



PRESS RELEASE

Want To Get Ahead at Work? Hone Your Political Skills, Says FSU Professor

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TALLAHASSEE, Fla. -- Political behavior, defined as the ability to effectively influence others, often is associated with people who are running for elective office. However, political skill exists in just about every organization - and the people most successful at utilizing this skill often have the best reputations among their colleagues, according to a study by a Florida State University researcher.

Pamela Perrewé, an FSU professor of management and a psychologist who specializes in organizational behavior, says that a common trait of successful leaders is their political adeptness.

"They have the ability to understand others and use that knowledge to influence others' thoughts and actions," she said.

Political skill is about building trust. Perrewé found that workers are more likely to follow if the leader is someone in whom they have confidence and like. "Leaders need to inspire the team to work toward a common goal," she said. "A leader with good political skills can get employees to go the extra mile because they have been convinced that it will help the organization."

Perrewé will present her findings at the annual conference of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, scheduled to be held in Dallas on May 5-7.

"Actually, political skill is useful to anyone within an organization, not just leaders," Perrewé said. "But having those abilities often is a key to advancement. A person rarely gets promoted without having developed strong political skills."

Politically skilled people are good with people and can get them to buy into their ideas and objectives, said Perrewé, who recently co-authored a book, "Political Skill at Work." And such people usually rise to top leadership positions in organizations.

So can anyone develop political skills?

"Political skill actually is both innate and acquired," Perrewé said. It is much easier for people with outgoing personalities, she added, but a person can learn

political skills through his or her experiences.

People also can be taught. Training sessions, executive coaching and leadership books all can be helpful to people wanting to acquire political skills.

What does it take to be politically skilled? Perrewé's research has identified four attributes that define a politically adept individual. They are:

- Social astuteness, which is the ability to comprehend what is going on around you and being able to observe others accurately.
- Interpersonal influence, which is having a convincing personality and developing a style that is pleasing to others.
- Networking ability. People who have strong political skills are proficient at developing contacts that can help them.
- The ability to convey the impression of sincerity. Perrewé noted that people are truly sincere most of the time, but added that there are others whose veneer of sincerity is not genuine.

"Unfortunately, we've all heard and maybe are personally aware of instances in which a politically adept person used their abilities to benefit themselves rather than the organization," she said.

Political skill can be a two-edged sword, having the potential to be either advantageous or disadvantageous to the organization, depending upon how an individual uses it, Perrewé said.

However, since political behavior is a fact of life in most organizations, employees find it more acceptable when the initiator is perceived to be a reputable person. In addition, they are more likely to regard the person's tactics as benefiting others as well as the organization.

The Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (www.siop.org) is an international group of more than 6,000 industrial-organizational psychologists whose members study and apply scientific principles concerning people in the workplace.

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