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Playing Office Politics

January 02, 2008

How to be "good" at the game

By Louellen Essex, Ph.D. and Mitchell Kusy, Ph.D.

Being political is essential in today's workplace. Whether you're a manager or rank-and-file employee, if you refuse to play the game—or resist getting good at it—you'll miss out on important opportunities and even be mistrusted or ignored.

Here are nine do-or-die tips for playing office politics—the right way.

- **Identify the power holders.** Who do others look up to and why? Know who the power brokers are in your organization and you'll have important insights for navigating an often complex web of relationships.
- **Tailor your work style.** How is success measured in your company, and what types of approaches and behaviors are most rewarded? The better your working style fits the organization, the more influential you will be.
- **Be an expert.** Develop an indispensable set of knowledge and skills—things that are not available elsewhere—and you gain expert power. This clout and credibility will serve you well, especially in times of political upheaval.
- **Recognize others.** Be generous with recognition and rewards, as well as opportunities for involvement. If you're not in a formal position of power, find other meaningful ways to assist or support people.
- **Use your influence wisely.** You do have influence—and, yes, power—even if you don't realize it. Whether that influence is formal or informal, use your power to give to—not take away from—the people around you.
- **Develop a network.** Building a strong network is critical. Develop key relationships, and you can secure access to vital "insider" information and really make things happen.
- **Be respected—and respectful.** Give respect, and you will get respect. This "referent" power comes from being genuinely liked and looked up to, and for having a reputation as someone with whom everyone wants to work.
- **Mind your alliances.** Be cautious about aligning with a single faction. By alienating yourself from other groups, you could hinder or hurt your own position, especially in times of transition.
- **Work with your enemies.** Listen to your foes as much as your friends. It's easy to stick close to your allies—especially in difficult, politically charged times—but ignoring your enemies is a political mistake that can lead to closed doors and missed opportunities.

Louellen Essex and Mitchell Kusy are workplace experts specializing in developing leaders and creating learning organizations. Award-winning consultants and university professors, they are co-authors of *Manager's Desktop Consultant: Just-in-Time Solutions to the Top People Problems That Keep You Up at Night* (Davies-Black, 2007, \$18.95). Contact them on the Web at www.louellenessex.com and www.mitchkusy.com.

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