

**“Politics: The Don’t Go Anywhere without It Skill<sup>©</sup>”**

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**DR. DORY HOLLANDER’S**

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**PRIMER ON POLITICAL DEFENSE AND SUCCESS**

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**EVERY LEADER SHOULD KNOW<sup>©</sup>**

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## **I. Introduction**

**As a workplace psychologist, I work with hardworking, competent people at all organizational levels. Too many are foundering, failing or becoming part of the working wounded. Something they don't understand has derailed their success and enjoyment of their worklife. That something is workplace politics.**

**It is imperative that leaders see their ability to decode and address workplace politics as an essential core competency necessary for their own survival and for that of their followership.**

**Our objectives in this session are that you will walk away more able to:**

- **Tune into assumptions and expectations that hold you back, take away your power, and keep you from achieving the buy-in it takes to make a difference**
- **Understand what workplace politics are and aren't --garden variety politics vs. bad behavior**
- **See how political savvy will help you successfully influence and defend yourself against those who wish to erode your ability to lead effectively**
- **Apply 3 ways to decode office politics that will not compromise your values**
- **Master 6 skill sets that will protect you from others' political maneuvering and create positive outcomes**

**If we are successful, when you walk out of this classroom you will be on your way to:**

- **A new mindset about politics**
- **Not being blindsided by organizational. politics**
- **Designing your own blueprint for political defense and influence that will smooth your leadership journey**

## **II. Let's talk more about you for a few minutes**

- **What were your motivational drivers?**
- **Describe the last time you were caught in a political dilemma.**
- **What's your usual reaction to workplace politics?**

## **Workplace Politics!**

### **Change Your Mindset**

- **Forget everything you ever thought about politics**
- **Work is not just about the work**
- **Workplaces are not rational places**
- **Ignoring the highly social and emotional nature of workplaces dooms many a leader-- and follower too**
- **Politics is nothing more than the natural hardwired behavior of people in groups**
- **You can run, you can hide, but even that won't let you escape from organizational politics**
- **Leaders cannot ignore emerging political situations and stay whole**
- **Political savvy is a mandatory, not an optional career and leadership competency**
- **If you value success, understanding politics is a make/break part of your job**

## **Transforming Your View of Workplace Politics**

### ***Start by Redefining Workplace Politics***

**WORKPLACE POLITICS IS ANYTHING OTHER THAN THE WORK  
ITSELF  
THAT INVOLVES PEOPLE AND CAN HINDER OR ADVANCE CAREER  
SUCCESS**

## **Pinpoint Your Current Political Style**

**LOOKS THE OTHER WAY**

**COMPLAINS TO THIRD PARTIES**

**FEELS POWERLESS**

**AVOIDS**

**COMPROMISES**

**PROTECTS OWN TURF**

**FIGHTS TO THE DEATH**

**ONE-UPS THEM**

**OBSERVANT, BUT NOT A PLAYER**

**UNDAUNTED PARTICIPANT**

**SAVVY MASTER PLAYER**

**JUST ANOTHER PART OF THE JOB**

## Use Three Simple Lenses for Decoding Politics

### **Lens 1                      Insider/Outsider Sorting**

**---All organizations continuously sort people into insiders or outsiders**

**---Your challenge is to observe what distinguishes insiders from outsiders among various stakeholder groups**

**---Insider/outsider status is subject to change.**

**---Being an insider in one group is no guarantee of being an insider in another**

**---A leader's balancing act is becoming a trusted insider without sacrificing his or her own values or vision for change**

**-- If being an insider compromises values, leaders can change the paradigm by changing the culture**

**---Leaders can help newcomers transition to insiders or let them struggle. The former makes more sense**

## Use Three Simple Lenses for Decoding Politics

### **Lens 2 Clashing Self-Interests among Stakeholders**

**--- Clashes between people and groups with differing self-interests as normal, not nutty. See it that way**

**--- Spot and manage these inevitable conflicts, clashes and their fallout. Avoiding is rarely a wise option**

**---Whether leader or follower, make it your mission to develop thick skin and solid negotiation skills so that you can address emerging conflicts with confidence**

### **Lens 3 Hidden Alliances**

**---Co-workers, friends and even enemies will bond together in hidden alliances to win resources, rewards and advantages**

**---Your job is to stay in touch with what is going on in the trenches and learn where these alliances are to avoid being blindsided**

**--- Develop skills in managing these hidden alliances through frequent communication with diverse groups, aggressive relationship management and strategic stakeholder interventions**

## **Jumpstart Your Political Savvy and Success Right Now**

### ***Six "Do it Now" Power Skills for Leaders and Everyone Else***

#### **Power Skill 1 Become an Organizational Insider**

- **Align yourself with the values and norms of your organization**
- **Make yourself visible across the organization**
- **Build relationships among diverse groups at all levels**
- **Tune into the grapevine, hallway buzz and locate network information nodes**
- **Initiate contact with respected insiders willing to advise and mentor**
- **Make others feel good in your presence, even when you disagree with them**
- **Choose your battles carefully, but don't battle too early in a new leadership position**

## **Jumpstart Your Political Savvy and Success Right Now**

### ***Six "Do it Now" Power Skills***

#### **Power Skill 2      Create Positive Perception**

- **Ask for whatever you need to succeed, and then some**
- **Speak up early in meetings...by waiting until you have something perfect to say you will disempower yourself**
- **Listen closely to what others are saying and why**
- **Build your comments on others' insights and acknowledge that you are doing so**
- **Present yourself as appropriately optimistic and unflappable**
- **Become known as a leader unafraid "to get your hands dirty" rather than as a "high maintenance" or disengaged "prima donna"**
- **Enthusiastically and frequently communicate what you are planning, working on and achieving to key stakeholders and potential sponsors and mentors**
- **When people ask "what are you working on or how is it going?" Don't say "nothing much" or "fine." Tell them what great things you are working on and how it's going**
- **As an rising star, when you finish an project, show leadership by talking about next steps**
  - **I understand what we are trying to achieve here and this is what makes sense for me to do next**

## **Jumpstart Your Political Savvy and Success Right Now**

### ***Six "Do it Now" Power Skills for Leaders and Everyone Else***

#### **Power Skill 3      Build Success-Critical Relationships**

- **Identify 8-10 people at work who can help or hinder your success as a leader: Make a list**
- **Cultivate relationships with these 8-10 people**
- **Find out who is for and who is against your success and initiatives**
- **Ask others to help move those who are against you to a neutral stance**
- **Treat these people as partners, even if they are on the other side**
- **Seek and appreciate their advice and input on various issues**
- **Inform stakeholders-- for and against you--of successes and credit them for any role they played**
- **Ensure that their fingerprints as well as your own are on visible and subtle successes aligned with agreed-on strategies**

## **Jumpstart Your Political Savvy and Success Right Now**

### ***Six "Do it Now" Power Skills for Leaders and Everyone Else***

#### **Power Skill 4      Be Ready to Tackle Conflict**

- **View conflict as a 'negotiation opportunity,' not as an affront**
- **When opposed, don't flinch, refuse to take it personally**
- **Find out which alternatives, if any, opposing parties propose or support**
- **Be curious: hear the other side's story, find out their wants, needs, underlying interests**
- **Get them to hear your side of the story, learn your wants, needs and underlying interests**
- **When threatened do not run for the hills: simply hold your ground without being unduly defensive**
- **Never avoid or accommodate as your first response to demands—reasonable or unreasonable, unless personal safety is at stake**
- **Take a workshop in conflict resolution this calendar year**

## **Jumpstart Your Political Savvy and Success Right Now**

### ***Six "Do it Now" Power Skills for Leaders and Everyone Else***

#### **Power Skill 5      Share the Spotlight at Every Opportunity**

- **Make unsolicited positive comments about people's contributions in meetings**
- **Talk about the good work of your teammates**
- **Help your management team and those who support you look good –see them as your work clan, your tribe**
- **Separate liking and trust. Treat those who are against you as people you like; focus on commonalities, even if trust is low**

#### **Power Skill 6 Have an Exit Strategy in Your Back Pocket**

- **Start building skills, knowledge, experience and contacts needed for your next leadership position or capstone now**
- **Actively network outside your organization and let your network know when you are ready for a new opportunity**
- **Keep your updated resume "head hunter-ready"**
- **Develop relationships with people who have knowledge or close contacts related to your next targeted positions**
- **Remember, in the long run all jobs are temporary**

#### **References**

**Dory Hollander, *™ System*, Viking Books, 1991  
(Chapter 11: *Politics: The Don't Go Anywhere without It Skill*)**

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