

# Beyond Office Politics

[www.shaughnessyhowell.com](http://www.shaughnessyhowell.com)

It is still accepted in organizations that if you want to get ahead in business you have to learn how to "play the game." Even some enlightened managers support the view that it's not what you know, but rather whom you know that can make or break a career.

Politics abound for a variety of reasons. When employees belong to the same social circles or professional associations, or just play tennis or golf together, there is potential for them to accept only those who are part of the "club." Intimate relationships formed in the workplace, especially between supervisor and subordinate, can also come into play.

*"Managers today need to learn how to cultivate an environment that rewards honesty, ability and hard work."*

It is when such alliances are misused that they become "dangerous liaisons." The inappropriate conduct can include providing professional favors and sharing confidential information. It can mean giving unfair access to promotions or business opportunities not available to the less politically astute. Sometimes it involves the abuse of power.

## **Principles for success**

Once an organization is firmly grounded in a long-standing tradition of playing favorites, it can seem almost impossible to turn things around. But managers can experience a great deal of success by becoming committed to the following principles:

### **Tell the truth and encourage your team to do the same.**

It may be uncomfortable at first, but it is infinitely less time-consuming than trying to keep up with countless lies. Teach employees to be tolerant of the opinions of others by "modeling" that behaviour yourself.

### **Reward the efforts of the team as well as individual accomplishments.**

At team meetings, ask employees to describe objectives they've met and who helped them along the way. Encourage staff to share their success with anyone instrumental in getting them there.

### **Create clear policies regarding intimate relationships in the office.**

As the workplace is a likely place to meet a future mate, you certainly cannot forbid people from dating. You can, however, create a code of conduct that indicates appropriate workplace behavior.

### **Clearly state the course of action that will be taken in the event of supervisor-subordinate relationships.**

Many organizations opt to relocate one employee or the other. They usually work with the couple to determine a plan of benefit to both of them. Allowing them to continue to work together can cause an uneven playing field for everyone.

### **Follow due process in all promotions and transfers.**

If there is a job available in your department, be open and up front about it, and accompany it with clearly written criteria for application and selection. Evaluate all candidates based on their skills and abilities. Make a formal job offer then announce to each person who applied for the position who was selected and why. This will assure everyone that the selection was fairly made.



It may well be true that in order to succeed in business today, you have to learn how to play the game. But the game has changed. Managers today need to learn how to cultivate an environment that rewards honesty, ability and hard work -- one where you can get ahead because of what you know, not just who you know.

