

Corporate Survival ... Dealing with people in the corporate culture.

By Edward B. Toupin

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Title : Corporate Survival ... Dealing with people in the corporate culture.

Description: Ever wonder how to deal with certain individuals in your company? This article takes a look at some of the groups and individuals that make up the culture of most organizations.

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Corporate Survival
... Dealing with people in the corporate culture.
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Once you get your arms around your corporate culture, there's one more area that you have to learn to better understand the games and power plays within a corporation. This next level involves understanding the larger groups and individual types of people that live and work within the environment.

Whether well-intentioned or confrontational, coworkers are seen as the number one stress-inducing factor on the job. Unlike your private life, you can't always choose the people with whom you spend the majority of each working day. Learning how to deal with coworkers can reduce your stress, establish you as a professionally capable individual, and allow you to enjoy your job.

--- People and Politics ---

Since Ugh smashed Mugh in the head with a club back in prehistoric times, politics has been around. It's a subliminal fight for survival and it actually happens in personal lives as much as it does in our work lives.

People are the funniest creatures on this planet. Most despise politics, yet, to be truly human is to be political. Since we're all different and we all have different needs and goals, the fight for survival

comes at us from many different angles and perceptions.

The corporate culture is driven by the multitude of personalities and ideals brought to the table by the people of the organizations. You must be aware of this interplay to effectively deal with and interact within the culture of a corporation.

--- The Group ---

Several groups of employees represent different points-of-view within an organization. It is those different views that cause friction and power plays. Across professional and workplace boundaries, the more difficult groups tend to fall into one of the following groups.

* Intelligent

The intelligent group consists of people that are capable of doing the job and who know everything that there is to know. They are usually seen as a threat because their intellectual assets seal their positions. They are usually placed outside of the standard groups, however, they are allowed in when they're needed. These people usually work hard and, because management needs them, managers usually shield these people from the politics.

* Just Get By

This group of people just wants to make it to the next paycheck. They usually complain about everything and do exactly what is expected of them, and no more. While this appears to be a stress-free way to handle life and work responsibilities, it actually takes more effort to limit oneself than it does to simply do the job. Management usually hands these people the simple, grunt tasks to keep them busy and to frustrate them enough to make them quit.

* Just Doing the Job

People that "just do the job" are hard workers and only want to work. This group tries their best to avoid confrontation and political situations. However, they are usually single-minded and are easily confused and frustrated if some twist or political ploy is thrown in front of them. For the most part, management sees them as the project worker-bees that get in, do the job, then get out. If they're left alone too long or without some supervision to move them on to the next project, they turn into the "Just Get By" group.

* Scared

The people of this group work at a frantic pace and are usually afraid that they don't know what they're doing, but they don't want anyone to find out. Highly unorganized, they are always stressed. They usually find comfort and camaraderie in chatting constantly to other people about how terrible their lives are and usually develop physical ailments that reflect their complaints.

They are an integral part of the gossip tree and are used by management and political types to initiate problems and take the fall for any failures. However, they want to avoid problems at all costs and will usually find a way to push failure and blame onto someone else.

* Intimidating

The intimidating group of people has little knowledge of their position, so they use intimidation to keep people out of their corner of the world. They are similar to the "Scared" group, except that they are more forceful in how they present themselves. They appear to have the right solution at all

times and will do battle and start gossip about anyone that thwarts them. In most cases, they are usually the pawns for many managers.

* Goal Oriented

This group consists of people who are skilled, hard workers and have goals and direction. They are politically sensitive, but they don't use politics to a great degree to get what they want. Higher-ups love these people as long as their goals are in line with the company's management. Those that are not inline with management find it difficult to achieve anything and will either become political or quit.

* Waiting for Retirement

This group made it all those years, know all the games, and really don't care about anything except their ability to hang on until their retirement and the "Golden Handshake." With this group, just respect the fact that they made it, however, they are usually open to providing information. If you have a question about the company, some project, or other related bit of information, ask them.

* Politically Oriented

In general, this group consists of the company spies. As for production, they are generally useless, but as for corporate climbing and backing up their boss, they are brilliant. They work on small projects, but they know how to market their work such that management thinks they are fantastic. They sometimes move around the office causing problems through political mischief so that they can solve them and appear as heroes. Your best course of action with this group is to minimize your interaction.

--- Types of People ---

Of the various groups of people in the workplace, a few specific individuals stand out among the rest. As in all corporate workplaces, one of each exists. Try to see if you can recognize these coworkers within your organization and practice the suggestions for how to manage each.

* Talkative Timmy

Timmy doesn't have to be in the same geographic area of your workspace, but when he wants to chat, he'll find you. The discussion is usually nonsensical or gossipy, however, the ultimate purpose of their discussion is to take up time so that the workday goes by faster.

These types of coworkers generally mean no harm and they feel that their willingness to chatter all day is a sign of camaraderie. For the most part, they either have no idea how to handle their jobs, or management gives them "things to do" to keep them busy and out of everyone's hair. If the constant babbling doesn't get to you, the time lost from your other responsibilities will.

To resolve a situation with this type of person, put up a barrier. Psychologically distance yourself if physical distancing, such as shutting the door, isn't an option. You can barricade a workspace with bookshelves, plants, and by putting papers and books in any chairs that might be in your office.

During conversations, respond to the conversation with short answers or a pause followed by "hmm." This will eventually discourage further conversations. You can head off a conversation before it starts by appearing engrossed in an activity or by picking up the phone to pretend that you didn't know they were there.

* Sammy the Slanderer

Sammy achieves personal fulfillment by discrediting others. His gossipy tidbits about everything from your work habits to your personal life may be twisted versions of the truth or outright lies. His common game is "Bait and Slam," where he may appear friendly and open, as he hopes you'll reveal some useful material about yourself that he can use against you.

Sammy will also look for ways to "press your buttons." He usually wants to find ways where he can catch you improperly performing your work or even becoming what he can classify as "hostile." In some cases, he will even set you up for failure so that he can bring it to the attention of your boss. In this way, he can start gossip about your work ethic and your attitudes, when in fact you did nothing to provoke such gossip.

When dealing with Sammy, don't tell them anything about yourself and check your work carefully. Also, refuse to get into a character assassination or office feud. Spreading negative rumors as revenge about Sammy will only lower people's opinions of you and your abilities. Usually, no one remembers who starts such attacks, but you and Sammy will be viewed as petty and untrustworthy. As for the negative rumors, let them circulate. Eventually people will see through Sammy and the rumors will be proven wrong through your personality and performance.

* My Pal Peter

Peter is your best friend and is unconditionally open with all the details of his private life. However, he expects you to feel the same and provide him with morsels of your personal life. It doesn't matter if you're uncomfortable hearing about the last fight with his wife or what his proctologist said, you'll hear a lot of information. Peter generally believes that the office is a family where intrusive questions are acceptable.

In all cases, recognize that you're not the one being inappropriate so don't feel obligated to discuss any personal topics. Don't encourage personal discourse by offering advice or asking for more information when Peter opens up. You are not required to answer personal questions; however, a laugh or joke is the best reply to an offensive question.

* Thomas the Thief

Thomas is always on the lookout for opinions and ideas that he can pass along as his own. Thomas' victims are surprised to hear their own ideas mentioned by the boss as a "brilliant idea" from Thomas himself. Better yet, Thomas will also go so far as to take your ideas and have them mysteriously appear in his reports.

Learn from the experience. Making a scene that Thomas stole your idea isn't going to win you any points or respect. As with Sammy, don't get into an office war and limit your discussions with this person to topics such as the weather or sports.

* Calvin the Clinger

Calvin is very much like Peter and views the office as one, big happy family. If you work together, Calvin sees no harm in spending weekends, evenings, and holidays together. He's always suggesting going out after work, playing ball, or some other group activity. If you're willing to socialize with the office crowd, then Calvin isn't a problem. The problems surface when you want to maintain some distance.

Decide how much of your private time you're willing to share with office-mates. Participate in group activities when you desire, and don't apologize or provide excuses otherwise.

* Bond, James Bond

James is the boss's eyes and ears. Luckily, this person generally blows his cover quickly, especially when you hear things from your boss that you said in front of James. Unfortunately, because of James' slick style, victims must learn about James the hard way.

Your best bet is to always be on guard with what you say and do in front of James and his cohorts. As with Sammy, don't get into an office war, and limit your discussions and interactions with this person.

--- What's next? ---

If we were all the same, not only would it be boring, but there would be no politics. As you can see, you can't have politics without the uniqueness of the freedoms we all have and desire. If you don't want politics, then you must give up that which makes us unique. In that sense, instead of giving anything up, learn how to cope with the various personalities and groups with your environment.

One overall practice that helps in dealing with all of these groups and individuals is to keep your personal ideals, opinions, beliefs, and desires to yourself. Your best response is to pause and reply with a "hmm" and nothing more. The reason is that some people will purposely read into your opinions and use them against you. In this case, you will be scripted for something that you are not. Religion, world events, social events, and personal events are topics that should be left at home to protect yourself in your environment.

Professional, individual interaction can sometimes be a tough game to play, but it is essential in the work environment. Once you learn the office culture, learn the people and how best to interact with each. Not only will it make your work and personal life easier, but you will gain much respect from your colleagues and your managers.

About the Author

Edward B. Toupin is a published author living in The Entertainment Capital of the World. He authors books and articles covering employment to technical-related topics as well as performs technical writing for clients in Denver, Chicago, and New York. In his spare time, he enjoys the energy of Las Vegas and writes short slice-of-life and feature-length sci-fi screenplays. Edward consults and creates entirely from his home office in Las Vegas, NV and can be reached at etoupin@toupin.com or <http://www.toupin.com> .

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