CHAPTER 11:
POSITIVE POLITICAL SKILLS

The purpose of this chapter is to help students gain the knowledge and skills necessary to make positive use of organizational politics. Career advancement is difficult without developing at least moderate political sensitivity.

CHAPTER OUTLINE AND LECTURE NOTES

A knowledge of positive political tactics helps build good interpersonal relationships. In turn, these good relationships can facilitate achieving career goals. Political skills are a supplement to, not a substitute for, job competence. Organizational politics refers to gaining power through any means other than merit or luck. Politics has also been defined as the art of trying to accomplish things in organizations. Politics are used to achieve power, the ability or potential to control anything of value and influence decisions. Political tactics power control and influence.

I. IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT AND ETIQUETTE

To get ahead, it may be important to make others aware of one’s capability. Impression management is a set of behaviors directed at enhancing one’s image by drawing attention to oneself. The attention can be drawn to superficial aspects or to work accomplishments.

A. Tactics of Impression Management

Managing one’s impression encompasses dozens of specific tactics, limited only by one’s imagination of what will impress others. Self-Assessment Exercise 11-2 (of the text) lists 28 tactics of impression management. William L. Gardner III offers sage advice: "Make every effort to put your best foot forward—but never at the cost of your identity or integrity."

B. Business Etiquette

A major component of impression management is to practice good etiquette. Business etiquette is a special code of behavior required in work situations. Both manners and etiquette generally refer to behaving in a refined and acceptable manner. The general principle of being considerate of the feelings of work associates is more important than any one act of etiquette or courtesy.

1. Etiquette for Work Behavior and Clothing. General work etiquette includes all aspects of the work environment such as timely completion of work, punctuality, being a good team player, listening to others, and following through. A caution about casual business clothing is that being neat and clean is part of being casual.
2. **Introducing People.** The basic rule for introductions is to present the lower-ranking person to the higher-ranking person regardless of age or sex. Provide a little amount of information about the person. It is good manners to remember names and to pronounce them correctly. Men and women are now both expected to extend their right hand when being introduced.

3. **Using the Telephone.** Most business communication over the phone requires live interaction between people. Guidelines for proper business etiquette include identifying your company, your department, and yourself.

4. **Dining.** Etiquette surrounding meals involves planning for the meeting, seating arrangements, bill paying, tipping, using proper table manners, and appropriate drinking of alcoholic beverages.

5. **Hard Copy and e-mail Correspondence.** Guidelines for writing letters include using a courtesy title in the inside address, typing the name and address correctly, and using the correct closing line. E-mail messages should be proofread, be sent only when necessary, and should generally be no longer than one screen not including attachments. Avoid the informality of personal e-mail messages when corresponding for business purposes.

6. **Using Electronic Devices in Addition to e-mail.** Each electronic device has its own potential etiquette problems, such as surfing the Net on company time, and hogging the photocopying machine. Many cell phone users invade the tranquility of others in hearing distance.

7. **Cross-Cultural Relations.** Be alert to cross-cultural differences in etiquette in such areas as gift giving, dining, drinking alcoholic beverages, and where and when to discuss business. Watch out for differences in nonverbal communication.

8. **Interacting with People with Disabilities.** Be as natural and open as you can. Keep in mind specifics such as speaking directly to a person with a disability, not to the person’s companion.

**III. BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH SUPERIORS**

The political purpose of building good relationships with superiors is to gain power through such means as being recommended for promotion and key assignments. Building these good relationships is also important because it helps create a positive, supportive work environment. A list of useful tactics follows:

1. Network with influential people. (A basic success strategy is to develop
contacts, or network, with influential people.)
2. Help your manager succeed. (The primary reason a person is hired is to help the manager to achieve the results necessary to succeed.)
3. Volunteer for assignments.
4. Flatter influential people. (One of the most effective relationship builders is to flatter people sensibly and credibly.)
5. Use information power. (Power accrues to those who control vital information.)
6. Appear cool under pressure. (Maintaining emotional control under chaos conditions shows one is ready for additional responsibility.)
7. Laugh at your boss’s humor. (Sharing humor is a rapport builder.)
8. Express constructive disagreement. (Be ready to disagree in a constructive manner when you sincerely believe the boss is wrong.)

III. BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH CO-WORKERS AND OTHER WORK ASSOCIATES

Another strategy for increasing one’s power is to form alliances with coworkers and other work associates (a politically correct term to replace workers of lesser rank). These individuals help one get work accomplished, and their input might be solicited when a person is being considered for promotion. The increasing use of peer evaluation systems makes coworker relationships even more important. In addition to the following list, the teamwork skills described in Chapter 4 are also relevant.

1. Maintain honest and open relationships.
2. Make others feel important.
3. Express an interest in their work.
4. Be diplomatic.
5. Exchange favors (reciprocity works).
6. Ask advice. (Asking another person for advice will usually be perceived as a compliment.)
7. Share constructive gossip. (Positive gossip is a relationship builder.)
8. Buddy up to the tech-fixers. (Being able to get back running after a computer failure gives you power indirectly.)
9. Follow group norms (unwritten sets of expectations for group members.)

IV. AVOIDING POLITICAL BLUNDERS
A strategy for not losing whatever power you have accumulated is to refrain from making power-eroding blunders. A sampling of these blunders follows.

1. Criticizing the boss in a public forum.
2. Bypassing the manager.
3. Overt displays of disloyalty (such as criticizing the company publicly).
4. Being a pest. (Over-persistence can backfire.)
5. Being (or being perceived as) a poor team player.

**ANSWERS TO DISCUSSION AND REVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. To what extent are office politics skills important for a person who is technically competent and hard working?

   Keeping your nose to the grindstone works as a career-advancement strategy to some extent. To gain the power you might want and need, however, it pays to engage in positive politics such as cultivating a network of influential people. The hard-working, talented person may get recognized but it is worthwhile to increase the odds of getting noticed and acquiring power.

2. Would you want to work for a person who achieved a maximum score on the Organizational Politics Questionnaire? Explain.

   Most students would not want to work for a person who achieved a maximum score on the politics questionnaire. Assuming the questionnaire is valid, a top scorer would be power-hungry and ruthless.

3. Identify three impression management tactics presented in text Self-Assessment Exercise 11-2 that would be acceptable to you. Explain your reasoning.

   People generally accept or reject tactics of impression management based on their ethics and values. Even the most ethical students should find plenty of tactics in the questionnaire that match their values. For example, who would object to being self-confident or achieving high job performance?

4. Identify three impression management tactics presented in Self-Assessment Exercise 11-2 that would be unacceptable to you. Explain your reasoning.

   Again, ethics and values would moderate the answer to this question. For many people, the following could be interpreted as unethical: (a) creating a problem and then solving it to look good, (b) exaggerating accomplishments, and (c) flattering people.

5. Identify three jobs in which you think practicing good business etiquette would be the most important.
High-level jobs with extensive business contact require the highest degree of ethical skill. Among them would be public affairs specialist, industrial sales representative, and executive secretary or executive assistant.

6. Etiquette training for people in high-level business positions is more popular than ever. How would you explain the popularity of such training in the recent era?

Many people in high-level business positions need etiquette training because etiquette is de-emphasized in families and among peers. One example is that family sit-down dinners in which etiquette is demanded are less frequent today. Also, rudeness has become the norm in dozens of situations including telemarketers addressing strangers by their first name, and people interrupting meetings and casual conversations to address a cell-phone caller.

7. A candidate for an information system analyst position was well on his way to receiving a job offer. As part of the final screening process, he was taken to lunch by the team leader and two team members. During lunch the candidate left a spoon in his coffee cup and sucked in a few strands of spaghetti. Based on these table manners, the team declined to extend the candidate a job offer. What is your reaction to this scenario?

A sensible question to ask here is the extent to which good dining etiquette is part of an information system analyst’s role. (We can also assume that a person who has poor dining etiquette has poor etiquette in other areas also.) If the analyst would dine frequently with external and internal customers, poor etiquette would be a legitimate disqualifier.

8. It has been said that although most people can see through flattery, the technique still works. How would you explain this observation?

Whether or not flattery is transparent, it still works with most people for several reasons. One reason is that many people have such strong needs for recognition that they do not care if the recognition is genuine. Another reason is that most people do not receive enough compliments, and are therefore predisposed to accept any flattery that comes along.

9. How ethical is it to ask a person for advice about a problem even if you already know which solution you will use?

Some students would regard this tactic as manipulative, and therefore unethical. Yet others would argue that this is what many managers do when they pretend to be practicing group decision-making so the tactic is ethical.
10. Describe how e-mail can be used to play positive office politics, as well as for unethical purposes.

E-mail is a widely used political tool. An ethical approach would be to send an e-mail message complimenting an influential person, or compliment a coworker with a copy to an influential person. An unethical approach would be to criticize somebody by e-mail, with distribution to key people. Also, some people send many messages advising people against a particular course of action. If the course of action fails, the sender of the e-mail re-sends the warning message with copies to influential people.

ANSWERS TO CASE QUESTIONS

The Unnoticed Group Member

The theme of this case is the perennial one of how to impress management enough to stand out as having the potential to be promoted.

1. If you were Sydney, what advice would you give Troy?

Sydney should encourage Troy to search for ways to create a more favorable impression on his manager. Troy might attempt to identify the behaviors that do impress his manager.

2. Which techniques for getting along with one’s manager might Troy be neglecting?

A fundamental mistake Troy might be making is that his job performance, as perceived by his boss, is average or above-average, not outstanding. He may need to contribute outstanding performance. He might also go through the techniques listed in this chapter in check-list fashion to see which ones he might be neglecting. For example, is Troy helping his manager succeed? Is he appearing cool under pressure?

3. Is Penny being fair in her evaluation of Troy?

Penny appears to be fair because she is honest with Troy. She is communicating her lukewarm reaction to his chances for being promoted in the near future.

COMMENTS ABOUT QUIZZES AND EXERCISES

The Organizational Politics Questionnaire
Students typically enjoy comparing their scores to normative data. One finding that occurs regularly is that many students who receive relatively high scores do not perceive themselves to be very political.

*The Positive Impression Survey*

Here again is an opportunity to compare oneself to normative data. Another potential value of this exercise is that students may be alerted to tactics of impression management they had not thought of previously. Several students, for example, who have taken this questionnaire were alerted to the potential utility of greeting cards as an influence tactic.

*Business Etiquette (Quiz)*

It is important to recognize that some declarations about what constitutes good etiquette appear arbitrary. An example would be question number 5 about the right time to fold a napkin. Answers to several of these questions would therefore warrant a few minutes of discussion.

*Business Etiquette (Role-Play)*

Students who are willing to invest the time in these roles-plays will find them useful. Under the pressure of a live interaction, people often neglect to practice the etiquette they know should be practiced.

*Flattering an Influential Person*

A beneficial aspect of doing a role-play about flattery is that students come to realize that being an effective flatterer requires skill. However, the students who volunteer are usually pretty effective flatterers. For an added kick to this role-play, ask a few students to flatter the role players.

*The Coworker Relationships Quiz*

To the extent that the self-assessments are accurate, a person with a high score on this quiz would be politically astute with respect to coworker relationships. A low-scorer would have poor political skills in dealing with peers.

*Getting Along with Coworkers*

A feature of the two role-plays in this exercise is that students have an opportunity to practice basic human relations skills. Many students fumble a bit when trying to
express an interest in the work of the store associate, thus pointing to the need for skill development.

*The Blunder Quiz*

Taking the blunder quiz can alert students to potential areas for career self-sabotage. A fruitful discussion item is to explore the meaning of an affirmative response to Number 10, "I avoid office politics of any kind."
EXAMINATION QUESTIONS

Multiple Choice

(b) 1. The position taken in the human relations text is that organizational politics refers to gaining advantage by
   a. dirty tricks.
   b. any means other than merit or luck.
   c. the formal use of power.
   d. hard work and good performance.

(d) 2. Which of the following sequences best describes the relationship among politics, power and influence?
   a. power  political tactics  control and influence
   b. control and influence  power  political tactics
   c. political tactics  control and influence  power
   d. political tactics  power  control and influence

(d) 3. A major purpose of impression management is to
   a. become a high-performance contributor.
   b. become known as a good dresser.
   c. help your boss with his or her impression.
   d. draw attention to oneself.

(a) 4. An expert quoted in the text, offered the following advice when managing your impression:
   a. Be yourself.
   b. Manipulate others whenever the opportunity arises.
   c. Hide your identity if you have to.
   d. Forget about integrity while building your career.

(d) 5. Both manners and etiquette refer to
   a. behaviors expected of white-collar professionals.
   b. effective telephone behavior.
   c. being a smooth office politician.
   d. behaving in a refined and acceptable manner.

(a) 6. A general principle of etiquette in the workplace is to
   a. be considerate of the feelings of work associates.
   b. look sharp at every available opportunity.
   c. criticize others gently.
   d. smile and be positive even when in a down mood.
7. When introducing people of different rank, proper etiquette is to introduce
   a. both by first name only.
   b. the youngest first.
   c. the person of lower rank first.
   d. the person of higher rank first.

8. Which of the following is recommended etiquette for proper telephone
   business usage?
   a. Answer the phone by the fifth ring.
   b. Answer the phone by the third ring.
   c. Say "Bye Bye" at the end of the call.
   d. Mention the company but not your name.

9. You arrange a business lunch for a client and two work associates. In
   regard to paying the bill,
   a. inform the server in advance who will pay the bill.
   b. ask the client to pay for just the tip.
   c. divide the bill four ways.
   d. ask the server to put the bill in the middle of the table.

10. A point of etiquette to keep in mind when sending e-mail is that
    a. rules of etiquette do not apply to e-mail.
    b. the way in which you send a message tells something about you.
    c. using line justification is a heavy insult.
    d. salutations such as "Dear ____________" are now regarded as
        poor etiquette.

11. A major etiquette problem with cellular (cell) phones is that their users often
    a. speak in a private language others cannot understand.
    b. disturb the tranquillity of others.
    c. conduct business during religious services.
    d. poke other people with the cell phone antenna.

12. When in doubt about proper etiquette in a given situation, a general guide is to
    a. imagine how a member of royalty would behave.
    b. trust your hunches.
    c. observe how a successful person in the group behaves.
    d. ask others, "Am I being a boor?"

13. A key aspect of using networking as a career tactic is that a person should
    a. have lunch with somebody new at least once a week.
b. do most networking by e-mail to save time.
c. network with people mostly outside of the company.
d. develop contacts with influential people.

(c) 14. For flattery to work effectively, it is important to
   a. use it sparingly.
   b. combine it with a sprinkling of criticism.
   c. add an element of credibility.
   d. tell the other person you will be using flattery.

(a) 15. A study of workers who flattered their managers concluded that flattering
   a. paid off in terms of positive evaluations.
   b. tended to double a person’s salary increases.
   c. resulted in more negative evaluations.
   d. tended to lower a person’s salary increases.

(a) 16. To use information power effectively, the person must
   a. control information not readily available to others.
   b. become a major source of gossip within the firm.
   c. become an information systems specialist.
   d. develop exceptional skill in using the Internet.

(c) 17. Laughing at your boss’s humor tends to be an effective political
tactic because
   a. kissing up is a standard part of most jobs.
   b. most managers are emotionally insecure.
   c. the shared laughter helps build rapport.
   d. it costs more to implement than other tactics.

(b) 18. A recommended method of expressing constructive disagreement is to
   a. send an anonymous letter to your boss explaining your position.
   b. use carefully worded, inoffensive statements.
   c. express the disagreement during a staff meeting.
   d. joke about your boss’s limited understanding of the problem.

(a) 19. If you ignore strategies for getting along with others on the job,
the most likely negative consequence will be
   a. not gaining a wide base of support.
   b. lowering your technical competence.
   c. early dismissal from your job.
   d. being excluded from certain employee benefits.

(c) 20. The tactic, make others feel important, is
a. considered to be a political blunder.
b. used primarily in building relationships with superiors.
c. valuable for building coworker relationships.
d. too old fashioned to be effective in most situations.

(d) 21 A key characteristic of positive gossip for relationship building is that it
a. does not identify the people involved in the gossip scenario.
b. does not involve company personnel.
c. focuses on the social life of key personnel.
d. does not attack others.

(b) 22. A major purpose of the tactic, buddy-up to the tech-fixers, is to establish a
working relationship with technical service workers so you
a. get them to take over some of your responsibilities.
b. can get computer help when you need it.
c. impress managers with your technical expertise.
d. get them to help you send your resume over the Internet if needed.

(d) 23. Diana, a resident in heart surgery, brings her complaint directly
to the top administrator of the hospital. She is committing the political
blunder called
a. criticizing the boss in a public forum.
b. being a pest,
c. burning your bridges.
d. bypassing the boss.

(c) 24. A clear example of a political blunder is
a. expressing constructive disagreement with your boss in private.
b. staying with one employer for ten years.
c. developing the reputation of a poor team player.
d. joining a political party outside of work.

(a) 25. The common form of bridge-burning is to
a. express anger toward an employer as you are leaving the firm.
b. invite all your enemies to a party at your home or a restaurant.
c. tell your new employer in advance your code of ethics.
d. not having a going-away party when you leave a firm.

True/False

(T) 1. The most highly recommended strategy for career advancement is job competence.
2. Political tactics power control and influence.

3. Sam is a kindly middle manager who is an excellent coach for younger employees. He believes that developing others is much more important than advancing his own career. Sam would most likely achieve a top score on the Organizational Politics Questionnaire.

4. Impression management deals almost exclusively with creating a good appearance and dressing for success.

5. Effective impression management is aimed at creating a false impression so the person can cover up most problems.

7. What is considered to be proper business etiquette has a tendency to change over time and vary with the situation.

8. An important general principle of business etiquette is to draw attention to yourself because of your polished behavior.

9. Honoring the deadlines of work associates is considered to be part of business etiquette.

10. You are taking the marketing vice president, Miguel Ortiz, on a tour of the office. You run into office assistant, Ann Osaka, and you decide to introduce the two people. You are following proper etiquette when you say, "Ann, I would like you to meet our new marketing vice president, Miguel Ortiz."

11. An etiquette guideline for e-mail is that messages should be no longer than one screen, not including attachments.

12. Good business etiquette these days is to write e-mail messages to business contacts in the same informal, breezy style that you use with friends such as i will CU soon MJ.

13. When communicating with a physically-disabled person, speak to the companion who will then send your message to the disabled person.

14. Networking is mostly about building relationships with people of much more influence than yourself, outside of your own organization.

15. E-mail can be used as an effective networking tool in the political sense.
(T) 16. One reason flattering others is an important tactic for career advancement is that it helps build constructive relationships with superiors.

(F) 17. A research study indicated that flattering your supervisor in terms of making him or her feel important typically backfired.

(T) 18. One reason that appearing cool under pressure is an effective political tactic is because it shows that the person is capable of handling additional responsibility.

(F) 19. The idea behind the tactic of expressing constructive disagreement is to be a yes-person with your boss in a meeting, but later sending a memo describing your disagreement.

(T) 20. Sharing constructive gossip can help build good relationships with coworkers.

(F) 21. When the skilled political player agrees to perform a favor for another person, he or she states clearly that the other person will be expected to return the favor.

(T) 22. Tech-fixers are such laid-back, easy-going people that it is considered good politics to engage in emotional outbursts in front of them when you have a computer problem.

(F) 23. Deviating far from group norms is a recommended political tactic because it makes one stand out.

(F) 24. A recommended way to handle a dispute with one’s manager is to quickly threaten to bring the problem to the attention of the manager’s boss.

(T) 25. Being a poor team player, or being perceived as one, is usually a serious political blunder.