THE POLITICS OF PROMOTION

How High-Achieving Women Get Ahead and Stay Ahead

BONNIE MARCUS
Praise for *The Politics of Promotion*

“If you’re one of those nice girls who thinks politics is a four-letter word, think again. From promotions to perks to plum assignments, savvy women know the path to success is paved by politics. *The Politics of Promotion* will help you to make workplace politics an integral part of your skill set without feeling as if you’ve compromised your integrity.”

—Lois P. Frankel, PhD, author of *Nice Girls Don’t Get the Corner Office*

“Bonnie Marcus has finally come out and said what needs to be said: self-promotion is a leadership skill! *The Politics of Promotion* should earn a place on every woman’s bookshelf. Marcus not only demonstrates why playing politics—zestfully, skillfully, and ethically—is essential for women seeking to shape satisfying careers, she offers invaluable advice on how to do it. This book offers a perfect wake-up call for women who want to believe that working hard should be enough. It’s not. Bonnie Marcus shows you a better path.”

—Sally Helgesen, author of *The Female Advantage* and coauthor of *The Female Vision*

*The Politics of Promotion* is a savvy book, full of advice for ambitious women. Bonnie Marcus explains that success follows not only from competently fulfilling one’s job description but even more from successfully negotiating company politics. To help women navigate these complexities, she offers a wealth of advice backed by examples gleaned from her long experience as a corporate executive and a career coach. Marcus provides the crucial insights that business schools leave out of the curriculum.”

—Alice Eagly, coauthor of *Through the Labyrinth*

“Sheryl Sandberg taught women about the importance of ‘leaning in’ in order to get ahead in the workplace. In *The Politics of Promotion*, Bonnie Marcus gives women practical tips on how to be savvy about the way they lean in to avoid potential landmines; how to navigate the realities of their workplace, and position themselves for success without compromising their feminine traits or integrity.”

—John Gerzema, author of *The Athena Doctrine*
“The Politics of Promotion totally reframes the concept of office politics. Bonnie Marcus clearly and practically explains how the work environment must be understood for anyone hoping to advance their careers. Through research, case studies, and a variety of powerful vignettes, the book offers insights for all individuals—women and men—who seek to be more successful, eliminate roadblocks and deliver for themselves, their teams and their organizations.”

—Susan B. Chodakewitz,
President, Tetra Tech AMT & Chair of the Board,
Women in Aerospace

“More than a ‘rah rah’ motivational treatise, The Politics of Promotion sends a strong message that we must work hard AND be smart as women in today’s organizations. I found woman’s leadership guru Bonnie Marcus’s blend of personal experience, relevant examples and applicable tools to be a goldmine. Her strategic networking templates alone are worth the price of the book. A meaty great read for all women and those who support them.”

—Jennifer B. Kahnweiler,
PhD, CSP, author of Quiet Influence
and The Introverted Leader

“The Politics of Promotion is packed with practical knowledge every woman needs in clear, engaging, and actionable language. Marcus outlines a proven method for women to navigate the complexities of the workplace and get the promotions they deserve.”

—Gloria Feldt,
cofounder and President,
Take The Lead; and author of No Excuses

“Women tend to perceive office politics as something distasteful. The Politics of Promotion is a very helpful book for individuals needing to better understand and embrace the importance of company politics, not only as a critical part of career advancement, but as a more effective way to successfully carry out your daily job responsibilities. Bonnie Marcus’s research demonstrates how being political savvy allows you to build important relationships with critical stakeholders who may be able to support, mentor and promote you. Reading this book will help you to learn how to navigate across an organization to achieve your career and business goals by working with and through others.”

—Alexandra Glucksman,
COO, Editas Medicine
“Women are graduating from college and entering the workforce ill prepared to navigate their new environment. Putting your head down and achieving great results works in school, but being successful in your career requires more. Bonnie Marcus has nailed the missing piece: political savvy. The Politics of Promotion should be required reading for all college graduates.”

—Tiffany Dufu,
Chief Leadership Officer,
The Levo League

“Women regularly think that doing a great job ensures promotion — I used to think so too. Instead, we know from data and personal experience that performance excellence means, at most, that you might be considered; actually securing the promotion requires a great deal more. Bonnie Marcus has seen how this plays across multiple disciplines and industries and is full of insight and advice that will put women in a far stronger position to understand how to create the opportunities their talent demands. Her tough love acknowledges injustice but her tough thinking is what promises success.”

—Margaret Heffernan,
author of Wilful Blindness and A Bigger Prize

“Until genuine meritocracy becomes the norm, women will continue to face subtle bias and double standards. They will be greatly helped in navigating the traps and blind alleys of organizational life by the career advice that Bonnie Marcus offers in this readable book. Bonnie reframes the ‘dirty words of politics, networking, and self-promotion as necessary leadership skills that can achieve all-round benefits when exercised thoughtfully. Ambitious readers will feel better equipped to go for the leadership prize.”

—Alison Maitland,
coauthor of Future Work and Why Women Mean Business

“Bonnie Marcus shares from her experience on how to get the recognition and rewards you deserve for your work by managing the interpersonal dynamics of the workplace. Politics is inherent in all human relationships. The Politics of Promotion will teach you how to interact professionally and get promoted while staying true to yourself.”

—Marilyn Tam,
author of The Happiness Choice
THE POLITICS OF PROMOTION

HOW HIGH-ACHIEVING WOMEN GET AHEAD AND STAY AHEAD

BONNIE R. MARCUS

WILEY
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Politics in the Workplace

How It Works and How Women Fit into It

Sallie Krawcheck, once named the most powerful woman on Wall Street, said it felt like she was fired when a restructuring at Bank of America eliminated her role in 2011. She was asked to join the bank to turn around its Merrill Lynch and U.S. Trust wealth management businesses. What seemed like a perfect role for her turned out to be a blindside. Bank of America was a mixture of several cultures due to acquisitions and leadership changes. Though Sallie attempted to navigate and understand the ever changing political landscape, she was considered an outsider with few ties to any of the powerful cliques within the bank.

Sallie, based in New York, found it challenging to build relationships and camaraderie with her team and the key stakeholders who were in the corporate headquarters in Charlotte, North Carolina: “It’s hard to be part of the inside jokes when you’re not there or you aren’t having a few minutes swapping stories while grabbing a coffee between meetings. I was never part of the meetings-before-the-meetings, or the meetings-after-the-meeting, or the ‘real’ meeting; I was just part of the official meeting (which in some companies can be the least important meeting of them all).”

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Sallie wasn’t in the “in crowd.” Not only was she not located at the corporate headquarters, but she was still viewed as an outsider to Bank of America culture. She was not invited to these informal meetings where the real politics play out; where important decisions are made. Despite her attempts to gain access, she was unable to maneuver through the complex politics. Because Sallie was astute, she understood her vulnerability as an outsider. But like many of us, Sallie also believed that her business results would help to maintain her status and substantiate her value to the bank.

“I realized I wasn’t part of the ‘inner circle’. But I mistakenly believed that if my team delivered strong business results—and, as I repeatedly told the team, if we were the business no-one had to worry about—we would be successful. But on the day I left, the business was ahead of budget and gaining share.”

Sallie is a great example of a woman who is a top performer and incredibly savvy about workplace politics. Her résumé validates this. She had repeatedly overcome political and cultural barriers in her past to achieve top leadership roles. Yet despite her best efforts to understand and master the politics at Bank of America, she was blindsided. Her job was eliminated. And though she was offered another position at a lower level, Sallie decided to leave the bank. She was trumped by the politics.

Derailed in New York City

Cathie Black, a former chair and president of Hearst Magazines, was appointed chancellor of New York City schools by Mayor Bloomberg in November 2010. Mayor Bloomberg believed Cathie was the right candidate based on her extensive management experience. But it was apparent rather quickly that public opinion was against her. After just a few months in the job, a NY1/Marist poll revealed that just 17 percent of New Yorkers approved of her job performance.

Cathie had an incredible track record. She navigated to the top in the publishing world, where women executives were a rare...
commodity. Despite her obvious success and savvy, however, New Yorkers viewed her from the outset as an outsider to public education, and therefore incapable of doing the job. They looked for every opportunity to emphasize her weaknesses and never gave her a chance to prove herself. What looked like a new challenge and opportunity for Cathie turned out to be a blindside. In April 2011, she was forced to step down. Cathie fell victim to the politics and the power of public opinion. The politics derailed her.

What lesson can we learn from Sallie Krawcheck and Cathie Black’s experiences? Here are two extremely competent and prominent female executives who were able to reach leadership positions because of their talent, hard work, and political savvy. Yet in each of these situations, they were blindsided and unable to overcome the strong political barriers. This clearly demonstrates the necessity for all of us to understand the political landscape and identify potential landmines.

Every organization has unique political dynamics. In fact, each team within a business line or function often has a different language, different success metrics, and behavioral norms. You have to be willing and capable of adapting not only to get ahead, but also to stay ahead.

Politics can make or break your career. This is especially important for women to understand. To our detriment, we continue to avoid workplace politics and set ourselves up to be blindsided and passed over for promotions.

You must ask yourself where you would be today if you had been more politically savvy and tuned in to the way decisions are made in your company. Most important, what is possible for you in the future if you are willing to learn how to effectively navigate the realities of the workplace? What is possible if you are given the tools to master the politics?

For decades, women’s advancement in the workplace has been the focus of research and conversation. Unfortunately, we can only point to limited success in this area. Women are inching their way up to leadership positions, but their progress has been very slow. Currently,
women hold only 5.2 percent of Fortune 500 CEO positions and 5.4 percent of Fortune 1000 CEO positions.¹

Are we frustrated yet? You bet!

We are certainly well prepared and well educated. Women now hold 57 percent of all bachelor’s degrees and 51 percent of all doctorates. We now earn 47 percent of law degrees and 45 percent of all master’s degrees in business. We enter the workforce with optimism and ambition, and then our goals for career advancement are not realized.

Many theories explain our lack of progress, but the bottom line is that the optimal way for women to circumvent obstacles is through political savvy and relationships. The culture and politics in our organizations still make women’s ascent to top positions extremely difficult. Sometimes the politics is so powerful and overwhelming that even superstars like Sallie Krawcheck and Cathie Black cannot survive. For women, the politics is often complicated by gender bias. This was certainly true decades ago when we faced overt discrimination.

For instance, Elizabeth, an executive in the bio/pharma industry, told me her story about her first job out of college. She was one of the few women working in a company that made flavor and fragrance materials. Three weeks into the job, one of the salesmen came into the lab with a request. Elizabeth quickly volunteered that she could make that happen. The man replied, “No, you can’t. You’re a woman.”

Elizabeth said she was shocked at the time and will never forget this incident. She said to herself, “Wow. I thought I could do anything and then I realized there are other people who aren’t going to let me do everything because I’m a woman.”

Timi Hallem, a partner at Manatt, Phelps & Phillips, LLP, tells her story of gender discrimination early in her career as an attorney:

“I had a 3-year-old and a 10-month old. The managing partner of the firm came into my office and told me that the firm was going to reduce my salary because I was less valuable now that I had children. Because I had young children there were things that the people who worked with me would not ask me to do, and therefore, that made me

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less valuable to the firm. I asked whether I'd ever turned anything down or refused to do anything, and was told that that was not the issue—that, no, I had not. But that there were things they wouldn't ask me to do—and that in and of itself made me less valuable. So my pay was reduced, and I thought about leaving. I actually interviewed elsewhere, and then I decided that would, basically, give them too much satisfaction. I decided to first work on building up my practice to the point where they'd be really sorry when I left. Instead, within six months, they restored my pay and gave me back what they had taken away, and decided I didn't deserve to have my pay cut since the clients were clearly happy with me.

For those of you who have recently entered the workforce, I'm sure these stories are shocking. We rarely see examples of discrimination this overt any longer. Now we have the law on our side—it is no longer legal or politically correct to discriminate against women based on their gender—but this has forced gender bias to go underground. Second-generation bias, as it is commonly called, is more challenging because it is subtle, and women are blindsided by it every day.

The point is that you never want to be caught off guard by this. Political savvy helps you to understand which people in your organization support you and support the advancement of women. These are the people you need to build relationships with. Political savvy also helps you to uncover those who are less likely to help you because you are a woman. This is not always easy because these people may justify their behavior based on other reasons, but with keen observation skills and focus, you can learn who pays lip service to the promotion of women and who doesn't. Bottom line: You need to figure out who are your allies and who are your foes.

Lisa, one of my clients and a senior executive in the banking industry, tells me that the boys' club still exists in banking and these informal networks are difficult for women to access:

"Twenty years ago, men were pretty overt about the fact that they didn't really care to make an effort to include women in their inner circle. I think, at this point, it's less overt, but it still exists. And there
are different reasons. I think there’s definitely an element of men feeling like, if they say the wrong thing, or do the wrong thing, they’re going to get sued for harassment. So, they need to keep their guard up.

“Sometimes I think there’s a ‘women versus men’ type of thing, just in terms of the kind of things that men will do together—and they won’t invite women. Not even for drinks.”

Lisa tells the story of how a senior manager at the bank with whom she had a great relationship did not invite her on an all-day fishing trip, yet invited all her male counterparts. Lisa had lunch with him a couple of weeks later and asked him, “If you knew I liked to fish, would you have invited me?” And he said, “Probably not.”

She says, “It was a man who I respected, who I knew liked me very much—and who was very much a straitlaced guy, and there was never any question that he treated men and women equally. But then, there’s the off-campus event, and he didn’t invite me. It’s these types of events where people let their guard down. That’s where people talk about things that you may not talk about in a formal meeting. And that’s where you build relationships. To be excluded from that because you’re a woman excludes you from those important conversations.”

To Lisa’s point, she may never get invited on fishing trips with her male colleagues. She may never be asked to go to Monday night football events because she’s a woman. You may have had similar experiences. It is still important to find opportunities to connect and build relationships with these men so they can get to know you beyond your work and your presence in formal meetings. Stay tuned, because access to these informal networks is achievable with political savvy. It is possible to create bonds with the men in these networks even if they don’t include you in their activities after work. You have to be creative and make it happen!

Another thing I’ve learned listening to women is that they understand the importance of “leaning in” and asking for what they want and need, but when they assert themselves it can backfire because some men are threatened by their assertiveness.
Lori relates her current challenge with “leaning in” at her company: “The higher you get in an organization, the older the men are that you’re dealing with, and the less receptive they are to assertive females. I surprise men when I am assertive. And it disturbs them at some very basic level. And those are the folks who are my audience. They’re who I need to persuade, and who I need to have some confidence in my capabilities and my leadership. And if I strike them personally on a level that makes them uncomfortable, it puts me automatically behind the eight ball. Their basic understanding of female behavior is challenged. I’m looking for collaboration and some equal footing—something they would gladly give somebody my age who was a man with a family and demographic that they have.”

Do you get a similar reaction from men when you speak up or offer a different opinion? Isn’t it worth your while to know who would be most receptive to your ideas and the optimal way to communicate with them to avoid landmines? That requires political savvy!

Unconscious bias rears its ugly head in other ways as well. Bias shows up in the stereotypes men and women have relative to work and leadership. For example, I hear from women that they are no longer considered ambitious once they have children. They are frequently passed over for positions that require more travel. We can experience this type of bias from both men and women who hold beliefs that women who are mothers should behave in a certain fashion. And of course, we still earn less money than our male counterparts.

Here’s Elizabeth’s story:

“When I was pregnant with my first son, the woman who had hired me had been appointed to a new job as an individual contributor and another woman came in to take over the group. This woman decided who got the really high-level corporate assignments. Well, I saw these assignments going to other folks. So, I made an appointment with her and when I walked into her office I said, ‘Arden, can you help me understand why I’m not getting any of these opportunities?’ And she did actually say to me, ‘Well, I didn’t know how willing you were to travel.’ And I said, ‘But you never asked me. You made
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that assumption for me.’ You could see that she just never considered that I would want to travel, and it was a really good opportunity. She did end up being very open about giving everybody opportunity. I could see how it changed her approach. She stopped making assumptions about what people would say.”

In this situation, Elizabeth confronted the woman and asked her directly why she wasn’t getting the same high-profile assignments others were offered. If she had not asked the question, she never would have known the reason why she was repeatedly passed over.

There are people in your organization that make assumptions about you because you’re a woman. It is not always obvious why we are not given the same opportunities as others. It’s critical, therefore, to clearly communicate your goals to your boss and other decision makers who have influence over your career.

How you position yourself in the company with key stakeholders is critical to overcoming this bias. Learning how to effectively articulate your career aspirations and your achievements is an important aspect of political savvy. Identifying the people who would benefit from this information is another critical component.

Another challenge women face is a lack of confidence. Do you wake up at 3 AM in a sweat because you’re wondering if you have what it takes to succeed, if others will discover you really aren’t that smart? Our internal demons can hold us back. Many women tell me that they believe they aren’t good enough to make it, and that it is pure luck that they have achieved any success. Their self-doubt prevents them from speaking up and giving their opinions, from asking for more compensation and responsibility. I hear from these women that because they have a need to be liked and please others, they take on too much work and don’t delegate. As a consequence, they are not perceived as having leadership potential in an environment that rewards visibility and credibility.

Lack of confidence holds many women back from engaging in politics and leaning in. What I have come to realize through my coaching practice and discussions with women is that many of us don’t understand our contribution to business outcomes. We don’t
recognize our value. Identifying your value proposition is the necessary first step to understanding and believing in your contribution to the company. It inspires your confidence to put forth your ideas and ask for what you deserve. It fuels your ability to build relationships of trust and influence by offering to help others based on your value proposition. These relationships assist you in navigating the workplace by giving you important information about its politics and by promoting you for new opportunities.

In this book, you will learn the significance of self-promotion as both a leadership skill and a political tool. You will learn savvy ways to communicate what you and your team have accomplished and how to sell your ideas across the organization to build political influence.

I'm sure you can relate to some or perhaps all of these examples of barriers to women's advancement. You live with this every day! And yes, we can look internally (our own limiting beliefs), externally (unconscious bias and gender inequality), and every which way to explain the lack of women's progress. Women are still viewed and judged differently than men in the workplace—and this is sometimes subtle and therefore challenging. But political savvy is understanding the culture whatever it is, and then learning how to best position yourself given the reality. You cannot ignore the politics any longer if you want to advance your career. Political savvy helps you successfully circumvent the landmines and position yourself for success. Gender bias is just one obstacle you must be aware of when navigating through the workplace.

You deserve to move up.

If you are working really hard and want to get ahead, you certainly don't want to be passed over or pushed aside, right? Well then, let this be a wake-up call for you. You need to get “real” when it comes to how you fit into the current culture of your organization. You need to take a good hard look at whether or not you have the political savvy to thrive in such an environment. Because the reality is that workplace politics can make or break your career!

The reality is that if you have any aspirations for advancement, you cannot afford to ignore the politics. Yes, hard work is important. Yes,
performance is important. That being said, once you reach a certain level of technical competence, politics is what makes the difference for your career success.

Right about now, you’re probably asking yourself, “Whatever happened to meritocracy? Why can’t I get a promotion based on my track record?” Look around your workplace. Is this what’s really happening, or are you wishing for a pipe dream? Who is getting promoted? Is their advancement based solely on their performance, or on other factors such as the relationships they have formed and their influence with key people?

For those of you who focus all your efforts on doing good work, you are not alone. Women spend all their time and energy doing their work and getting great results. We do not see the importance of spending time to network with others and build key relationships. As a result, we do not have access to the privileged information about “the rules of the game” that we need to navigate the workplace successfully. We do not have access to the influential networks where key decisions are made. We rely on the traditional methods of receiving information. Most of the time, we get this information too late to be able to use it to our benefit.

For instance, we wait patiently until new positions are posted. The reality is that many times these jobs have already been promised to others and the company is simply going through the motions of interviewing candidates. Has this happened to you?

It happened to Shereen. “I had two interview opportunities in my company for the same position and I was blindsided. I was highly qualified for the first position for which I posted. I had full support from my direct supervisor who reached out to others on my behalf. I executed the interview well. I definitely had the background to supersede the other candidate. But then I found out from behind the scenes that the VP went to the Hiring Director and told them to hire the other person because it was her third time interviewing for the job. And so, they went with that person because they were uncomfortable going against the grain, fearing
some backlash and knowing that there was a reorganization on the horizon.

“Then I interviewed for the same position a year later, because the girl who got the position quit. There was now a new Hiring Director in place. I was unknown to the new Director. I reposted and again, they went with another candidate, a male, who was very well networked and considered a hot ticket. Everyone knew this person well.”

The more we are tapped into the information networks, the greater the likelihood of knowing about new openings before they are formally posted. This knowledge then gives us the advantage of letting others know of our ambition and getting their feedback on how to move forward.

Another example is when we read a job description and believe that we are qualified and meet the requirements for the position. What we don’t know is what is involved in the decision-making process: who owes who favors, who will influence these decisions—in other words, the politics. The only information we have is the formal job description. But what will it really take to secure this new position? We’re in the dark. That was my blindside experience as well as Shereen’s.

Here’s the lesson. When you rely on the traditional means of getting information, you miss the boat time and time again. You don’t want to appear too pushy or too ambitious and so you continue to wait, living by what you think are the rules of the game. But your refusal to be proactive and political results in you being the last one to know what’s really going on.

Do you sometimes feel like an outsider at work? You most likely recognize that there’s an “in crowd” that has the ear of senior management. Do you sometimes wonder how to gain access to this exclusive network? And is it worth the effort to do so? You may not want to bother with the politics, but your very survival in the workplace depends on learning who the players are and their unwritten rules.

I’m certain that most of you reading this know only too well that the strength of the old boys’ club persists in most organizations. What you may not know is that the best way for you to advance is to gain
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access to these informal networks by building relationships and using political skill. Politics opens the door to valuable information and shows you the best road map for avoiding landmines and building bridges and allies across the organization. The more expansive your network is, the clearer your path.

You might also be turned off by the notion of “politics” in the workplace. You don’t want to get involved. You don’t have the time for this. You put in a long day and then rush home to your family. You barely have a life as it is. So how important is this?

It is the knowledge of the workplace systems and culture that gives the politically savvy the advantage. A lack of engagement in politics results in your exclusion from the power networks. You are not connected to the people in the organization who can provide you with information about the way decisions are made and who can influence those decisions.

This lack of engagement in workplace politics by women is often referred to as “political skills deficiency.” One can make the argument that this is a viable reason for women’s lack of progress. Our lack of engagement in workplace politics not only puts us at a disadvantage or political deficiency, but it also puts us in the “loser’s bracket.” None of us want to be in the loser’s bracket if we have any ambition at all!

Only YOU can answer how important this is for YOU. If you are truly ambitious and want to control your career destiny, then you need to pay attention to the politics. If you sincerely want to move your career forward, this book will be your guide to learning how to be painlessly political.

I understand that engaging in workplace politics is probably not your comfort zone. You would rather focus on your work and not deal with the politics. But what if you had a road map for how to become politically savvy and build the relationships necessary to help you get ahead and stay there?

In this book, you will learn all the tools you need to scope out the political landscape, be strategic, and identify the key relationships you need for your advancement. You will also learn how to build
confidence, trust, and influence with these key stakeholders. In short, you will learn how to be politically savvy.

### What Is Political Savvy?

Have you ever wondered why some people seem to get a free pass? Their mistakes are minimized and their achievements maximized. Doors open for them and they enjoy the spotlight without a tremendous amount of fanfare. They may or may not be as competent and talented as you are, but everything they do seems to work in their favor.

These people are politically astute. They have learned how to work the system in a subtle way. They have gained favor with those in power, and this is not by accident. This is a skill. The fact that they have achieved this status without being viewed as manipulative and self-promoting only confirms their skill.

Politically savvy people develop a sense of intuition that helps them to circumvent potential landmines. They observe the environment and take note of what is rewarded and what is disregarded. They observe how people succeed and what is important to the people in power. This observation is critical to developing political skill.

How well are you tuned in to how decisions are made in your organization? These decisions are often not as straightforward as you might think, and the people with power and influence are not necessarily those you see in the upper rankings of the traditional organizational chart.

How strong are your relationships with key stakeholders and influencers? Politically savvy people have not only identified the power brokers, but also have developed relationships to increase their visibility and influence.

How do you become politically savvy? You need to observe, listen, and ask questions such as:

- Who is getting promoted and why?
- With whom do they have relationships?
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How are people rewarded in your organization?  
What did they do to get noticed?  
What types of behavior are not rewarded?  
Who can be your champion?  
Who seems to be in “favor” and why?  
Are there certain people who have access to the leadership team?

In her book, *It’s All Politics*, author Kathleen Reardon addresses the importance of observing the environment and learning about potential danger. She mentions primatologist Frans de Waal’s studies with chimpanzees. Chimpanzees don’t make uncalculated moves. They are great at observing the social landscape. “They are always keeping track of each other, always thinking about the next social step. Three chimps form coalitions and work together to assess their surroundings and deal with potential enemies.”

So it seems that even chimps are politically savvy to some degree! This awareness of their environment and willingness to work together contributes to their very survival.

We also need to develop a radar system to understand potential roadblocks and danger. This radar comes from a keen understanding of the people and culture of the organization. This radar system comes from the knowledge that can only be obtained from the inner circles within the workplace that both influence and make the rules of the game.

Betsy Myers, director of the White House Office for Women’s Initiatives and Outreach in the Clinton administration, chief operating officer of Obama’s first presidential campaign, and now founding director of the Center for Women and Business at Bentley University, spoke to this point when I interviewed her: “I think you have to be conscious of how you come across. You have to watch for what’s going on around you—that you can’t just operate; you can’t just do your work. There’s a bigger picture, and you have to stay conscious of what’s going on around you. I think that’s the big thing—that there are more pieces to the puzzle. Where do you fit in to the puzzle?”
Betsy suggested that you ask yourself these questions:

1. Who are the stakeholders here that care about the work that I’m doing?
2. What are the relationships that I need to build?
3. What are the relationships that need to be improved or strengthened?

“Part of being politically savvy is saying, “What is it that I’m trying to do? And, when I approach someone whose help or involvement I need, I ask myself how can I help them reach their goals?”

“So, part of being politically savvy is being able to sell your initiative and your idea or the reason why you need to be at the table, because you actually are—not just because they like you, or, you know, you’re fun, or you’re smart, or whatever it is—but that you actually help them further their goals.”

Betsy says there are two parts to being politically savvy: “Being conscious of the world around me—who is in my corner, who’s not? What relationships do I need to build, to spend more time on? And then, being strategic about how to move the ball forward.”

According to executive coach and best-selling author, Dr. Lois P. Frankel, political savvy means understanding the nature of the quid pro quo inherent to every relationship. She advises that to be effective at workplace politics, you must provide others with what they need and want in exchange for what you need and want.

Frankel comments on this: “Early in my career it was difficult to succeed with workplace politics because the ‘old boys club’ wasn’t hospitable to women and I didn’t understand how to crack it. I thought working hard would be the best strategy, but that wasn’t true then; it isn’t true now. I don’t know that the ‘old boys club’ has changed that much, but I’ve gotten better at building the kinds of quid pro quo relationships that enable me to achieve my goals.”

Timi Hallem speaks of the political savvy necessary for female attorneys: “I think it’s crucial for female attorneys, because in addition
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to the usual office politics that everyone faces, in every organization, whether it’s a law office, a corporate, academia, or in fact, real politics, there are minefields no matter where you are. For women attorneys, there are more minefields, because you’re also going to be dealing with some people, even in this day and age, who are not supportive about either women attorneys, or women who have kids, or part-time work. And you need to know who they are, and how to deal with them.”
About the Author

Bonnie Marcus, MEd, is president of Women’s Success Coaching, a company she founded in 2007 to assist professional women in successfully navigating the workplace and advancing their careers. She started her own corporate career at an entry-level position and worked her way up to the top of a national company. With 20-plus years of sales and management experience, Bonnie’s extensive business background includes being president/CEO of a ServiceMaster company, and VP of Sales at Medical Staffing Network and at two other national companies in the health care and software industries. She has held executive positions in startup companies and Fortune 500 firms.

As an award-winning entrepreneur, a contributing writer for Forbes and Business Insider, and a much sought-after professional speaker, Bonnie shares her message globally through keynote speeches, live workshops, blogging, and her popular podcasts. Her passion is to help high-achieving women embrace their ambition and realize their leadership potential.

Forbes.com honored Women’s Success Coaching three years in a row as one of the Top 100 Websites for Professional Women, stating, “Women’s Success Coaching weighs in on the many building blocks of empowering women in business, from assertive communication to self-promotion to sensitivity training.”

Bonnie received a BA in Sociology from Connecticut College and a M.Ed. from New York University. Her website is www.WomensSuccessCoaching.com, and she can be reached by e-mail at Bonnie@WomensSuccessCoaching.com and on Twitter as @selfpromote. Read her posts on Forbes.com at www.forbes.com/sites/bonniemarcus.
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