

incorporate design changes? How are the production units stored? Sold? Shipped? The more you know about the bigger picture, the better you will be able to do your own job, as you will have a better grasp of where your job fits into the grand scheme of things.

This commitment to personal growth should not stop at the gates of the factory, either. After you have been on the job for a while, you may want to reacquaint yourself with the tuition-reimbursement program at your company. You may find that it will be in your best interest to pursue additional formal education, either by working toward an additional degree or by taking additional courses in an appropriate area.

Succeeding at Office Politics

In the last several years, the term *politics* has taken on increasingly worse connotations. People who get involved in politics are smeared with the same brush as those who have betrayed the public's trust. The term *office politics* has a similarly negative connotation. In its most negative form, it is used by people who have failed to succeed at the rate they believe they deserve to describe how people they perceive as being less qualified have succeeded. Other times it is used by people who attempt to explain things that they don't understand in the workplace.

Promotions, like jobs, do not usually go to the person who is best qualified. The fact is that they usually go to someone who is qualified, but who is particularly good at the art of office politics.

First of all, notice that I do not cast the term *office politics* in a negative light myself. Like gravity, it is a fact of life. It is rather futile to be "for" or "against" something over which you have no control. The best thing to do, in my opinion, is to recognize that it exists, protect yourself from it, and do what you can to use its power for your own benefit.

It's worth noting that there is a huge difference between learning to be good at office politics and being a "brown noser." People who succeed at the former are much more likely to advance than those who attempt the latter. The "brown noser" is also more likely to earn the disdain of his or her fellow workers. You will impress both your boss and your coworkers much more by working hard and keeping your mouth closed than by "tooting your own horn" or by being a "yes man."

There are a few things you can do to help yourself navigate the politics of your workplace:

- **Study the organizational chart.** Get a copy from your supervisor or from human resources; or, if necessary, try to construct one yourself. This will give you a good idea of how the organization is set up on paper—who reports to whom, where each division lies, and so on.
- **Figure out what the “real” chart looks like.** After a period of time, you will see that regardless of how it looks on paper, power is distributed in a different way. You may find that the secretary to the president has more real power than a vice president.
- **Be a good person.** Sometimes people overlook this simple principle. By treating people with respect—regardless of whether they are above you on the organizational chart, in the next cubicle, or reporting to you—you will earn their respect.
- **Be a good listener.** Sometimes your coworkers will just need an ear. They may want to vent about that jerk in accounting, or they may want to complain about how the step-up in production is going to create problems on the assembly line. Regardless of the issue, pay attention to what they are saying, and show them that you have heard them and understand what they are saying. That doesn’t mean that you should chime in with your two cents about the people in accounting. Your best bet is to speak no ill of anyone else in the workplace. Just having you listen to them nonjudgmentally is enough to make your coworkers think you are “on their side.”
- **Gossip is inevitable,** but don’t believe it unless you see it yourself, and even then don’t be so sure. Even Machiavelli would be unable to keep all of the plots straight, with twelve different versions of each story, all containing a certain amount of truth, twelve different motivations for sharing the story with you, etc. Don’t get caught up in it. If someone tells you that Stephanie from the other territory is trying to steal your account, don’t act on it unless that action is going directly to Stephanie and asking her. If a person tells you such a story, in fact, suggest that the two of you approach Stephanie right then. More often than not, the person who brought you the message will back down quite a bit from his or her assertions.