

## CAREER DEVELOPMENT

# 7 Ways to Succeed Amid a Politically Charged Company Culture

by expert, author and business success/career coach

John M. McKee

While office politics are commonly regarded quite negatively as a culture rife with back stabbing, gossiping, and brown nosing, it also has a very strong upside. The key to successfully navigating your way through the propaganda lies with making the system 'for' you rather than against you, as is often the case.

The good news is this: effectively strategizing and executing an office politics "action plan" can literally make your career. Do it poorly or not at all, and stagnant wages or, worse, a pink slip may very well be in your future.

Indeed, the very nature of office politics is strategy, which differs from office gossip in that people participating in office politics do so with the objective of gaining advantage, whereas gossip can be a purely social activity. Accordingly, creating an office politics "action plan" detailing specific, proactive strategies to circumvent political landmines is a worthy exercise.

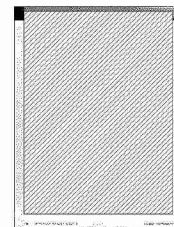
"Office politics will occur anytime there are 3 or more people in a conversation, which is a very common occurrence in the workplace," notes business success and career coach John M. McKee, author of *'Career Wisdom - 101 Proven Strategies to Ensure Workplace Success.'* "It's imperative to use these opportunities to get yourself, your point of view, and your ideas into play."

Exactly how might one go about this? Below, McKee offers 7 methods sure to help anyone to become more successful climbing the corporate ladder amid a highly charged political climate:



1. **Over-Communicate.** Keep others apprised of what you are planning or currently working on. Organizations hate to be surprised and often, when they are, it creates a blueprint for failure – personal or for the project, itself. In many companies this can mean taking meetings with people you may not like or respect, but chalk that up to life in the fast lane. If you think withholding information will allow you to surreptitiously gain professional yardage, think twice. Your concealment can be easily sabotaged based on the plight for secrecy, alone.

2. **Mentors** – These individuals are still the best way to get an objective handle on what's really going on in an organization as they can better see the forest through the trees. "Company insider" mentors can give you a fast understanding of the company's culture. But, a mentor need not be within the organization, as outside mentors can provide a new, fresh and completely unbiased perspective on both your personal style – what it is and what it "should" be - and how your company's politics are working in general. A mentor is also a confidant with whom you can not only strategize your career, but also vent about a nasty boss and/or co-worker and otherwise get frustrations off your chest without feeding into the office political game. And, it doesn't matter if your mentor is not the same gender, as a different perspective than your own can actually be better for you in the long run.



**3. Open-ended Questions** - Ask a lot of questions to different people in different sides of the company. And then shut up. When you hear the perspectives of people in departments or operations other than yours, it helps you to see the world as they see it and understand what they deem important. It may be different than what the boss has told you. Ask peers, "old timers" at all levels, and superiors. Take notes. Don't interrupt, you don't need to show how smart or experienced you are - just learn.



**4. Review Constantly** - Seek constant feedback from others. Talk about what just took place in that meeting you just attended,

what the last message from the corporate office 'really' said, how you did in a recent presentation, what is driving decisions and directives. This could mean after-hours socializing, but the effort can pay off greatly. Many great managers fail because they believe that what's right is what is going to succeed, which all too often is not the case.

**5. Get 'Buy In'** - It's important to ensure that everyone who may be influenced by your programs or initiatives is



aware of what's going to happen and feels like they've been involved - or, at least, were able to weigh in with their opinions or recommendations. Ideally they'll be supportive of what you are doing, but at the very least it may reduce friction that could derail your ultimate,

longer-term success. Best case scenario is that you learn something that will ensure the success of the activity and your upward mobility, but even in the worst case where others won't support you, you'll have learned who's for or against you and/or the program. Knowledge is power.



**6. Give - and Take - Due Credit.** OK, it's true: guys are credit hogs, which gets old and can come back to bite

them over time. Yesterday's stars often trip and fall, and are then surprised that there's no one around to help them get back on their feet. On the other hand, gals can go too far the other way - giving the rest of the team so much credit that they don't get the respect from upper management they deserve for their ideas, work and contributions. These women end up watching others, who are less deserving, get promoted past them. Credit those on your team who deserve it, but don't miss an opportunity to take credit for your work as well.

**7. Style: It still Counts** - How you present yourself to others - your external façade - can make a big difference in how you are perceived. While this is seemingly common sense advice, all too often we mistakenly think our presentation - our outward appearance, our use of PowerPoint, our buzzwords and jargon - will be universally accepted. It might, but sometimes those in other departments or companies have preconceived opinions about you or your 'kind', however stereotypical or politically incorrect. Also, in every situation make an effort in advance get to know the 'audience' you are dealing with, and present yourself in a light that will better ensure acceptance and, accordingly, a better the chance of success. **PWM**

