Session No. 675

Business Lessons: Your Political Survival Kit

Mark D. Hansen, CSP, PE, CPEA, CPE
Plano, TX

Only in America, do we use the word "politics" to describe the process so well: "Poli" in Latin meaning "many" and "tics" meaning "blood-sucking creatures"

Introduction

In my thirty plus years as an employee in the corporate world, I’ve been a consummate observer; I’ve seen just about everything there is to see. I’ve been on the upside and downside of mergers, acquisitions, joint ventures and divestitures. I saw many executives advance during this turmoil, while other languished. I wondered what those who advanced did so differently than those who languished. Even after the turmoil I saw similar patterns emerge in management circles. As a young safety professional, I always wondered how people climbed the ladder so rapidly and stayed aloft so long. It wasn’t just the star performers; in fact, few of the stars made it to positions of power and influence. I always hoped, as a Type “A” personality engineer, that superior technical knowledge was the key to organizational success. It took me awhile of spinning my wheels until I finally realized it wasn’t just technical ability but something quite intangible. The proverbial, “It isn’t what you now, but who you know,” began to find a place in my five-year plan. This went against the grain of everything I had ever learned about succeeding in business. I saw many incompetent professionals rise to the top and stay there, much to the chagrin of my pay-for-performance, Protestant work ethic. It wasn’t hard work after all, it was a combination of ability and who you knew. My goal was not to stay too long in middle management. In fact, I once posted in my office cubicle, “Temporary office of a rising young executive.” I had my five-year plan, but no mentor to guide me through the maze of corporate politics. One wrong move and I’m gone or pigeon-holed for life. Being someone who abhorred failure, I had to find a solution. As an engineer I wanted to call it political engineering. But I knew that would be a trite oversimplification. So I called it, the politics of safety. I began to develop tools, some of which are in this article. If I were to compile a survival kit for politics in the corporate world, these are the chief tools I would include.

What is contained here is something I have found no school to teach, no continuing education class to pontificate, no individual to share even in safety. It is all through the school of hard knocks. Through repeated failures and trial and error, I have compiled material that no one wants to share. These are the strategies and tactics I have employed to successfully get things done and move up in the organization.

One measure of leadership is the caliber of people who choose to follow you."
Dennis A. Peer

Survival Tool #1: Understanding the Types of Influence

Influencing is the process of affecting others' attitudes and behavior in order to achieve an objective. To work within any organization you must have the capacity to influence others. Leaders and followers influence each other. How management uses its influence has a direct effect on organizational performance. Types of influence are:

Instrumental Compliance. Followers follow for the purpose of gaining reward or avoiding a punishment controlled by the leader.

Internalization. Followers follow because of the leader's appeal to their values and beliefs.

Identification. Followers follow and commit to imitate the leader's behavior or adopt the same attitudes to please the leader and to be like the leader.

Survival Tool #2: Nine Generic Influence Tactics

These influence tactics are considered generic because they are applied in all directions within the organization. The first five influence tactics are considered "soft" tactics because they are considered friendlier than the last four "hard," or pressure, tactics. The three possible responses to an influence tactic—enthusiastic commitment, grading compliance, and outright resistance—commitment is most apt to result when the tactics used are consultation, strong rational persuasion, and inspirational appeals.

"Win by persuasion not by force." – Latin Proverb

Rational Persuasion

Rational persuasion is a tactic used to influence others. It is characterized by the use of logical arguments with factual information to persuade others that a specific action will lead to a particular outcome. Leaders who use rational persuasion well are effective at influencing their followers. Logical arguments tend to work best for people whose behavior is more influenced by thinking than emotion.

1. Explain why an objective needs to be met: To get commitment for an objective, people want to know why it needs to be met and why it's important.
2. Explain how the follower will benefit from meeting the objective: Try to think of the other party's often silent question: "What's in it for me?"
3. Provide evidence that the objective can be met: Remember seeing is believing. Give details, offering a step-by-step plan of how others have met the objective.
4. Explain how potential problems and concerns will be handled: Think through what potential problems and concerns may arise and deal with them with your rational persuasion. Do not ignore the concerns of others or use statements like: "That won't happen," or "We don't have to worry about that."

5. If there are competing plans to meet the objective, explain why your proposal is better than the others: Do your homework. You need to be well versed about the competition.

"Inspiration is what gets you started. Habit is what keeps you going."
Jim Ryun

Inspirational Appeals

Inspirational appeal is a tactic used to influence others. It is characterized by a leader's ability to tap into followers' emotions and enthusiasm by displaying his or her own feelings about an objective. In order to be effective, a leader must know the followers' values, ideals, and aspirations. Inspirational appeals generally work well with people whose actions are more influenced by emotions than by logical thinking. How do you use inspirational appeals?

1. Appeal to the follower's ideals and values: Consider the common desires of people: to be important, to be useful, to develop skills, to accomplish something worthwhile, to be the best, etc.
2. Link the appeal to the followers' self-concept: Appeal to the self image as a professional or as an integral part of a team, department, or organization.
3. Link the request to a clear appealing vision: Create a vision of how things will be when the objective is achieved, including incentives, advancement, personal and professional growth.
4. Be positive and optimistic: Make your confidence and optimism about meeting the objective contagious. This is especially important when giving difficult, complex tasks to followers who lack self-confidence. Don't forget to mention what is in it for them.
5. Use non-verbal communication to bring emotions to the verbal message: Remember that people interpret about 58% of any communication from what they see! Use nonverbal cues such as facial expressions, body movements, and voice tones. Matching nonverbal cues with the verbal message reinforces the communication.

"Be smart, be intelligent, and be informed."
Tony Allasandra

Consultation

Consultation as a leadership style can be effective in a variety of situations. Consultation requires the leader to seek the follower's input and the leader to be willing to modify the objective and plan based on that input. When using consultation as an influencing tactic, the leader's primary concern is to gain the commitment of the follower to achieve an objective or goal. Followers are more committed to implementing change when they give input. How do you apply consultation as an influencing tactic?

1. Present a tentative proposal and be willing to modify it: Presenting a concept as a proposal offers followers an opportunity to suggest improvements and honestly state their concerns. To gain influence and commitment, it is important to respond to followers' concerns and implement their suggestions.
2. State your objective and ask the followers how they can help: If you expect the followers to resist change, use rational persuasion (Consultant's Corner: Influencing - Part II) and ask how they can help you achieve the goal. Remember that they will ask themselves, "What's in it for me?"

3. State the objective, but let the followers develop the implementation plan: When followers are capable and committed to the goal, implementation of the objectives can be left to the followers.

"A gift opens doors; it gives access to the great"
Author Unknown

Ingratiation

Although ingratiation is often expressly viewed with distaste, in practice it is very common. The key to successful ingratiation is that the person does not realize that you are doing this. This usually means being subtle rather than exaggerated.

Flattery and agreement when people have a high opinion of themselves as it is in alignment with their own views. When they have less self-esteem, flattery acts as a boost and, even if the person does not agree with the comments, they will likely appreciate the kindness.

Flattery and agreement work because to reject the flatterer is to reject the positive comments about oneself. Importantly for persuasion, there is also an exchange dynamic created whereby they feel obliged to repay the kindness.

A way to make the ingratiation more effective and credible is to start with a criticism and end with flattery. If the criticism is of an already known and accepted failure or weakness, then this will not be taken badly. The contrast between the criticism and flattery makes it all the more powerful. It also means you do not need to exaggerate the flattery as much to still have a strong effect.

Rather than stroking the other person, self-presentation works simply on ensuring you look good and are likeable. If they like you, then they are more likely to do as you ask.

Ingratiation is used in organizations for internal political ends, including "strategic ingratiation" that leads to promotion or pay rise. This includes:

1. Befriending and helping important people.
2. Managing the impression others gain of you.
3. Managing the sharing of information for best effect.
4. Getting others promoted so you can fill their shoes.
5. Doing favors and then requesting significant returns.

Organizational politics tend to increase when managers are more powerful and autocratic, when favoritism is common and when individuals are forced to compete with one another for management approval. Ambiguity and uncertainty increases this also as individuals hedge against unexpected criticism.

Ingratiation is not always appreciated and may be seen as manipulation or a low-status, low-self-esteem activity. A way to make ingratiation fail is to overdo it or use it in cultures where any form of ingratiation is viewed with distaste or where authenticity is highly valued.

Helping too much is a typical issue, where the ingratiating person upsets the balance of social capital and the target person becomes annoyed by the implied obligation that is put on them. This may explain why trying to help someone only results in anger and unkindness in return.

In some situations where one person assumes a subservient role, such as waiting table, ingratiation may be the norm and is expected. Waiters who ingratiate are often likely to receive a higher tip.

"Personal relationships are the fertile soil from which all advancement, all success, and all achievement in real life grows."
Ben Stein

Personal Appeals

The personal appeals tactic is characterized by a request to meet an objective based on loyalty and friendship. Personal appeals are especially useful when you, as a leader, have little authority over a person or group, such as when assigning a task to people who work in other departments. Personal appeals are more commonly used with peers and outsiders than with employees or managers. It is also important to have a good relationship with the person or group. If you ask a personal favor of a person who doesn't like you, the request may end in resistance. How do you apply personal appeals as an influencing tactic?

1. Begin by stating that you need a favor and explaining why it is important: Then ask the favor. You are really hoping for an affirmative commitment before giving the details. If people understand why the request is important to you, and you have an established relationship, it will be difficult for them to say no.
2. Appeal to your relationship: Generally, this is not needed if a strong relationship already exists. However, this type of appeal might be successful with customers and people in other departments. You can begin by saying: "We've been working together for some time now and I was wondering if I could ask you a favor?"
3. Tell the followers that you are counting on them: This helps the people to whom you've made the request understand the importance of the request, that you don't want the request ignored, and that failure to help you could hurt the relationship. The stronger the relationship is, the more effective this technique will be.

"A fair exchange brings no quarrel."
Proverb

Exchange

Exchange is reminding someone of past favors or offering to trade. The influencing tactic of exchange is characterized by a leader offering a reward for assistance. The reward may involve sharing the benefits of the objective or something else entirely. The incentive for exchange can be anything seen as valuable: a scarce resource, information, advice, or assistance on another task or professional development. When using exchange to influence others, use the following guidelines:

1. Offer to share the benefits: For example, in doing a report, you can offer to put the person's name on the report or offer to help him/her the next time s/he must do a report.
2. Offer an unrelated reward: With manager-employee relationships, additional time off, additional resources such as equipment, or a promotional reward may be exchanged.
3. Offer to help the employee: If the employee lacks confidence, offering assistance can overcome resistance. Doing an unpleasant task with others can be more fun than doing the task alone.
4. Offer to do some of the employee's work: If the employee has too much work to do already, you can offer to do some of his/her work in exchange for his/her uniquely required talent.
5. Offer to reciprocate later: If you have nothing to exchange now, you can offer your future help for his/her help today. If you use, "I owe you one," always remember to honor your word.

"No matter how stout one beam, it cannot support a house."
Chinese Proverb

Coalition tactics

Coalition tactics involves getting others to support your effort to persuade someone. The coalition tactic is used when a person has difficulty or can't influence another person alone. When using the coalition tactic, an influencer enlists the help of others to persuade. The more people a person can get on his/her side, the more influential s/he is likely to be. This method can be used peer-peer, employee-boss, manager-employee, CEO, Board of Directors, etc. When using coalitions to influence others, use the following guidelines:

1. Tell the person to be persuaded who supports your idea: It's best to first enlist supporters from most influential to least influential and from least resistant to most resistant. The larger the coalition, the lower the resistance is likely to be, even with those who might normally offer greater resistance.
2. Take someone with you when you make the request for support: This step is particularly important when you expect resistance. Support of an idea is more credible if it is present in person rather than just in name.
3. Encourage Discussion: Ask supporters to communicate their support openly with others.
4. Ask others to follow up: If resistance still exists, have others speak to the person who continues to resist. Persistence overcomes resistance.
5. Ask for support from a higher authority: Getting support from a higher authority in an organization leads to greater credibility and decreased resistance.

You can measure a man's character by the choices he makes under pressure."
Winston Churchill

Pressure

The tactic of pressure may range from using assertive behavior, such as repeated demands and frequent checking, to issuing threats and warnings of discipline, to ensure an objective is met. Effective leaders generally do not use pressure as a tactic. However, pressure may be necessary when an individual has low maturity and/or is unwilling to cooperate. While pressure in such a circumstance may bring about compliance, it will rarely create commitment. Pressure may sometimes be necessary to complete a task on time and enforce rules. Hard pressure, such as threats and punishment, may also hurt relationships. Soft pressure, such as continually checking, may not. When using soft pressure:

1. Be persistent: “Close the loop.” When you assign a task, if you are unsure of an individual’s ability to complete the task, check back routinely to determine what progress has been made.
2. Set specific deadlines for task completion: It is most helpful to set deadlines with those who will be responsible for the task to be completed. This will offer you buy-in and agreement.
3. Frequently check progress: Closing the loop will allow you to monitor progress towards the deadline. Always bear in mind that if circumstances beyond an individual’s control interfere with task completion, the deadline may need to be altered. This is usually acceptable when it is known in advance.

“A position of authority is neither necessary nor sufficient for the exercise of leadership." Eric Werkowitz

Legitimating Tactics

Legitimization requires an individual to rely on organizational authority. It is best used when legitimacy of a request or instruction is questioned, for example, an unusual request, a request that exceeds an individual’s authority, or for someone new to a position of authority that is not well known. Relying on legitimization as a primary tactic is generally an ineffective leadership style. When using legitimization:

1. Refer to organizational policies and procedures and other supporting documentation: Explain how the organizations structure supports your authority and request.
2. Refer to written documents: If others don’t believe your verbal reference to documents, show them the policy manuals, work orders, and/or other documents that make your request legitimate.
3. Refer to precedent: If some other person has made that same or a similar request, refer to it in support of your request.
4. Give the name of the person who gave you authority: If the person still does not want to cooperate with the request, give the name of the manager who is specifically authorizing the request in question.

Practical Insights

The tactics of consultation, strong rational persuasion, and inspirational appeals are more likely to generate commitment. Commitment is also more likely when the influence attempt involves something important and enjoyable, and is based on a friendly relationship. Ingratiating tactics can slightly improve performance appraisal results. The “soft” tactics are viewed as fair and the “hard” tactics as unfair. Unfair influence tactics were associated with greater resistance among employees.

For both women and men, task behavior was associated with perceived competence and effective influence in work groups. Dominating behavior was not effective. Interpersonal influence is bound by culture.

Survival Tool #3: Three Influence Outcomes

Many actions and feelings, both positive and negative, can result from the use of power. Obviously, a goal of any good and ethical leader is to use power so that it culminates in a positive outcome. To ensure this positive outcome, the leader must determine what type of power is appropriate for the specific situation. Followers can be expected to react in one of three ways to uses of power.

Commitment. Commitment usually results in substantial agreement followed by initiative and persistence in pursuit of common goals. Followers accept power as reasonable and legitimate.

Compliance. Compliance is a reluctant agreement requiring subsequent prodding to satisfy minimum requirements. Followers accept the process and go along with it, although they don’t feel deep commitment to it.

Resistance. Resistance is evidenced by stalling, unproductive arguing, or outright rejection. Followers don’t agree with the attempt at influence and resist it.

Survival Tool #4: Influencing and Persuading Others

Persuasion can be quite simple that anyone can understand it. There are six triggers that influence us to act, to believe, to be persuaded: reciprocity, commitment, social proof, liking, authority, and scarcity. Let’s take each one in turn.

Reciprocity. This idea is baked so deeply in us that it may be innate. Some studies show babies at a very early stage demonstrating basic forms of reciprocity. The concept is very simple: If you do something for me, I feel obligated to do something of similar value in return.

Commitment. We humans love to make commitments. If we make a small commitment, we’re more likely to make a big one to that same idea, person, or cause. It’s why fundraising people ask you for any amount, no matter how small, because once you start giving, you’re more likely to keep on doing so.

Social Proof. We're a social species. If we see lots of other people doing something, we're more likely to do it too.

Liking. If you tell me you like me, I'm more likely to be persuaded by something you say. I *find people* I like more persuasive than others. And I tend to like people who are similar to me.

Authority. People who are able to invoke authority, any kind of authority, are more likely to persuade me than people who don't. We still look up to our leaders, our teachers, our presidents, in spite of the bad press that so many institutions have had of late.

Scarcity. If something is scarce, I'm more likely to find it appealing, or persuasive, or attractive. When there only a few of something, I want them!

The power here lies in its simplicity and clarity. These six impulses are very powerful motivators for us humans. If you can invoke one or more of them, you will find the persuasive power of your argument, your speech, or your pitch going up. Way up.

Survival Tool #5: Favorable Impression Management

Typically, employees use impression management strategies in three ways: job-focused, supervisor-focused, and self-focused. Job-focused strategies involve self-promoting behaviors and are designed to make employees appear more competent at their job. Supervisor-focused strategies involve ingratiation behaviors and are designed to make employees appear considerate and helpful. Self-focused strategies involve exemplification behaviors and are used to make individuals look like nice, polite, and dedicated employees. As described below, the use of each of these impression-management strategies is likely to way employees are seen as engaging in citizenship behaviors.

<u>Job-focused: Manipulating Information about One's Performance.</u>

Job-focused tactics involve behaviors and verbal statements related to the employee's performance on the job. These tactics often involve the presentation of performance-related information in a way that attempts to impress others. Such behaviors have frequently been described as self-promotion. In particular, employees who engage in job-focused tactics tend to take responsibility for positive events (even when they are not solely responsible), tend to make negative events for which they are responsible seem less negative than they truly are, and try to play up their accomplishments and credentials. While such behaviors are designed to make employees appear more competent, they often result in very negative outcomes.

Employees who use job-focused strategies involving self-promotion tend to be seen unfavorably by supervisors and the peers. Similarly, employees who promote themselves are less likely to be seen as team players or good citizens.

<u>Supervisor-focused: Praising and Doing Favors for One's Supervisor.</u>

Supervisor-focused strategies involve ingratiatory behaviors. These strategies might include the use of flattery or opinion conformity. Employees who employ these strategies may praise their supervisors, compliment them, or agree with their ideas. Supervisor-focused strategies might also involve favor-rendering behavior. For example, employees using such strategies may offer to do personal favors for their supervisors. Supervisors view these employees as helpful, kind, and considerate. These strategies are more effective on job performance than job-focused strategies.

As you might imagine, employees who engage in supervisor-focused strategies of impression management tend to be seen more favorably by their supervisors. It is expected, therefore, that employees who do favors for their supervisors or say nice things about them will be more likely to be seen by their superiors as good organizational citizens.

Self-focused: Presenting Oneself as a Polite and Nice Person
Self-focused strategies are aimed at making the employee who uses them appear hardworking and kind. Employees who engage in self-focused strategies seek to present themselves as being friendly. They also tend to work especially hard when others are looking and try to act like a "model" employee in front of their supervisors. Thus, employees may utilize such behaviors in order to be seen as good, loyal employees who are willing to go the extra mile. Employees who used these strategies were more likely to be seen as 'dedicated' by their peers and less likely to be seen as "lazy."

Survival Tool #6: Keeping Organizational Politics within Reasonable Bounds

Establish formal conflict resolution and grievance processes. This includes the employee, the supervisor and human resources. Many companies have implementation compliance programs with a 1-800 hotline for complaints. They key to the success of these programs is multiple paths to reporting. This kind of process will short circuit many of the political underpinnings and manipulation.

As an ethics filter, do only what you feel comfortable doing on national television. This is the equivalent of reading your e-mail on the front page of the New York Times or Wall Street Journal. This will keep you accountable for your actions.

Publicly recognize and reward people who get real results without political games. This eventually sends a message to political players that their antics are not going to be rewarded.

Screen out overly political individuals at hiring time. It never gets better than the interview. Among the many behaviors to notice during the interview process is the political inclination of the job candidates. Ask telling questions that peel back the onion skin of the candidate's true nature. If they reveal a tendency to be political especially when there is little reason to do so, be ready to screen them out. This will make the organization run better and will sustain the open management style you have hopefully established.

Create and open-book management system. Transparency of your own actions with your subordinates sets the stage of how you manage. As the leader of the group, your subordinates behave accordingly. Conversely, if you are political, expect your employees to pick up the habit and use it on you.

Make sure every employee knows how the business works and has a personal line of sight to key results. Keeping everyone focused on the goals rather than each other keeps politics to a minimum. There is literally no time to waste playing those games. A good premise to follow is, "The main thing is to keep the main thing, the main thing."

Establish formal conflict resolution and grievance processes. This is easy for larger companies with compliance programs already in place, but for smaller companies, this is not the norm. However, develop a process, however simple, so there are clear lines to file a grievance.

Survival Tool #7: Surviving Mergers and Acquisitions

Just when you thought the joint ventures, mergers and acquisitions were over, they have resurfaced. Judging from recent activity, organizations in such industries as health care, oil and gas, telecommunications, consulting and accounting believe pairing off is the best way to grow and tap new markets.

But when companies join forces, every employee, from the CEO to the new hire, is affected. Even if you have many years of experience, it is difficult to prepare for the ensuing change, the uncertainty, and confusion that follow the corporate transaction. Employees must deal with fears about job security and retirement, insurance and other benefits while phasing in changes required by the new owner and operator. Employee workloads increase, along with personal frustrations. Sometimes the hardest part is the initial uncertainty and confusion.

The greatest anxiety that tops the list during these activities is clearly job loss. With mergers apparently increasing, the road will be a rough one. If your company is merging or being acquired, don't expect the transition to be smooth. You'll have to contend with organizational chaos and your own emotions. To embrace a new company and take ownership is difficult when no guidelines exist. To survive, chart your career in the new company and handle relationships with co-workers and colleagues effectively. Here are some tips:

Develop a Plan. As an engineer, I talk a lot about plans. While many SH&E professionals do not have plans of any kind, you'll weather the merger transition better if you have a strategy for managing your career.

The plan should include goals for long-term career success and short-term job survival. Develop a list of networking contacts, explore different career options and set funds aside for a financial emergency. You also should practice following up with contacts and headhunters about potential job opportunities.

Developing an action plan to guide you through the ongoing process of mergers is imperative. It keeps you from becoming confused and overwhelmed.

Maintain Your Professional Integrity. Knowing how to satisfy your current employer, while preparing to work for another, is an acquired skill. Make decisions carefully to avoid jeopardizing your relationship with either regime. The layers and layers of new management may complicate even simple choices.

Double-check the effect of decisions where results aren't immediately apparent. Show the new management team that you're a consummate manager by remaining optimistic and open to new challenges and responsibilities. If you are the pessimist who believes that the glass is not just half empty but upside down, your half-life with the new management will be even shorter.

Be tactful with peers. Mergers test work relationships, especially those with colleagues whose jobs may be phased out. Your dealings with others will take on a new dimension as job descriptions change, and layoffs are announced. Your position may survive, but a colleague's might not. Listen and be empathetic to his or her plight. Offer encouragement and suggestions. Minimize your feeling of relief so you don't seem oblivious to others' pain and worry. In other words, be sensitive to their pain.

Watch what you say about the merger. You'll receive subtle and pointed questions about your future from coworkers, friends and family. Decide how to respond in advance. Know what information you can share and don't divulge details that breach confidentiality. Zip your lip when asked details that are proprietary. If you don't, and are found out, you may move from the keeper list to the layoff list. State confidently that you hope to be in a new routine soon. Don't make negative or cynical comments about the acquiring company, since judgmental statements may hurt you in the future. This is where I have the most trouble. I am very opinionated and, as a result, sometimes judgmental. I guess it comes with being an engineer. I sometimes have to bite my lip when asked pointed questions and just say I'm not sure how this or that will go.

Learn to be a chameleon. If your company is acquired, you must shed your old identity and loyalty and adopt new ones immediately. Avoid the starter phrase, "When I was at such and such a company, we did it this way." Nobody cares and the former company doesn't exist anymore anyway. So, remove that phrase from your repertory. The only constant in today's workplace is change, and dwelling on the past, instead of the current reality, will make the transition more difficult. Remember, you can respect your previous employer and still develop loyalty to a new owner.

Assume personal control of your career path. You may be worried about a job or position change, but you don't have to feel demoralized. Be mentally tough, and make positive things happen by taking advantage of new opportunities that come from the realignment. Participate in activities that allow you to feel a sense of accomplishment. I look at all of these activities as opportunities to excel and move up the food chain rather than down the food chain in the organization chart.

Manage your emotions. Unexpected changes in work environments can throw you emotionally. In time, you may lose your position, employer and colleagues. If this happens, don't minimize the loss. Allow yourself time to grieve, then move on. If you don't, you can easily harden your heart to others' plight and lose your sensitivity to other people. Take a positive attitude. View change as a stepping stone to something better. Don't dwell on your loss or the past. Assume the future offers even better possibilities.

Relieve frustration with stimulating physical activities. Sports, such as tennis, or racquetball, or some other sort of exercise, coupled with a healthy diet, are stress reducers. By improving your physical fitness, you'll have the stamina to cope with change and remain productive amid the turmoil.

Assume a positive leadership role. You won't score points by making difficult situations worse or by creating problems. Demonstrate leadership skills by helping employees pull together for the new team. Don't take sides in office gossip, spread misinformation or behave like a victim, which demoralizes others and reflects poorly on you.

Realize that some things never change. Mission statements and job descriptions can be rewritten, but what's required of a good employee remains constant. Corporations need capable professionals to handle challenges, save time, and improve efficiency. If you're interested in being a survivor, show your new employer your willingness to help. Above all, don't panic during a realignment. I know that this is easy to say but difficult to do. You may have rely strongly on your spouse, friends, relatives, significant others, etc., to achieve this.

Find new rules for success. Not long ago, experience, expertise and efficiency were key requirements for advancement. Today's requirements include innovation, creativity and resilience. Develop team leadership abilities and self-reliance and be ready to act on new opportunities. Taking advantage of promotion opportunities that result from a merger may give you an edge and help you remain employed. If you assume change is bad, you may make it a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Keep events in perspective and expect some unpleasantness. Periodically weigh the pros and cons of your job. If negatives outweigh positives after the merger, it may be time to rethink your career. Explore all your options before deciding to leave, and don't be discouraged by the prospect of job hunting. Being asked to leave isn't necessarily fatal. There's always a market for talented people.

Accelerate your networking activities. Beyond professional society network, helping peers is as important as gaining their assistance. It can be amazing how many people can come to your assistance when you helped them in time of need. The outpouring of assistance can even be overwhelming. Also, many employees will lose jobs because of overlapping job descriptions and new priorities, not because they're incompetent. Be aware of openings and refer others whenever possible. By being helpful, you'll receive assistance when you need it.

Create a survival kit. Determine what you must do to remain secure and calm during this period. Participate in outside activities that help you feel anchored and self-confident. Develop a support system and postpone difficult decisions in other areas of your life until your career stabilizes. Monitor your self-esteem and avoid those who trigger negative feelings. It is difficult to get a job when you interview like an abused dog. Keep your chin up and persevere. Seek to be interdependent. Your survival kit should include people who can encourage you and be uplifting and supportive.

Be entrepreneurial about your career. Explore and evaluate different options. Polish your technological skills and develop a backup plan. Daydream about ways to improve your life. If you can visualize it, you might be able to accomplish it.

Become philosophical. William Faulkner wrote that "man will not merely endure, he will prevail." This is true in the turbulent corporate world. Even if your department is being eliminated and your future is uncertain, realize you have the strength to solve problems, create new opportunities and above all, to prevail.

Surviving a merger can be very challenging. But implementing some of these strategies can make it a little more bearable.

Survival Tool #8: Boardroom Blunders

Your arrival. Arriving just a few minutes before the meeting is scheduled to begin, rather than giving yourself time to socialize with others prior to the meeting.

It starts as soon as you walk in the room. Not recognizing that as soon as two people are in the room, the "informal" meeting has begun.

Seating. Taking a seat before others sit down. Also, sitting to the immediate left or right of the person running the meeting unless asked to do so

When to speak up. Not asking for the floor through verbal or nonverbal cues before beginning to speak.

Where did that come from? Not "bridging" what you are going to say with what has just been discussed.

Egotism is ugly. Speaking in the first-person singular (I) rather than in the first person plural (we) when sharing good news.

The performer formerly known as Prince. This means that you speak in the second-person singular (you) rather than in the first-person singular (I) when making recommendations.

Agenda! Agenda! Who need a stinking agenda! Bringing up topics that are not on the agenda without being asked.

Clean and Pressed, NOT clean and jerk! Not recognizing that the attention you pay to detail in your professional appearance equates to the attention you pay to detail in your work.

5 Classic Boardroom Blunders

Think it's "no big deal." The CEO walks into your office and nonchalantly says, "You've got 20 minutes to pitch your business unit's plan at tomorrow's board meeting." Your near-panic is visible, so he adds, "Don't sweat it; it's no big deal." Just because *he* says or acts as if it's no big deal doesn't mean it's no big deal. I'm sure *his* first time was a big deal. Prepare. Know your material cold and be ready for a healthy amount of Q&A.

Walk in with a half-baked plan. Boards are typically comprised of smart, opinionated people who are also former or current executives. If you pitch a half-baked plan, it may get twisted, debated, and mutated to the point where you end up getting a green light to do something that bears little or no resemblance to your original plan. And if it fails, it's still your plan ... and your fault.

Try to out-maneuver a founder. Don't underestimate the loyalty, power, and sway even a dysfunctional founder may still have with a board that owes its existence - and perhaps riches - to him. Even if you're the CEO, you can do irreparable damage to your standing or even get fired - which I've seen happen. Exercise extreme caution.

Expect the board to actually **do** *something.* Never forget that it's the job of company executives to manage, plan, strategize, make decisions, and of course, execute. The board's job is to provide oversight, advice, and sometimes, connections. If you need something from them, be clear and upfront about it, but don't expect much more than feedback.

Pitch a controversial plan without support. I watched a president get shot down by the chairman (who incidentally was right) after pitching a controversial acquisition. It was embarrassing in front of all the officers and directors, but it didn't have to happen. They had a good relationship; the president should have sought one-on-one feedback prior to the meeting. Rally some support before the meeting for hot or controversial ideas.

Survival Tool #9: Dealing with Email

Even though we use e-mail as though it is just another mode of communication, it can be a dangerous one. There have been many a senior level executive released to “pursue other interests,” that were otherwise performing well. E-mail is an Achilles heel. Use it as you would formal memos because they can be used against you. Assume all e-mails will be forwarded to those not on the cc list. E-mail can bite back and bite back hard. Consider the following when writing / sending e-mail:

Read and re-read for content and tone. Tone is not communicated in black and white letters in an e-mail. Try to decipher the tone before you hit the send button. Think of how the reader will respond

Would a phone call be better? Often, a phone call would be better, especially if the e-mail is of a regulatory compliance or legal issue. Attorneys can twist your innocent words to construe things you never imagined.

Avoid e-mail “copy all” wars. Enough said. Don’t participate or watch. Ask to be dropped from the e-mail thread.

Limit your e-mail to one screen (½ pane rule). If it goes longer than this, call the person you are trying to communicate with.

Use bullets and underlining for emphasis. This helps draw the attention to what is important. We all get inundated with long e-mails. Make it easy for the reader to figure out what is important.

Don’t let e-mail replace phone calls. If you are an introvert, this is probably your preferred mode of communication. Introverts prefer e-mails precisely because they do not want to talk to people. Don’t let this happen to you.

Remember the compassionate human element. Please remember we are in the business of safety which has a compassionate human side. Don't become so cold that you communicate primarily in cold e-mails.

Be very careful with E-mail. Sometimes responding to e-mails is like defusing a bomb. It must be done very, very carefully.

Think about who may read your message. A good assumption is that the worst possible recipient will get it.

Watch your tone, sarcastic, "all caps." This is akin to yelling and can wear thin on recipients.

Avoid starting out with a negative. Just like audit debriefings, start positive, or your e-mail will be read with a jaundiced eye.

Is your message too cryptic? Abbreviations and acronyms can be misleading. So stop doing this PDQ ASAP NLT than tomorrow.

Check for grammar. Please, please, please check your grammar. Nothing is worse than this and reflects poorly on you as the sender. Some of the biggest offenders are misusing "gone" and "went." This and others can really annoy the reader and makes you look illiterate.

No junk e-mail, no jokes. Period. Doing so can do nothing but get you in trouble.

Only send relevant information, which is defined as just what the person needs to know. Apply the KISS method. Keep it simple stupid.

Limit "CCs" (which might be more appropriately named CYA). The whole world doesn't need to know about this conversation. Address the issue with the fewest possible recipients necessary.

Don't ping-pong with e-mail for a conversation; use the phone. A good rule of thumb is to start a new thread after about 3 pings. Who needs all the information in the thread anyway?

Deal with it and delete it. Keep you inbox clean and free of old unneeded e-mails. See below for more reasons.

Don't read every e-mail as it comes in; handle them in batches. This is part of time management. Otherwise you can become addicted to e-mail which many have done. Remember, you are in control of the e-mail. It is not in control of you.

Phrases to Avoid Saying in an E-mail: What Attorneys Look for…

When attorneys litigate, they get email in discovery and look for phrases like those listed below. If you need to write this in an e-mail, just pick up the phone and call.

1. I really shouldn't put this in writing.

2. We’re going to do this differently than normal.
3. Can we really do that?
4. Don’t ask. You don’t want to know.
5. I don’t want to discuss this in e-mail. Please give me a call.

“Words” the Securities and Exchange Commission and the Department of Justice Look for in E-mail During an Investigation

In a similar manner and of equal importance, the SEC looks for these key words when investigating. So, just be warned of the consequences if you choose to use them:

1. Conceal/hide/bury
2. Monopoly/monopolize
3. Madoff/Enron
4. Delete this message
5. Manual override/bypass
6. Houston, we’ve got a problem
7. Fraud
8. Magic
9. Improper
10. Crush competition
11. God forbid

Summary

These are certainly not all the political issues you need to be aware of but they are certainly part of your survival kit to avoid key land mines in the corporate world. Some may seem like common sense, but in the heat of battle, we sometimes forget as we get caught up in the banter of everyday corporate communications with superiors, peers and subordinates. Just remember, less is more, and that guiding principle will take you far.

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