotation, in that it refers to strategies people use to seek advantage at the cost of others. In this context, it often adversely affects the working environment and relationships. There are numerous problems to be faced in office which come in the form of manipulation, threats, building friends or enemies and taking undue advantage of the privilege and so on.

Some people have more power than others, either through hierarchy or some other basis of influence e.g. wealth, nepotism, casteism, provincialism and communalism. All and sundry aspire for more power. Moreover, for many people, gaining promotion or any other perk is important, and this can create competition between individuals, or misalignment between the team's objectives and those of individuals within it. People and teams within organizations often have to compete for limited resources; this can lead to a kind of "tribal conflict" where teams compete to satisfy their needs and objectives, even when this is against the greater good.

Most people care passionately for decisions at work and this encourages political behaviour as they seek to get their way. Decisions at work are impacted by both work-related goals and personal factors, so there is further scope for goal conflict. Many people take delight in backbiting which directly or indirectly leads to office politics.

METHODOLOGY: HOW TO OVERCOME OFFICE- POLITICS

KNOW YOUR EMPLOYEES AND EMPLOYER

A person can have significant vision for a company, but if that vision can't be powerfully conveyed through words in a way that resonates with staff, the implementation becomes nearly impossible. If you want to be successful in communicating that vision, you must know who your employees are and be able to draw upon their strong values, myths and symbols. Ah, if only it were that easy. The paradox lies in that what you say is not always what is heard. A hungry person is more likely to hear of food and thirsty of water. Different people can say the same thing and carry completely different levels of impact. Stylistic differences, inconsistent messages, kinesics or a lack of integrity are all influences that impact how what you say is

absorbed. Even an employee's past experience with a topic, environment or speaker can be the deciding factor in what he or she hears. Understanding this paradox may well change your assumptions and actions.

'YES' FOR DIALOGUE 'NO' FOR DEBATE

Have a dialogue, not a debate. We are conditioned in our society to debate, not to converse. It's much like a game in which we score points to determine winners and losers. We yearn to have a final say. This is not a communication; it's a competition. We must inculcate the habit of accepting the truth even if it against us. This habit projects our good image.

STAY FOCUSED

Be in limelight. Come out from behind your desk, put down your phone and set the mail aside if someone wants to talk with you. If you've set the ground rules for communication, you can assume the information about to be presented is important to the speaker. If he or she comes in and talks about two or three unrelated items, seemingly unfocused, consider for a moment that a difficult conversation may be about to unfold as the individual determines whether or not your space is safe. As such, you should be aware of how your actions and words convey meaning to the person in your presence. If you are already a highly-focused person, know that your clipped responses may cause others to perceive you as angry and unapproachable. By staying aware of both non-verbal and verbal dynamics, the impact of your words and theirs will not be overshadowed by less important issues.

FEEDBACK TECHNIQUE

What do you do when an employee keeps coming back to you with the same complaint or issue over and over again. Cutting him off because "you've heard it all before" is a hindrance to communication. Understand that he is telling you the same story again only because he feels you have not understood or acknowledged your understanding. Rather than ending the conversation, consider using a feedback technique. It looks like this: "When we've talked about this before, my understanding is ... Is there anything more?" You may find you carried some mistaken assumptions. At least, you've offered up some way to recognize that you have listened to the person. If you did understand, but didn't act on their input out of respect for the bigger picture, it may be important to remind the person that his or her voice may not be the only one you are

listening to. Try to dissolve their assumption that you didn't act because you don't care or didn't understand. Show them you care and understand but still do something different.

MAKING POLITICS WORK FOR YOU

Office politics does happen whether you accept it or not. To deal effectively with office politics and use it yourself in a positive way, you must first accept the reality of it. Once you've done this, you then need develop strategies to deal with the political behavior that is going on around you. The best way to do this is to be a good observer and then use the information you gather to build yourself a strong network to operate in. Here are some tips:

REASSESS THE ORGANISATION PATTERN

Office Politics often circumvent the formal organization pattern. Sit back and watch for a while and then re-assess the **Organization Pattern** in terms of political power.

- Who are the real influencers?
- Who has authority but doesn't exercise it?
- Who is honoured?
- Who champions or mentors others?
- Who is "the brains behind the organization"?
- Who is behind whom?

UNDERSTAND THE INFORMAL NETWORK

Once you know who's who in the organization, you have a good idea of where the power and influence lay. Now you have to understand the social networks.

- Are there groups or cliques that have formed?
- Who is involved in interpersonal conflict?
- To what extent can one go?
- Who has the most trouble getting along with others?
- What is the basis for the interrelationship? Friendship, respect, manipulation?
- How does the influence flow between the parties?

BUILD RELATIONSHIP AND LEAVE YOUR COMFORT ZONE

You need to build your own social network accordingly. Often, a person doesn't step out of his or her comfort zone at work and build relationships because he is just terrified to do it. If you are not actively engaged in building and nurturing relationships at work because you are afraid, you are sidelining yourself. Don't align yourself too strongly with just one group at the office because they may not hold power forever. In office politics, it is possible to find yourself stuck in between two power figures who are at odds with each other. You can't get them to agree on a common decision for a project. In cases like this, focus on the business objectives and don't take side with either of them – even if you like one better than the other. Place them on a common communication platform and ensure open communications among all parties.

Do not be afraid of politically powerful people in the organization. Ensure you have relationships that cross the formal hierarchy in all directions (peers, bosses, management). Start to build relationships with those who have the informal power. Build your relationships on trust and respect. Be friendly with everyone but don't align yourself with one group or another. Be a part of multiple networks – this way you can keep your finger on the pulse of the organization. Don't trust in the naked flattering. Remember that imitation is the best form of flattering. When you spend more time listening, you are less likely to say something that will come back to bite you later. Also, people like those who listen to them. By not taking sides, you'll help to direct conflict resolution in an objective manner. You'll also build trust with both parties. That'll help to keep the engagements constructive and focus on business objectives. So, what can you do to enter the politicking/networking/relationship-building game?

NETWORK, BOTH ABOVE AND BELOW YOU

Make the Most of Your Network. Your network is like a shield which can protect you from the people who have an axe to grind. It is up to you to communicate your own and your team's abilities and successes to the right people, and you do this through positive political action. To win in the office, you'll want to build a network of allies which you can tap into. Use your network to:

- Gain access to information.
- Build visibility of your achievements.

- Improve complex relationships.
- Attract opportunities where you can shine.
- Seek out ways to make yourself, your team and your boss look good.
- Learn to forgive and learn from your experience.

GOVERN YOUR BEHAVIOUR

Through observation you'll learn what works in your organization's culture and what doesn't. Watch other people at work and identify successful behaviors. There are also some general standards to observe that will stop negative politics from spreading.

- Don't satire. Rise above interpersonal conflicts – do not get sucked into arguments.
- Maintain your integrity at all times – always remain professional, and always remember the organization's interests.
- Be positive – avoid whining and complaining.
- Be confident and assertive but not aggressive.
- When voicing objections or criticism, make sure you take an organizational perspective not a personal one.
- Don't rely on confidentiality – assume things will be disclosed and so decide what you should reveal accordingly.
- Be a model of integrity to your team, and discourage politics within it.
- Don't pass on gossip, questionable judgments, spread rumors – when you hear something, take a day to consider how much credibility it has. Don't lie. Remember when you don't lie, you need not remember.

GETTING TO KNOW PEOPLE AND BEING KNOWN

Get to know these people better and be courteous to them, but always be very careful what you say to them. Neither avoid nor give them too much significance. Of course, you must know them and their art of being dishonest, sabotaging people, or ruining others' reputations. Instinctively, we are more interested in getting the others to understand us than to understand them first. First

of all we should understand them. This sets the stage for open communications to arrive at a solution that both parties can accept.

DON'T DISTANCE YOURSELF

Politics does happen whether it is positive or negative. If you don't participate in the political game, you risk of not having a say in what happens and allowing people with less experience, skills or knowledge to influence the decisions being made around you.

Office Politics is a fact of life which cannot and should not be ignored. Wise politicking will help you get what you want in the world of work without compromising with others in the process. Learn to use its power positively while diffusing the efforts of those who abuse it.

You always wish to distance yourself from the people who are selfish, cunning and politicians as much as possible. But what is required is contrary to it. The expression, "Keep your friends close and your enemies closer" applies aptly to office politics. When people say that you don't engage in office politics, what you are really saying (though they probably don't realise it) is that they have figured out their place in the company and that's where they are going to stay. You have your relationships, you know the dynamics of those, and you limit their interactions with people outside of their comfort zone. You are afraid to make waves so you limit who you deal with and talk to and what you try to achieve. But you are engaged in office politics. Think of playing office politics as a game of strategy through which you are able to get the resources and influence you need to accomplish your goals. Most often those who are diplomatic, respectful and build coalitions with effective people win. You're just doing it at a lower level, and in a way that isn't going to help you advance yourself. Invite them for coffee, or volunteer for extra projects. The more relationships you nurture at work, the more you can get done and the more fun it will be. Don't hate the game of politics; play it to win—but play it authentically and honorably. If you don't know how to play, learn. Remember, it's just humans interacting. So get out there, play with people, and stop hiding! Politics get nasty when an employee is out for his or her personal gain alone. Winning requires you to consciously choose your reactions to the situation. Recognise that no matter how bad the circumstances, you have a choice in choosing how you feel and react. Some workers say they don't want to get caught up in politics at work, but most experts argue that playing the game is crucial to your career success. By not getting

involved in office politics, you may find your talents ignored, your success limited and you may feel left out of the loop.

EMPOWERING TECHNIQUE

At work, there are often issues which we have very little control over. It's not uncommon to find corporate policies, client demands or boss mandates which affect your personal interests. In lieu of feeling victimized and angry about the situation, focus on the things that you can do to influence the situation – your circle of influence. This is a very empowering technique to overcome the feeling of helplessness. It removes the victimized feeling and also allows others to see you as someone who knows how to operate within given constraints. You may not be able to change or decide on the eventual outcome, but you can walk away knowing that you have done the best within the given circumstances.

When you are under pressure, remain cool, calm and collected. This time is always tough for your true values to be introspected. Brian Tracy has very aptly remarked, "You can always tell your true values by looking at your behaviour—especially under pressure."⁵

GET A MENTOR

It may almost be guaranteed that the person whom you make your mentor will be flattered and eager to help. Such a person should worth being your mentor. He must have the qualities of head and heart. He or she can be your friend, philosopher and guide. Pay attention to his / her communication style, and network of relationships. Emulate those traits by drawing on the strengths you have. **If you find that there are things you want to say but you can't bring yourself to say them, you need to work on that.** Ask your mentor for help in getting over this, take a public-speaking class, get a coach, and find an ally at work. Update your skills to be relevant to company initiatives to get the competitive edge.

DON'T GET PERSONAL

In office politics, you may get angry with people. It happens so. There will be times when you feel the urge to give that person a piece of your mind and teach him a lesson. Don't even think so.

People tend to remember moments when they suffered humiliation. Even if you win this argument and get to feel really good about it for now, you'll pay the price with interest later

when you need help from this person. Even a forgetful person does not forget humiliation even after a long time. Hence don't personalize any matter.

HOW CAN WE BOTH WIN

Political conflicts happen because of conflicting interests. We are taught only to win. Conversely, we are afraid to let someone else win, because it implies losing for us.

Learn to think in terms of "how can we both win out of this situation?" This requires that you first understand the other party's perspective and what's in it for him. Next, understand what's in it for you. Strive to seek out a resolution that is acceptable and beneficial to both parties. There may be some situations when no one loses.

EMBRANCE CHANGE

Change is a synonym for an opportunity. Change creates turbulence, and turbulence creates opportunities. Stability is for those who want to play a defensive game, and in today's environment, defense is not where you want. Be funny when you want to be. Humor can make the difference between confrontation and collaboration. If you feel that situation is going out of your control on account of being grave, colour it with humour. If you aren't funny, you can learn; if you're already funny, take care to use your talent sparingly and at the right times. "

KNOW HOW TO DEAL WITH RUMOUR

Rumour is hand in glove with office-politics. It is, unfortunately, very powerful which cannot be fought easily. Tell those who spread rumour that they are no longer trust worthy and you do not respect nor approve of what they say. As for co-workers, if anyone approaches you as to these rumours simply explain to them that the words being passed around are misleading and false. Just deal with it the best way that you know. Take the higher road, act with dignity no matter what they say. Those who spread rumours begin to take delight in it and exaggerate the same. Hence later or sooner they are exposed. One who has become prey to rumour should remain one's cool, calm and collected.

CONCLUSION:

Tackling with office- politics is, of course, difficult. But it is not too difficult to be managed. Remember the more you flee from it, the more it will make you prey. Face it boldly. Bearing the above points in the mind, one can easily grapple with it honourably and justly.

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