

# How to spot conniving co-workers

Some colleagues seem all friendly and innocent on the outside, but they're ruthless demons on the inside. Advancing professionals see through the pleasant mask and shield themselves from the machinations of their scheming office mates.

To spot conniving co-workers, look for these behaviors:

**They dig for dirt.** While almost everyone loves a little gossip, connivers feed on the dark secrets of others. Or they just make up stuff. Rather than exchanging relatively harmless rumors, they traffic in personal news about others ("She's an alcoholic," "I saw him taking drugs in the restroom"). The next time you're gossiping in a small group, pay attention to anyone who suddenly ups the ante by passing along embarrassing "facts" about co-workers.

**They're chameleons.** Connivers act differently depending on the company they keep. Among peers, they range from disingenuous to brash. But watch them among higher-ups, and they suddenly turn meek and compliant. While most of us vary our behavior somewhat when we're around high-powered people, connivers appear blatantly two-faced. It's a Jekyll-and-Hyde phenomenon where they're almost unrecognizable in certain situations.

**They thrive on conflict.** Connivers love to cheer a fight from the sidelines. They might even encourage a fight by pitting rivals against each other or by pinning blame for a snafu on others. If you look depressed, they'll be the first to point it out. They'll ask you, "So what's wrong?" in a strangely excited tone.

**They exhibit "me first" thinking.** When connivers hear of a promotion, firing or any other big personnel move, their first response is, "How will it affect me?" Sure, we all act that way to some extent. But in their case, it's transparent. They don't even try to appreciate other people's points of view because they're too busy plotting their next move to capitalize on the changes resulting from the news.

Once you spot conniving co-workers, stay away. Don't pick a fight or let them bother you. Just steer clear and rise above their petty scheming. And never let yourself be associated with them in the eyes of your boss.

Driven by irritation, you may start talking about a conniver to anyone who'll listen. But you won't enhance your image by continually speaking out against a conniver. By overreacting, you lose credibility.

Instead, keep cool. Rather than confront the individual in private (that will only give the schemer another chance to spread lies about what you said or did behind closed doors), assert yourself with both the conniver and the boss present. Don't speculate on the conniver's motives; your goal is to clear your name by sticking to the facts of what really happened.