



15 Tips for Navigating Office Politics

Three categories related to:

- **What you know & do** (knowledge, skills, expertise, behaviors)
- **Who you know & how** (relationships)
- **Who you are** (character)

Adapted from: NCSL. (1995). *15 Tips to be the best legislator you can be*, National Conference of State Legislators brochure, revised November 2016.



What You Know & Do

***HONOR THE INSTITUTION
MASTER THE RULES
MANAGE YOUR TIME
DEVELOP A SPECIALTY
BE A PROBLEM SOLVER***



What You Know & Do

HONOR THE INSTITUTION

- Don't tear down or demean the institution, it demeans you instead.
- Appeal to the best of the place and its mission.
- What are you for?
- Honor & make a positive difference. Doesn't mean not making changes that are needed.
- Don't run the place or its people down or vent on social media or other venues.
- "You don't have to be sick to get better."

MASTER THE RULES

- Know the policies, procedures and guidelines.
- Learn the unwritten rules. Ask. Challenge if necessary.
- Work to eliminate unnecessary rules.
- Work to revise outdated, oppressive, or onerous rules.



What You Know & Do

MANAGE YOUR TIME

- Organize, prioritize, and follow through.
- Commit to those things that are important.
- Be punctual. Show up early when possible.
- Meet deadlines.

DEVELOP A SPECIALTY

- Focus your strengths where they contribute most.
- Try to make a big difference in a few areas.
- Don't try to be all things to all people.
- Pursue opportunities to serve on committees, task forces, teams, etc.
- Work to develop negotiation skills and other key skill sets.
- Specialize but pursue new knowledge/skills in areas that add value.



What You Know & Do

BE A PROBLEM SOLVER

- Be part of the solution, not part of the problem.
- When you see problems, if possible, solve them before others notice.
- When you must bring a problem to the attention of a boss/colleague:
 - Ask to be assigned to address it.
 - Provide possible solutions that you have considered.
 - Seek opportunities to lead a team to address.
 - Build networks that can be resources in addressing problems.
- Don't take sides in people issues. Fix the problem, not the blame.
- Don't make other people's problems your own. Coach them.



Who You Know & How

***KNOW WHERE TO GET HELP
DON'T BURN BRIDGES
DON'T HOG THE MIKE
STAY IN TOUCH WITH YOUR
CONSTITUENTS
WORK WITH THE MEDIA***



Who You Know & How

KNOW WHERE TO GET HELP

- Information is power. Get it and use it.
- Find and utilize allies in different groups.
 - Someone who can relate to what you're dealing with and give wise advice.
 - Someone who can help you navigate in different cultures.
 - Someone who can offer area of needed growth.
 - Someone who can see possibilities that you may not see for yourself.
- Get to know the people with institutional history.
- Ask for help. Be helpful.

DON'T BURN BRIDGES

- Don't let disagreement or even dislike ruin work relationships.
- Work for compromise through purposeful communication.
- Learn to disagree without being disagreeable.
- Don't react emotionally or in anger toward another person.
- Resist speaking defensively or aggressively toward the person. Keep directing back toward the issues.
- Be more concerned with being respected, and showing respect, than in being liked.



Who You Know & How

DON'T HOG THE MIKE

- Learn how others prefer to receive communication.
- Generally, be brief and to the point.
- Resist the urge to comment on everything, even if you are the expert.
- Communicate necessary context without editorializing.
- Ensure everyone (as appropriate) has a chance to speak. Watch for those whose voices are not being heard and gain the floor for them.
- Become comfortable with silence. Don't feel compelled to fill the space.
- Sometimes people speak but are not heard. Facilitate real listening.



Who You Know & How

STAY IN TOUCH WITH YOUR CONSTITUENTS

- Always remember the people you represent.
- Ask anyone you might represent what they think, for ideas, for issues.
- In the appropriate forums, make these voices heard.
- Learn the names of those around you. Even those that might not seem important to you. Observe good work. Say thank-you.
- Be responsive. Return emails, phone calls and other correspondence promptly.
- Develop others around you. Help them grow/develop professionally.
- Go see folks, face-to-face, in their place/space.



Who You Know & How

WORK WITH THE MEDIA

- Take notice of the formal and informal communication networks.
- There are times to ensure you stay ahead of the grapevine.
- There are times to effectively use the grapevine.
- Develop a relationship with those who are always “in the know.”
- Don’t let someone get blindsided by a “hot news item” or bad news.
- The best way to approve of a story is to put the accurate story out there yourself. Be factual. Don’t spin.
- If you don’t give people a story, they make up a story.



Who You Are

***TAKE THE HIGH ROAD
VOTE YOUR CONSCIENCE
KEEP YOUR WORD
BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU AGREE TO
STOP AND SMELL THE ROSES***



Who You Are

TAKE THE HIGH ROAD

- Consider how your actions/decisions would look in a news headline.
- Just because you can (ie. It's legal.), doesn't mean you should.
- Be prepared for your ideas, actions, plans, etc. to be scrutinized.
- Avoid even the appearance of any impropriety.
- Consider both etiquette and ethical responsibilities.
- Don't be afraid to call out bad behavior when necessary.
- Most workplace issues are not personal. Try to remember this and remain objective.

VOTE YOUR CONSCIENCE

- Listen. Think. Research. Talk to respected experts. Decide.
- Let people know how you evaluate issues and arrive at decisions.
- Communicate and be transparent about the "why."
- People may not agree, but will usually respect these decisions.
- Educate and help shape the opinions of others.
- Do not compromise your core values and moral code.
- Consider those who trust you to do your best AND the right thing.



Who You Are

KEEP YOUR WORD

- Honest is the best policy.
- Truthfulness = Credibility. Credibility is required for effectiveness.
- Without truth there is no trust.
- Deliver what you promise. Communicate early and often if there are modifications, delays, or departures from what you promised.
- If you change your mind, explain.
- Never over promise and under deliver!

BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU AGREE TO

- Always know what you are agreeing to.
- Get important things in writing. Scrutinize them closely.
- Don't play in the "good ole' boys/girls club."
- Never feel pressured to make an immediate decision. Tell folks you will consider overnight and give a decision tomorrow.
- Ask questions. Ask a lot of questions.
- Joe Johnson - "If you lie down with dogs, you get up with fleas."



Who You Are

STOP AND SMELL THE ROSES

- Let people around you see a real human being.
- Take time for family, friend and personal activities.
- You don't have to explain or make excuses. "I have a prior commitment."
- "Success comes in cans, not cannots." Say, "I can work on that next week."
- Take time to eat right, get some exercise, rejuvenate.
- Personal obligations are important too.
- Celebrate your success and recognize the successes of others.