

Keep your constituents happy

Like successful politicians, hard-charging managers curry favor by maintaining good relations with each of their constituencies. Savvy executives know that by satisfying their bosses, colleagues, staffers and external customers, they remove impediments to getting ahead.

Yet if just one group feels left out, its disaffection can spread and derail a promising career. Group members might resent your lack of concern for them or judge you more harshly because they don't know you. What's worse, they can undermine your progress by speaking ill of you to others.

Apply these techniques to ensure that you keep all your constituents in your corner:

Work the crowd. Just as the best politicians take every opportunity to ingratiate themselves with the public, you can expand your network and meet new "supporters." Get to know key players in various departments at your company, and see how you can help them. One supervisor made the rounds when employees stepped outside the building for breaks. "That was a perfect time to chat with them and ask if there was anything my team could do to make their jobs easier," she said. "I made a lot of friends that way."

Suggest solutions. When you hear one of your constituents point out something that's wrong, don't just nod. Propose a solution, and offer to help implement it. Your goal: To earn a reputation as a "go-to person" who can get things done.

Make commitment statements. When you're asked to do something, don't hem and haw. Come right out and say exactly what you intend to do, when you'll do it and how you plan to do it. It sounds simple, but many managers neglect to make these commitment statements. As a result, they don't follow through, and that leaves constituents unhappy. Get in the habit of closing conversations by saying, "I will take care of that for you by Friday at noon" or "You can expect a full report by May 15." (And then deliver it—on the 15th, in the morning.) Don't leave potential allies muttering under their breath, "I wonder if I can depend on him to do what he said."

Win over skeptics. Politicians know that if they please their most vocal critics, they score a multiple victory. That's because loudmouthed leaders usually influence lots of followers. If you show patience and understanding with ringleaders, then you can win dozens of supporters at once.

Initiate follow-up. If you're inaccessible, you'll lose chances to show your responsiveness to your constituents. Send written updates or call them periodically to let them know how a project is progressing. Never put them in the position of having to nag you to keep in touch.