

Development Suggestions for Political Savvy

Suggested Readings

| Title | Author/Publisher |
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| Political Savvy: Systematic Approaches for Leadership Behind-the-Scenes | DeLuca, Joel R./ 1999/ The Evergreen Business Group |
| Don't Sabotage Your Success! Making Office Politics Work | Wood, Karen Ginsberg/ 2000/ Enlightened Concepts Publishing |

Activities

→Building and Maintaining Formal and Informal Working Relationships

Establish a network.

Form a network of individuals both within and outside your organization that are, or will be likely key stakeholders. You can do this by making an effort to join organization-wide activities both at work (e.g., committees, task forces) and outside normal work hours (e.g., professional associations, social events) in order to meet more people who may be useful contacts.

Develop stronger relationships with individuals throughout your organization. Take note of who has influence and the support of their peers at all levels of the organization. Get to know these people by setting up an informal meeting, such as lunch, or by working on a project together. Note that face-to-face contact is essential in developing these relationships. Trying to save time by calling the person or sending an e-mail will not help you build a mutually supportive relationship.

Follow up with contacts.

Once you have made an initial acquaintance with someone who may be a useful contact, make a point of following up with him or her to strengthen and maintain the contact. This could involve offering your assistance, seeking input, or inviting the contact to a function. When appropriate, make a point of publicly supporting the initiatives of your contacts.

Invest time in learning about the decision makers and concerns of others throughout the agency.

Get to know others and their work or provide assistance, just as you would want them to know and help you.

Recognize the importance of all your associates.

As a leader, recognize that you are dependent on your clients, superiors, subordinates, and other key people in your organization. Because you need their cooperation and help, you must develop influence with all of these individuals.

Get to know your peers

Clarify your organization's structure by getting to know your peers cross-functionally. Find out what they do and what processes or rules they follow, especially those that may have an impact on you or your group.

Engage stakeholders in your initiatives.

Make sure that you not only involve key stakeholders in your initiatives, but make them feel that they are a central part of the undertakings. Their involvement should be solicited early in the development of an initiative. Before implementing an initiative, determine the impact it will have on all key individuals or groups. If you are planning a new initiative, get input from key stakeholders by such methods as setting up meetings for them to voice any concerns they may have or by asking them to review drafts and comment on your proposals and plans. Remember that people will be much more willing to buy into initiatives if they feel that their needs and concerns are adequately met. The time you fail to spend building good relationships with key stakeholders will most likely be spent "fighting fires" and trying to justify your actions after the fact.

Find and benefit from a mentor.

In order to access informal networks in your organization, ask a more experienced person to act as your coach or mentor. Ask this person:

- Who are the people who can make things happen in each group?
- Who holds the positional power within each functional area? This person may not be the person who makes things happen.
- Who are the key players in this particular group? What are the dynamics of the group?
- What is important to the key players?
- Of whom do you have to be careful?
- What ways have you found to effectively shortcut the formal system? What are the likely consequences, if any, if you bypass the formal system?

Seek out someone who holds your respect and who has demonstrated a sound understanding of the politics, personalities and informal networks associated with your organization.

→ **Knowing who to involve in your key initiatives**

Knowing whom to involve – and when – maximizes your opportunities for success and positive recognition. To involve the right people at the right time, try to:

- Determine whose support you will need to get your idea approved and implemented effectively. This typically means that end users and customers need to be involved early.
- Run an idea by someone whose opinion you value before presenting it at a meeting. Ask this person to critique the idea and your presentation. What are the strengths and weaknesses of your idea? Also ask whose support you will need and try to cover those players in your plan before you present it publicly.
- Ask members who else should be included when putting together a task force or project team. Invite others to sit in on meetings when you are discussing a topic that affects them, even if they aren't regular members of the committee. Send minutes of action items to interested parties for their information.
- Talk with key individuals who will be affected by your project. Ask who among their peers or high management would support it and who would oppose it.
- Offer a particular individual the opportunity to be involved if you think he or she should be included. You will not only reduce the chances of overlooking someone important, but will also get further insights into the appropriate people to involve in future projects.
- Include people whose support you need in the planning and development phases of the project, because involvement generally means commitment.

→ **Managing an Agenda**

Recognize the importance of timing.

Be aware that timing is crucial to both the planning and the announcing of initiatives. Just as the right message at the wrong time is the wrong message, the right initiative at the wrong time is the wrong initiative. For example, it is frequently a mistake to announce or launch a major action at a time when there is a larger initiative that will supersede it in terms of visibility and momentum. One means of managing this concern is to tie your own initiative to the larger one.

Build support for initiatives informally.

Do not present new ideas for the first time in formal settings. Build support behind the scenes will not only increase the chances of success when the initiative is first presented

Formally, but will reduce the likelihood that the announcement will cause embarrassment or that the initiative will be at cross purposes with other initiatives within your organization or partner organizations.

→Helping Others Become Politically Savvy**Minimize the politics.**

Strive for a balance in your actions between being overly political and paying insufficient attention to the importance of relationships with other stakeholders, whether they are individuals, groups, or organizations. Try to defuse political issues. Frequently an issue or decision becomes political because there is no forum or vehicle for addressing it objectively. Set the standard in your organization for working through difficult issues in as straightforward a manner as possible. Provide a framework for discussion as well as decision-support tools. Clarify criteria and decision rules. Make sure to involve those who will be affected in the decision making process. Engage in networking opportunities. Participate in cross-functional, cross-agency task forces and meetings, to spend time with outside constituencies, etc. Share relevant news or information you have learned with others in your organization.

Debrief a recent initiative you championed across other agencies and/or multiple offices.

Identify one initiative that required risk management in terms of getting others' buy in, assessing, and managing the impact on other agencies or offices, calculating and ensuring an appropriate return for the risk, deflecting criticism and objections from others, etc. Critique the situation in depth to help your staff members understand the key strategies and best practices in action.

Assist in removing barriers to team success.

Make use of networking contacts within other divisions and work units. Enlist their support in helping you to change or adapt work processes to enable your organization to work effectively across division or functional lines. Suggest mutually-beneficial solutions that will serve the interests of all work units involved and the agency as a whole.

Help other staff members build critical external contacts.

Think about the experts, specialists, etc., who have helped you build internal support for your ideas by providing you with critical data and other information. Assist others to identify people outside the agency that they can get support from, and hook them up with your own contacts, if appropriate.

Seek an assignment in an organization where issues relate to many different departments and/or where there is significant exposure to the political level.

Ask yourself the tough questions.

When developing potentially politically sensitive or controversial recommendations, which require a decision from others, test your readiness to influence and negotiate. Ask yourself: “Who are you trying to impact?”, “Who is your audience?”, “What agency issues is your audience passionate about?” “What might be their individual concerns regarding the recommendations? “How will you overcome objections?”, “How will you compromise?” Develop this level of readiness before seeking decisions on controversial issues.

Learn from success stories.

Ask a mentor for advice about the internal workings and best ways to get things done. Ask about the obstacles they encountered trying to gain support and agreement from different groups within the agency. Ask for tips as to how they overcame those barriers to reach their goals.

Political Savvy Quick Tips

1. Actively participate in Interagency work groups and attend interagency and/or Departmental meetings on a regular basis
2. Stay abreast of impending legislation that may predict a future shift in agency priorities
3. Stay abreast of sociopolitical, economic, and technological trends that may affect the future direction the agency or in responding to a new customer base.
4. Remember, “The right message at the wrong time is the wrong message.”
5. Compare a list of the organization’s priorities with a list of your group’s objectives. Keep objectives that are related to organizational priorities at the top of your “to accomplish” list, and try to eliminate objectives that are not related to organizational priorities.
6. Identify a peer or higher-level manager who is effective at involving others, observe his or her methods, and adopt them if possible.
7. Exclude disruptive or unsupportive people from your projects by offering tactful ways for these people to “bow out.”

8. Seek out a resident “expert” to act as your mentor. This person can describe the formal rules of the organization and introduce you to the informal network as well.
9. Maintain a policy of “no surprises” by relating both the good and the bad news to your manager or others who need to know.
10. Keep key players informed of your project’s status.
11. Recognize that your peers can be valuable resources.
12. Strengthen your personal allegiance to coworkers at all levels of the organization by treating them with respect and consideration.
13. When you think that you may have to compromise on your agenda, classify your issues into “can drop,” “nice to have,” and “must have” categories. This will give you some flexibility for negotiation.
14. Make a list of the resources you can offer to others; then, when someone asks you for help, you will know which resources you have available.
15. Take time to listen to others’ requests for assistance; even if you cannot help them directly, you may be able to suggest someone who can.
16. Find effective ways to say “no” to a request for assistance from someone without jeopardizing his or her future support.
17. To understand others’ perspectives, set aside your own agenda and listen to other people’s ideas and rationales.
18. Ask your manager or a respected peer for feedback on your reputation in the “fight/compromise” arena; use the feedback to modify your behavior.
19. When faced with possible resistance, consider pre-selling your agenda to a couple of key players.
20. Analyze the costs of pushing your agenda to the exclusion of others’ agendas: If you “win,” will you receive cooperation from the “losers” in the future?
21. Learn to recognize when others are resisting your agenda by observing both their verbal and nonverbal behaviors.
22. Willingly share leadership responsibilities with peers.

23. Think about your audience's needs, concerns, and perspectives. Consider how people are likely to react to your message and, whenever possible, position your message in a way that appeals to them and avoids a strong negative reaction.
24. Express criticism tactfully.
25. Avoid delivering personal criticism in public.
26. Make a list of where key players stand on particular issues for future reference.
27. Before presenting a new idea or action plan, list the people whose support you will need. Attempt to discover where each person stands in relation to your proposal – pro, con, or neutral – and formulate a plan to handle each.
28. Demonstrate your commitment to the organization in tangible ways: by your willingness to “go the extra mile” when necessary; by attending company social functions; and by supporting the organization's values, goals, and mission.
29. When functions are created or reorganized, spend some time talking with the people involved. What are their new responsibilities? How can you work together most effectively to get things accomplished?
30. Keep your manager informed of what is going on in your department. Ask how he or she would like to be kept informed of progress or setbacks.