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Stressing Over Office Politics

Do's and Don'ts to Help Manage the Stress of Office Politics

Imagine gossiping with a friendly co-worker about the boss. You told them something confidential and expected them to keep it to themselves. Later you were called into the boss's office and asked to explain what you said. Welcome to the world of office politics.



Every person, at some time or another, has become stressed over office politics. Learning how to cope with stress and office politics is critical to having a positive work environment.

Definition

According to Wikipedia, Office politics "is the use of one's individual or assigned power within an employing organization for the purpose of obtaining advantages beyond one's legitimate authority. Those advantages may include access to tangible assets, or intangible benefits such as status or pseudo-authority that influences the behaviour of others. Both individuals and groups may engage in office politics."

Office politics has many forms and can create – bullying, gossiping, belittling or blaming others for their own faults (to make them feel better about themselves), handing off work that they should have done themselves, etc.

The results of office politics

When subjected to constant politicking many employees feel increasingly stressed out, leading to a marked decrease in their productivity. They may grow frustrated and isolated in the workplace and sometimes begin to practice their own version of office politics.

A cohesive and industrious workplace can become fragmented into individual groups, each busy with their own agenda. Behind the scenes power struggles can demoralise an organisation, intensify job insecurity and cause an increase in workplace accidents.

The hidden cost of stress and office politics

Statistics Canada calculates that the annual cost of work time lost to stress related disorders at \$12 billion dollars. Job stress is reported as the major factor in employee turnover, absenteeism, and poor employee morale.

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How you can manage the stress of office politics

Do's

- Always try to be polite to others, adopt a *positive attitude* and try not to judge others too easily or harshly. Focus on the issues, not the person. Treat your co-workers and bosses with respect and encourage them to practice the same philosophies.
- Know what you're capable of and always work to the best of your ability. Document your work by creating an email or paper trail. To keep them in the loop, be sure to CC your boss on emails and correspondence. An often unused *courtesy* is if you mention someone or refer to something that pertains to them, copy them on the email.
- Keep your word and *mean what you say*. Do what you say you're going to do, keep to deadlines, take on responsibilities and be able to admit when you were wrong or if you have made a mistake.
- Realize and accept the fact that office politics happen in *every workplace*. Don't worry about what is being gossiped about by the water-cooler and keep yourself focused on your own work.

Don'ts

- Become *invisible*. Be sure that co-workers and bosses know who you are. Introduce yourself to people you don't know and always try to remember their names. It's very hard to dislike or to say something bad about a genuinely friendly person.
- Take stuff to heart. Use lots of soap so that things will slide off you. Nothing that happens or is said at the office is worth getting sick over. Keep everything in perspective because, what is often said in the heat of the moment, over time loses its *impact*.
- Try not to look for *artificial comforts* to help you cope with stress. Taking a smoke break to "calm down" or bingeing out on chocolate to make you "feel better", will only create more problems for you than they solve.
- Get lost at work. Try to find a *mentor* to help you navigate your way around the quicksand in your office. Managers and senior employees make good mentors because normally they have been with the company long enough to know what's going on and usually know what pitfalls to avoid.

Protecting yourself against stress and office politics

Be aware of stress warning signs and take action if you feel yourself becoming increasingly stressed out. Try to deal with the source of your stress and eliminate the stressors. Learn stress coping strategies and conflict management. Talk with your employer about trying to reduce the unnecessary stress and office politics in your workplace.