

# TURN OFFICE POLITICS TO YOUR ADVANTAGE

Secret meetings. Going behind a co-worker's back to get something done. Taking credit for work others did.

Office politics is nasty business. And in this unstable economy, office politics is in full swing.

"Office politics will escalate when the stress level gets tense," says Sylvia Lafair, author of *Don't Bring It to Work*, to be published early next year. "That's when my drama queen comes out."

Lafair, a family therapist turned executive coach, says our behaviors in the workplace often stem from our childhood or fami-



ly culture. As a child, she would stomp her foot to get her way. As an adult, she's had to temper that, but it drove her to start her own business.

She says recognizing behavior patterns can help one navigate office politics and improve the way people work together.

The "pleaser," for example, is always saying "yes" to work and then complaining about it later. This person can be coached to become a truth teller in the workplace.

Lafair recalls sitting in on a meeting at one company she worked with on behavior patterns. A woman she knew to be a "pleaser" was told she would be handling a store opening "as usual."

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Instead of agreeing, the woman took a big breath and said she couldn't do the project. She didn't think it was the right time to open a new store.

Her boss was stunned but then curious about her opinion, saying he needed to further evaluate the project.

Most workplaces also have a "persecutor." This is someone who bullies, micromanages and displays contempt for others.

But even a persecutor can improve, becoming a visionary in the workplace if coached to find new solutions to problems, Lafair says.

The "superachiever" is another typical type in an office. These people have to be the best, so they often take other people's ideas as their own.

Instead, the superachiever can become a "creative collaborator," Lafair says. By eliciting feedback, this worker on steroids will begin to see ideas come forward and people start working as a team.

To get ahead in their careers, people have a tendency to hide information, says John McKee, author of *Career Wisdom — 101 Proven Strategies to Ensure Workplace Success*. There's a fear "it's going to be used against us, or they're going to steal our great idea," he says.

That's the wrong tack a worker should take to climb the ladder.

"By telling people what

you're working on and finding out what other people are working on, you can reduce the pressure and increase chances of success," he says.

In budget-cutting times likes these, being transparent is particularly important.

"Companies need to know as far ahead in advance everything that's going to cost money," McKee says.

He also suggests workers seek out mentors in the workplace who can help them navigate the politics, find out who the real power players are and give them perspective on issues.

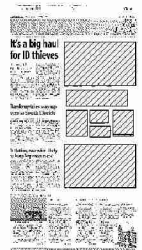
"Really successful teams and organizations seem to create a cocoon around them where they read the tea leaves and use it to succeed," McKee says.

Sometimes, though, office politics can drive people out of jobs and into their own business.

The back-stabbing is one part of the corporate work environment that some people can't put up with, especially entrepreneurs, says Suzanne Mulvehill, who left her Deerfield Beach sales job and wrote a book, *Employee to Entrepreneur*. That led to her venture coaching other entrepreneurs.

Claudia Barrington once worked as a nurse in South Florida hospitals, but she got tired of doctors' pompous attitudes and rigid hospital rules.

"I became intolerant, and that would overflow into my work," she said.



So eight years ago, Barrington started her own business, South Florida Thermography, which provides heat imagery screening at doctors' offices.

"I love my business. I'm in charge. I set my schedule," she says. "I don't answer to anybody except my clients."

Marcia Heroux Pounds can be reached at [mpounds@sun-sentinel.com](mailto:mpounds@sun-sentinel.com) or 561-243-6650.

## NAVIGATING OFFICE POLITICS

**Over-communicate.** Keep others apprised of what you are planning or working on.

**Find a mentor.** These individuals are still the best way to get an objective handle on what's really going on in an organization .

**Ask open-ended questions.** When you hear the perspectives of people in departments or operations other than yours, it helps you understand what they deem

important.

**Seek constant feedback** from others.

**Get buy-in.** It's important to ensure that everyone who may be influenced by your initiatives is aware of what's going to happen and feels like he or she's been involved.

SOURCE: JOHN MCKEE, AUTHOR OF  
CAREER WISDOM - 101 PROVEN  
STRATEGIES TO ENSURE  
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