# That'd be Great: A Review of Office Politics

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# That'd be Great: A Review of Office Politics

Stolen staplers, corporate birthday parties, and faulty printer problems are all elements of workplace culture at Initech, a fictious company, in the movie *Office Space* (Judge, Rappaport, Livingston, Root, Cole & McGinley, 2005). The message of the film emphasizes the profound impact internal politics have on the success of a company. Navigating unwritten rules within the workplace is a high-stakes game in which failure can lead to immense consequences. Political savviness can pay out dividends. For Initech, the top-down, authoritative environment builds into an invisible volcano that erupts while employee witnesses look as though they are attending a friendly backyard barbeque.

Opposed to formal, printed policies there are always unwritten terms of engagement within every business. A simple definition of office politics involves "unspoken rules of influence that exist in every organization" (Borysenko, 2019). Examples of underlying rules of engagement include knowledge share, depth of relationships, personality types, and communication styles. While there may be a formal procedure for gaining approval, there is always an undercurrent driving the decision-making process. Company values present on paper are more importantly determined by behavior exhibited in day-to-day operations. Transparency or withholding of internal company information play into the politics as well. Relationships and friendships throughout departments and leadership effect the influencing and decision-making process of a company. A company with a CEO and Vice President who are best friends on the weekends will have a different dynamic than leaders in those same roles that disagree on most decisions. The way announcements are communicated to employees also plays into the political environment as well.

To effect company decisions, influencing the right people at the right time can have a positive outcome. Peter Gibbons, the main character in *Office Space*, is a computer programmer at Initech. He was unsatisfied with his job and failing to influence his superior, Bill (Judge et al., 2005). When Peter was effective in an interview with two outside consultants who were paid to provide recommendations to leadership for improvement, the consultants recommended giving Peter a raise. Although Peter was unable to convince his boss of his capabilities over the years, he achieved a promotion by building rapport with the consultants. Influencing the right people at the right time paid off for Peter. Varying aspects of influence range from inspiring individuals or teams, communications such as email or public speaking, understanding approval processes, or relationship building. For professionals navigating the 'office space', it is vital to understand what needs to be done to influence decision-making effectively within an organization. For Peter, effective influence came naturally by sharing his honest opinion and authentic self. To gain approval when requesting additional resources for a project, proposing a raise, or recommending a solution, individuals need to identify who to meet with, in what order, and how specific leaders may be influenced.

Like influence, office politics are also present within negotiation. The top-down, authoritative culture at Initech leaves little room for compromise. Bill comes to Peter's desk late Friday afternoon and says, "I'm going to need you to be here on Saturday around 9am. And Sunday. That'd be great!" (Judge, et al., 2005). There is no way for Peter to get out of working every weekend without strictly denying his superior. Peter adapts his approach by attempting to avoid his boss and evade a request for overtime. His tactic fails. Peter is powerless and unable to negotiate with his boss. "What many negotiators find frustrating is the fact that you can't control what the other party does" correlates Peter's predicament (Negotiation p103). Unable to control

his boss's actions, Peter takes control. Instead of working through the weekend, Peter stops coming into the office for days.

Politics within the workplace typically associate with a negative connotation because with so much personal interaction there is bound to be conflict or differing perspectives. Working professionals are at risk for experiencing conversations or situations in the workplace that result in frustration, confusion, or feeling unvalued or powerless. Peter forgets to include a cover sheet on a report after a recent change in procedure to include cover pages on all reports. His boss, Bill Lumbergh says, "Make sure it doesn't happen again. That'd be great!" (Judge, et al., 2005). Two minutes later, another of Peter's superiors drops by his cubicle to point out the same error. It is apparent that Peter feels defeated instead of inspired to do better. Leaders like Bill make the mistake of exerting authority over subordinates to get a result. However, when asking a person to do something, the outcome takes in to account the person's motivation or passion to accomplish a task. In this example, Bill is reminding his team member of a policy change. Peter is even less inspired by his work and more likely to quit his job.

Companies, like Initech, miss the mark when numbers are the main priority instead of people. Office politics are all about getting to know the individuals inside the company. According to a Forbes article, when it comes to office politics "relationships are your goal" (Borysenko, 2019). Internal politics have enormous effect on the long-term success of a company. Initech paid the price for lacking the human element within business when a disgruntled employee, tired of moving desks and having his staplers stolen, sets the building aflame. For Peter, his political savviness paid off resulting in a short-lived promotion. Had his boss, Bill, asked about employees' lives or shown care for their wellbeing instead of making them feel like a number, Initech may not have gone up in flames.

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