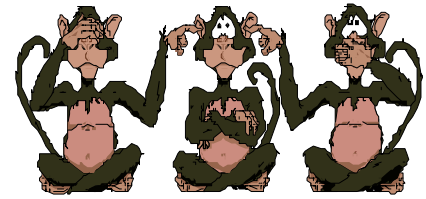


Office Politics—Surviving at the Expense of Productivity



The idea for this article culminated from a lifetime of participation in—or observation of—the time wasted by employees due to the politics at work. We really wanted to quantify politics and give the cost associated them so that once and for all, there would be a number given to the loss of productivity and revenue they cause. But there isn't a lot of material on the matter, so we took a different approach. We defined some of the common occurrences that fall under the heading of POLITICS so everyone can gauge for themselves how much time is lost at work on excessive activities.

Politics, to our way of thinking, are simply the impure actions taken to make one appear pure. Truly, if everything everyone did was based on performing to the ultimate goal while maintaining respect, dignity and integrity, there would be no need for the huge amount of ass-kissing or ass covering that eats into the workday.

Sure, that's a lofty goal, and it won't ever be fully achieved. Too, politics start at the top, so unless there are big changes of some of the small-minded people in large positions, all one can do is stay true to the mission at hand.

Read the following descriptions of scenarios that occur as a result of office politics and place a checkmark next to any of the bullets that happen where you work.

Send an email or voice mail and copy people not directly involved so that:

- Your side of the story is on record
- The transgression of another is known

Convene a committee or task force because:

- An executive desires a new result
- There are warring factions inside the com-



pany and the decision of a group involving parties from each of them will stick better

- Nobody trusts one or two people to do the job correctly without involving so-called Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) in numerous meetings

There is a disliked person whose enemies want to spotlight the person because:

- They are angry and seeking justice
- They are resentful of the incompetence or abuse of power exercised by the individual

Power and influence are an aphrodisiac to some, so they:

- Sidle up to and schmooze with higher-ups with agendas that transcend business
- Are nicer and more considerate of bosses than of peers and subordinates

The organization's culture is more punitive than positive, so people feel:

- It is more important to spend time to cover their butts than to stick out their necks
- It is safer to do things the accepted way instead of the better way
- It is okay to emulate the bad practices and behaviors they see others getting away with

The quirks or values of certain executives must be fed, so those below:

- Badmouth impracticalities among co-workers and other sympathizers
- Hesitate to say or do something that could go against the established grain
- Waste time agonizing over saying or writing something so that it agree when you don't.

There are people who are favored and protected by their boss despite:

- Poor performance
- Unethical practices
- Risk to the company

For each checkmark you made, allocate:

- 10 points for daily occurrences
- 5 points for those occurring 2-3 times per

- week
- 3 points if only once per week
- 1 point if only once per month

Add up your points. Sorry, but there is no science behind this. But we daresay that any score in excess of 100 indicates a colossal excess of politics in your organization, group, whatever. Truly, progress is being pilfered from the profits that would otherwise line your pockets. And if your score is 180, duck, cover and roll...you've found Corporate Hell.

Here's a new way to recognize politics:

People Obviously Lacking Integrity and/or Trust Instead of Character and Strength

We'd be interested in your scores...drop us a line or a call, would you?

* * * * *

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Edited by Denise Dollard*



Many, us included, are inclined to use the terms *honesty* and *integrity* to mean the same thing. We have learned the difference firsthand and want to share it with you.

There's a landscaper and yard maintenance guy named Rock whom we have employed to do work on our yards. Rock is an all around good guy—one of the nicest people you will ever meet. He has studied horticulture. He can name 10,000 plants by their botanical names and he is honest as they come. He has a key to the gate and you can leave the house wide open and go away for the day. He works hard. He has learned Spanish to better communicate with some of his crew. He attends seminars to learn things like new breeds of grass and disease control. His work is very good. He prices his services quite reasonably.

We don't recommend him. You see, honesty used to be good enough—it was the differentiating factor in deciding on a contractor.

The issue is integrity. A project he vowed to complete in two weeks is now in month six. Taking away the occasional rain, high winds and holidays, it could have been done in a month. However, Rock is disorganized and over-commits. He has a large customer base and tends to respond to the most vocal clients first (it may surprise you to learn we are not among them). We just want to trust someone who says they will be there on Wednesday to re-plumb the sprinklers to be there on Wednesday—or call to reschedule. Instead, what we encounter is after-the-fact excuses and apologies. He tells us how appreciative he is that we are patient (he doesn't know us that well). We have

therefore concluded that ***the difference between honesty and integrity is action.*** We love honesty, but without action to back it up, there is no integrity. In other words, we would trust him with our lives, but have no assurance he'd show up to save them.

Here's another example. A co-worker calls in to announce his decision to take a sick day because he had a rough Super Bowl Sunday and needs to recover. While the honesty is there, the integrity is absent. That he would blow off a day of work during which he was sorely needed doesn't cut it.

Sure, he could have lied, and that would have been an issue unto itself. He opted for forgiveness over permission—and that, friends, is the difference between honesty and integrity. The former is just no good without the latter. * * * * *

BIG DESK / LITTLE CUBE:

(a look at the varied perspectives of managers and employees)

The MISTAKE!%*@*&!

During First Interstate's acquisition of San Diego Trust & Savings Bank, we had the great fortune to meet with some of the outstanding executives of SDTSB. One of them described the difference between the two banks thusly: At First Interstate, when something went awry, the culture was to find the person to blame and mete out punishment whereas at San Diego Trust, the culture advocated meeting to figure out where policies or procedures needed modification to prevent future occurrences. We have never forgotten that. How our own bank looked from an informed outside perspective was jarring, but valuable.

Now, in our consultancy, we see how mistakes are treated all of the time: it's bleak in some places and inconsistent in many.

BIG DESK PEOPLE

You need to be more proactive so you don't have to be reactive as often.

Mistakes occur when:

- People are not encouraged to question questionable practices
- Messengers get shot when reporting problems
- There is little positive feedback for doing the right thing; the "regular" thing prevails
- **You** don't know how things *really* work in your department
- Longtime employees who have gotten away with substandard work are allowed to continue to do so
- Feedback from those doing the work is not solicited
- Feedback from those who are affected

by the work done by your staff is not sought

- The fear of making a mistake causes people to focus more on the fear than the task
- There are insufficient checks and balances or inadequate procedures to protect against mistakes
- Some people just don't give a rat's butt

Little Cube Dwellers

If you aspire to greatness, you must be prepared for challenge. For things to improve in your world, you have to initiate the action, not wait for greatness to swoop down on gilded wings and whisper that your prayers have been answered. If there are bad or wrong things going on that hurt your company, good things have to occur to counter them. Someone who knows (usually the rank and file know first) needs to step up and lead the charge of change.

Scared? What risk ever presented itself without some fear? If your cause is true and your actions will improve life at work, this is your big chance. Will you take it? The alternative is to keep griping along with the other non-risk-takers.

If you need help, talk to someone you trust for advice. Do the right thing and make a difference. *That* is leadership.

* * * * *



Light Touches

Service Extras That Linger Long After the Experience

InfoLink

City National Bank has a wonderful intranet. (An intranet is like the internet, only an intranet is internal and can only be accessed by people inside the company).

InfoLink is the name of City National Bank's intranet. The most impressive aspects of it is that it features daily articles about things happening within the organization; not just prattle and propaganda, but insights into people and what they do or products and how they work. The articles are written in a manner that is easy to understand and interesting to read.

So why do we characterize this as great service? Several reasons.

Imparting information to your employees is not just a good business practice, but an essential one. Providing background information to staff strengthens their knowl-

edge of the company and their ability to communicate with customers. If that ain't service, nothing is.

City National Bank's InfoLink articles humanize company information in a way that generates pride in the achievements of others or answers questions people didn't even know they had. Colleagues are interested!

One exceptional service provided via InfoLink are computer security tips and warnings for people to use at home for their personal information safety. When a company goes outside of its own walls to help employees, it's admirable.

InfoLink creates dialogue among colleagues with all of the power of a rumor but little of the risk. How many companies can brag about *that*?

pArticle Piques

Irksome iotas that cost:
SAD ARROGANCE

Titles don't mean *entitlement*. Experience doesn't mean *expert*. It is very disappointing to see a longtime admired co-worker's well-deserved ascension (usually based on genuine hard work, intelligence and integrity) result in arrogance. We see it too often and we bet you do too.

To be fair, though, in recognizing an over-inflated ego, the observer was most likely guilty of the same thing at some point. It is so easy to relate to something we have done! If you had never experienced happiness or outrage, it would be more difficult to distinguish and understand, right?

The lesson to be learned when in the presence of one too big for his or her britches is to commit to NOT being like that. We believe that one of the best ways to be great is to observe and reject behaviors that are not great: sometimes it is easier to learn by seeing things done the wrong way.

So how do you deal with people whose self-importance led them to think it is their right to ignore an email, to not return a call, to hold up a meeting and waste other people's time because his or her agenda is more significant? Or who talks over others more loudly or using high-falutin' language as if his or her words are company gospel?

Resist succumbing to the same lower standards; remain true to oneself. Refuse to feed that ever-increasing egotistical appetite—don't offer praise or encouragement to the perpetrator; ratchet down the pleasantries. Nicely ask for a summary of his or her filibuster so you are sure what he or she was trying to say amidst the drivel. Send polite but insistent 2nd, 3rd and 4th requests for a response. Slip a copy of this article to him or her.

It is tough to balance increased confidence with humility, but that is what the best leaders do. One is otherwise nothing but a higher-paid, lesser human.



Warm Tips

Reheating some old principles to succeed in new times

Real People Again!

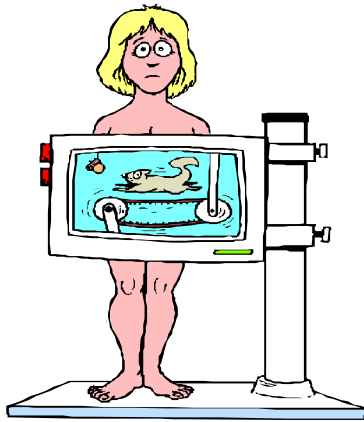
It is amusing, in a twisted way, to note that a national bank is advertising that you can now call and be connected to a real live person—by pressing the zero button as soon as the call is connected. What a concept!

The TV commercial for this is a hoot—it depicts a nerdy guy on his cell phone at home getting ready for work and progresses well into his morning commute. All the while he is engaged with the voice-response unit on the other end of the line, cautiously droning his responses, such as "Big Boy", when asked his password. When he finally reaches the actual person at his bank's call center, his train goes into a tunnel and he loses the connection.

We hope this is a new trend to rekindle good old service. Nobody likes the never-ending menus of telephonic robotics. We applaud Citibank for recognizing that they can outshine the competition with a no-brainer like this. We wish them huge success—it may inspire other service-providers to sit up and take notice. Being the first to advertise it makes the biggest splash, but there's no reason (other than a little money) that other companies shouldn't dive in, too.

Consumers have been complaining about this for years now. It was about time someone did something about it. Recognizing that technology is an enhancement—not a replacement—to service is the right step.

Now that this could finally change, dare we suggest the return of house calls?



Paul English

There's a guy we would elect Consumer of the Year, if there was such an award. His name is Paul English, and he has painstakingly cracked the phone systems of hundreds of companies to enable callers to reach a real person within in the beginning of a phone call. We love him for it!

Recently featured on network news, Paul has developed a website and has published the phone numbers and bypass keys to reach real people at hundreds of companies. He updates his site regularly. Companies are listed alphabetically by category—finance, government, insurance, pharmacies, etc. Maybe this is what inspired Citibank (see Warm Tips).

Check it out at gethuman.com and then click on [database](#). Or call us if you want us to print one and send it to you.

We found Paul's list makes a great gift, too. We recently printed it and gave it to Mom for Valentine's Day. It was better than flowers!

Insider Insights
Thoughts and News Items We Felt Like Sharing

Performance Reviews and Obituaries

When you stop and think about it, the only difference between the two is that the subject cannot refute anything in the obit.

Recently, the mother of a longtime friend passed away and we were asked for help in writing her obituary. Our friend drafted what he thought the tribute should include and sent it for input. The unfortunate thing was that it was too much about the people his mother had left behind—little about her. Too, it focused more on the recent past. We gently suggested that readers wouldn't care so much about her survivors as her accomplishments, and recommended the inclusion of her lifetime achievements and milestones.

This happens in performance evaluations, too. The writer tends to write what most easily comes to mind. Often, there is too much focus on the writer's view—not of others whose work life has been affected by the reviewed. Good reviews are inclusive of the whole of a person's evaluation period—not the last month or so.

In any job where there is a responsibility to know and assess the performance of another, it is valuable to keep notes as you go along. We do this for our newsletters, projects, and personal correspondence. Get some small spiral books or set up some folders with the names or subjects that are important to your work—add a line or two when something of note occurs. It will serve you well later, when it is a pain to have to get done. * * * * *



Beacon Bits

Quotations to cast rays of humanity across everyday business life

"The world is full of willing people, some willing to work, the rest willing to let them"
- Robert Frost

"You do not lead by hitting people over the head— that's assault, not leadership"
- Dwight D. Eisenhower

"Nothing is ever accomplished by committee, unless there are three members, one of whom happens to be sick and the other absent"
- Hendrick Van Loon

"I don't know the key to success, but the key to failure is trying to please everybody"
- Bill Cosby

"The man who makes no mistakes does not usually make anything"
- William Connor Magee

**Last Laughs:
Buzzword Bingo**

Our former colleague Judy Wortsman alerted us to the newest office game: Buzzword Bingo. It is great entertainment for staff members, particularly in large companies where there are frequent meetings or presentations by leaders. Here's how it works:

In advance of a meeting or other involuntary gathering, employees fill out a 25-square grid with the nonsensical terms and

jargon that tends to litter otherwise clear messages. Each employee completes his or her own card. Choose a random free space and write in BINGO. In the other squares write latest and greatest expressions being bandied about by politically-tainted talkers.

Here's an example:

Paradigm	Outside the Box	Customer Metric	Value Proposition	Operationalize
Change Catalyst	Thought Leader	Actualize	Organic Growth	Best Practices
Enterprise Wide	Principle-Centered	Business Silo	Scalable	Bleeding Edge
Bandwidth	Gap Analysis	Push the Envelope	Low-Hanging Fruit	Face Time
ROI	Core Business	BINGO	Re-engineer	Platform

Just like the real game, the object is to be the first to achieve 5 across, down or diagonally. The winning employee, if he or she has the gumption, shouts "BINGO" (or for more fun on his or her last day, "BULL- - - !") Or, for the less risky version, a cough or sneeze can suffice (on a conference call, press the MUTE button and let loose!).

Yes, there are websites for this that you can visit. Check out About.com and look up Business Buzzword Bingo—there are links there that will help you generate your own customized BB cards.

Spice up your next meeting with Buzzword Bingo. At least the presenters will know you've been listening...

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