

## Handling office politics

By Jennifer Kahnweiler, November 2005  
SHRM's HR Careers Articles

**Q: "My boss says I need to do a better job at playing office politics. Even though I received positive performance reviews, she says the higher-ups in our company tell her I don't pull my weight in my department. That may be because I deal with day to day administrative tasks and candidate interviews, rather than major departmental initiatives. Why should I have to play politics to keep my job?"**

A: Change your attitude about office politics. Don't think about it as the proverbial dark side which is a nasty game played by nasty people but as a way to get and use power to accomplish results in your organization. Do people know your competence and character to understand how you are adding value? Right now, if you are not "playing politics," probably not.

Though it may be hard to believe, your manager is doing you a favor by giving you this feedback. You need to drill down and find out what has created the impression that you are not pulling your weight. You probably need to work smarter not harder.

If your job is more of a support function, than how can you let the big bosses know about your accomplishments? Write a regular executive summary for all management that highlights interview tips and suggestions for managers. Weave in how these actions connect to the major initiatives du jour. Use bullet points and keep it brief. Ask to participate in meetings and cross functional projects where you can interact with people across the organization.

In today's "flat" organizations, it's easier for you to gain access to senior management to erase erroneous impressions. You can take informal opportunities in the hall or cafeteria to make conversation and show an interest in hot projects (How are things coming on the XYZ project?) Do remember that your boss is still your boss so keep her in the loop by letting her know about what you learn from these brief encounters.

Be sure that your work doesn't keep you buried in your cube. Get to know names and use them. Go to lunch with different people. Character is established by the little actions you take on a daily basis to let people see who you are. That is an important first step in playing the game of office politics and in your case, strengthening your retention odds.

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Jennifer Kahnweiler's  
**ABOUT  
YOU**

**Q: “Three months ago, I was laid off from an HR generalist job in manufacturing that I loved. As my family's sole breadwinner, I am concerned because my severance runs out next month. Unfortunately, my area doesn't have many job opportunities. What are some short term options besides taking a low paying job in retail?”**

A: Don't give up on HR just yet. If you haven't done so, assess your strengths and prepare a professional resume and cover letter. There are many free samples available to adapt by doing a search on the web. Be sure your resume focuses on your transferable skills and accomplishments, particularly since it is likely you will be transitioning to a new industry. Try using some key words (nouns and HR related terms like retention, SOX compliance, etc.) that reflect your experience so that your resume will be picked up by search engines. Make sure at least three friends review your resume for typos and hard to understand phrases.

Put on a full court press now as your main priority must be finding a job. Besides listing and updating your resume (every two weeks or so) on job sites target employers you are interested in and network, network, and network. Several websites offer free business cards. Attend professional meetings and consider the vendors and suppliers with whom your company has worked. They already know you so they should be happy to connect you with other potential contacts.

Since you mentioned that jobs are tight in your area, why not expand your search? Moving isn't easy but your flexibility may help you land that next job.

Research the expanding industries in your area and zero in on fast growing companies. For instance, an expanding health care or accounting firm most likely will be establishing or beefing up their HR function. Finally, consider contracting work for the short term. With the growth of outsourcing, we have seen a dramatic rise in the need for expertise in areas like recruiting, compensation and benefits. Your local SHRM chapter should be able to connect you with some of these third-party firms.

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