

Are you politically savvy?

This advice guide is based on the W-Tech workshop 'Political Savvy for Women Leaders', ran by Michelle Brailsford from Jupiter Consulting Group www.jupiterconsultinggroup.com

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Am I seen narrowly?
- Am I passed by on the career ladder by others with the same qualifications as me?
- Do I miss out on the credit for my ideas or achievements?
- Do people ignore my ideas?
- Has my career ever suffered as a result of me speaking out?
- Am I left out of key networks?
- Have I been sabotaged in my career?
- Am I oblivious to people's real agendas?

If you answered yes to any of the above, this advice guide is for you!

The term 'workplace politics' fills many people with dread - it's often something that's associated with conflict and struggle and defined as 'poly-tics' - 'a lot of blood sucking parasites'! But being politically savvy is a vital tool for today's businesswomen to have under their belts if they want to succeed. Why? Because without this skill it will be even harder to crack that glass ceiling. Here are some of the challenges you could face by not acting in a political way:

- Other people are given the promotions and exciting job assignments
- You deliver things your business doesn't value
- Your ideas are stolen and / or not heard
- Other people get the recognition for your work
- You find yourself labelled
- You don't have people watching out for you
- You're attacked by workplace 'sharks'
- You 'put your foot in your mouth'



Change your view

The first step towards becoming more of a 'political animal' is re-framing how you think of politics. Instead of viewing it as a negative, create a more positive definition for yourself. Being politically savvy is all about getting your ideas heard and implemented and making a difference - what is so bad about that? Dr. Rick Brandon and Marty Seldman, in their book 'Survival of the Savvy', define it as:

"Informal, unofficial and sometimes behind the scenes efforts to sell ideas, influence an organisation, increase power, or achieve other targeted objectives."

They also highlight some key differences between the politically savvy and less political individuals:

Substance Power vs. Position Power

It's not just about having the knowledge and expertise but about having the network to support you as well

Feedback vs. Perceptions

Instead of just getting feedback on your work, polish your image and reputation and get feedback on how you're perceived by others

Highlighting integrity vs. Highlighting success

Remember that your ability to achieve results is the most important thing to your company, so that's what you need to demonstrate

Open agendas vs. Private agendas

Sharing too much information can sometimes work against you

Meritocracy based decisions vs. Relationship based decisions

Instead of being assessed and defined solely by your achievements, think about how your relationships can highlight important qualities like loyalty and competency on top of that

Results and ideas speak for themselves vs. decent self promotion

Don't wait to see if others notice your successes – show them

Boost your influence

So, now is the all important question – how can I become more politically savvy? Here are some main points to remember, to help you become more politically aware:

Allies – Build powerful alliances. Approach the people who can open doors for you and bring good ideas to the table so that you and your work are seen as a valuable asset. The more people you have on your side, the more people you will have at your disposal – people who will be willing to step in, 'take a bullet' and help you out.

Image – Manage your image and perceptions by devising a PR campaign for your own personal brand. Find out the good and the bad - what are people saying about you and how can you alter their view of you? For example, if people see you as 'nice', that's great, but it may limit you if you have to be tough - give them an example of a time when you've faced a challenge so they can see this side of you. Ask questions and don't be afraid to say 'no'.

Language – Mastering language is important if you want to sell your ideas. Don't talk to your boss and say "any idiot can see that..." – an innocent comment like this could be taken as an insult and this won't put you in their good books! Instead of saying "this is the right thing to do..." be more tactful and say "for your great success to continue, we need to..." Your use of words can be a very influential tool.

Agendas – Detecting and addressing hidden agendas can be dangerous. We often assume that a 'hidden agenda' is evil but there is another possibility. The person just may not be ready to share it with you! Think about this and the impact that addressing it could have and gather all the data before you make a decision.

Network – Do it! Networking is vital to plant the seeds for getting people on your side. Network both amongst your peers and those at a higher level; but be disciplined and talk with the people who could prove useful contacts, whether it's regarding a job, your reputation or a project. Think of networking like a bank – you put into it as one day you may want to make a withdrawal.

Promotion – Promote yourself with 'decent boldness'. Have your elevator pitch ready (something interesting about yourself that you could sell to someone in an elevator - or lift as we Brits say). If you don't do it, who will?

Mentoring – Find mentors – both male and female. Drawing on their experience and expertise can provide crucial advice, and by seeking different types of mentor, you can get very different opinions and thoughts which all make up useful guidance.

The key to being a politically savvy woman in the workplace is having the confidence to build up strong working relationships and to sell your ideas, abilities and brand. Developing these skills takes time and effort, but as they say, you reap what you sow! With more politically savvy women across the business world, we can really help boost the number of females on boardrooms across the UK and create some strong female role models for the future generations.

Good luck!

