

# Make Office Politics Work for You

Every office comes with politics. It can be messy, especially when it involves the boss playing favorites, or the person in the cube next to you that's out for your job and pay grade. Even the water cooler gossip that seems innocuous can bite.

You most likely can't avoid office politics, but don't despair. Below are a few ways that you can still thrive in a politically charged environment.

**Know who to avoid.** There are several types of people such as the "friend" you lunch with that likes to tell you what other people say about you, most of it derogatory. Ronna Lichtenberg, author of the book *Work Would Be Great If It Weren't For The People*, says that everyone has an agenda at work. Even you do. So, when that office "friend" is feeding you negative information, filter it or stop it cold.

**Do as much as you can for the right people before being asked.** I know that means more work for you, but in the end, this will help you. Who are the right people? Lichtenberg defines them as "...the people your gut tells you you'd like to have on your team." These are the honest, hardworking folks that get work done. They may be your co-worker or boss. How does this help you? Because the more you're connected to these people, the easier it is to do your job and do it well.

**On the other hand, think twice before helping everyone.** You're not the office superhero. Don't do everyone's job so they will like you. Avoid offering all those poor overworked co-workers help. Let them fight their own battles. Stepping in rarely, if ever, will get you anywhere except exhausted every night.

**Embrace gossip.** Embrace the good gossip, that is. Keep your ear to the ground to understand the office culture and diverse personalities. People are going to talk. So gather information without passing it on or commenting. Lichtenberg relates a story a co-worker once told her about the vice president's drinking issue and how it got the company negative media attention at times. That information, which she never repeated, helped her navigate a sticky situation with the vice president after an office party one night. One supreme rule of office gossip: Never betray a confidence. It will always, always come back to bite you.

**Avoid overanalyzing.** Don't be that person that analyzes every memo for its hidden meaning or distrusts everyone. We might think that every action in the office is somehow about us, but it's not. "Most people are acting only on their own impulse, in their own world and no one can penetrate what's really happening—not even you," Lichtenberg says.