

A Positive Approach to Office Politics -- by Danielle Dresden

Do you long for an office without politics? You might as well dream of work without stress, because it's about as likely.

Furthermore, you might not like either very much.

Stress isn't necessarily problematic and neither is office politics. Stress gets destructive when there's too much of it and it's not handled appropriately. Office politics turns negative when it's cynical and self-aggrandizing.

But it doesn't have to be that way. As Allen Cohen, author of **Influence Without Authority**, put it, "Politics is the art of trying to accomplish things within an organization."

Politics can help you pursue opportunities and meet important needs. Michael Warshaw, writing for "***Fast Company***," identified five steps for a successful office politics campaign. The first, and perhaps most important point, is that nobody wins unless everybody wins.

A "divide and conquer" approach to office politics creates losers all around. Clear, consistent and honest communication is the best way to prevent development of internal factions.

Make sure everyone knows, understands and actually does what they're supposed to do. Misinformation creates a fertile breeding for self-serving and dishonest office politics. If employees are clear on what's going on, where the organization is headed, what's expected of them and how they're evaluated, they will be less likely to get involved in manipulation and conflict.

But no news -- or gossip or occasional employee dust-ups -- is not necessarily good news. Leslie A Perlow, a professor at the Harvard Business School, said research shows that not only isn't silence polite, it can be downright dangerous. Employees may not express their differences so they can preserve working relationships and get their jobs done, but this tactic can backfire. Silence in the workplace can build anger and cut productivity, Perlow said.

Managers need to prevent this sort of organizational sepsis. Try modeling a positive approach to conflict resolution in your dealings with employees. When disagreements arise, demonstrate active listening and focus on fixing the future, rather than rehashing the past. Emphasize principles above personalities. Put organizational needs and priorities above individual positions.

Potential problems are more common than you might think. In a recent ***PharmacyWeek*** poll, 52.8% of those responding said "other staff slacking" was the behavior which

caused the most problems at work. Internal conflicts and problems were cited by another 33.3%

But if you regularly practice a constructive approach to conflict resolution, you'll establish an environment where your employees are likely to do the same. Although your office won't be stress or politics-free, it can be more positive than negative.