

Dealing with Office Politics

by: Steve Snelling

On your first job after graduation, or during any Internship, it is best to avoid any “office politics” at work. It is easy to get caught up in the casual “water-cooler” conversations with co-workers. However, as the newest person in the group, your knowledge of what is acceptable to talk about and what is not, will be very limited, and you may offend someone without even knowing it; this goes double for telling any questionable jokes or any labeling of co-workers.

If there are co-workers making derogatory comments about others (including management, or the company), don’t chime in with your opinion, or be seen as taking sides in any personal disagreements. Be aware of the various personalities and even on-going disputes, but don’t personally take sides or add to any of the problems or disputes.

Act professionally and you will be treated professionally. Try to get along with everyone, so you can do your work and be seen as a likeable, competent, employee. Stay focused on your job and your assigned projects. Try to enjoy working with all of your co-workers and get along well with management.

One of the problems with office politics, is it is often more of a “rumor mill” than containing any useful information. Another problem is that it can miss-orient your thinking, or give you an inaccurate “spin” on a situation or a person. And if you are actively participating in the discussions, you will be seen as validating someone else’s opinion that you have no real basis for trusting. In general, office politics is usually so one-sided as to be counter-productive for making any fact-based decisions.

But if you get brought into some office politics, tread very lightly, since it may affect your relationship with some of your co-workers, or even be seen negatively by management.

Later, when describing your work or your activities at a former company or division (such as during a job interview), avoid describing any “office politics” you may have encountered – just describe your job and the projects you worked on.