Office Politics

Politics in the workplace is inevitable and the sooner you learn how to navigate around potential hot spots, the easier it can be on your life and the better it is for your career! According to communication coach, Kathleen K. Reardon, the only way to avoid politics is to avoid people. The workplace is comprised of people of different personalities, cultures, races, and beliefs, so it is expected that the environment is dynamically changing at a fast pace and with competing agenda (Gill Corkindale, 2007).

In their book, Survival of the Savvy - High Integrity Political Tactics for Career and Company Success, corporate leadership consultants Rick Brandon and Marty Seldman define the meaning of office politics.

Organizational politics are informal, unofficial, and sometimes behind-the-scenes efforts to sell ideas, influence an organization, increase power, or achieve other targeted objectives.

Firstly, identifying positive politics vs. negative ones is crucial to establish your own political mindset without losing your integrity or ethics. Simply speaking, how to get involved in politics without selling your soul to the devil. According to Brandon and Seldman, two conditions determine whether office politics become constructive or destructive:

1. Whether the targeted objectives are for the company’s interest or only self-interests; and
2. Whether the influence efforts used to achieve those objectives have integrity or not.

According to Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, the definition of integrity is as follows:
1 : firm adherence to a code of especially moral or artistic values. 2 : an unimpaired condition. 3 : the quality or state of being complete or undivided.

Naturally, we all have different sense of beliefs, conducts and levels of integrity. The question that we should strive for is what are our core values and principles. If it means swatting all those who comes in your path mercilessly, so be it, but note that such tactic does not warrant a strategic political roadmap.

Now that you can hopefully distinguish between the good and the bad, the following tips will help guide you through how to maneuver politics positively.

**Tips**

- Take note of your work environment, how things are done and learn how to work with or sometimes around it.
- Network with influential co-workers – cultivating professional relationships with individuals who can make change will help you attain goals.
- Act according to your beliefs, do not carry emotional attachments, be fair to everyone and don’t choose sides during a conflict.
- Be resourceful – learn where to get what and from whom in any situation. However, be aware of offending people and over-stepping your level of influence. The key is to do what you want with tact.
- Build a good reputation of yourself – refrain from office gossips, be reliable, honest and trustworthy.
- Persuade, convince and influence decision making, rather than using direct authority.
- Learn conflict management (see our section on this topic) and how to communicate effectively in difficult situations.
Activities to Do On Your Own

- Organize a lunch hour activity with co-workers to enhance a sense of belonging. Or organize a community involvement activity, for example a bake sale/golf tournament with proceeds going to a local charity.
- Participate in work-related functions. Attend that weekly seminar or the potluck lunch. This will increase your presence in the work-place and allow you to build a relationship with people at work.

Other Resources

- http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/integrity
- “Tooling Up: Be Politically Astute, But Don’t Play Politics.” http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/career_magazine/previous_issues/articles/2006_12_15/tooling_up_be POLITICALLY astute but don_t play politics