

Political Savvy in the Workplace

Joint Meeting of the Actuaries Club of Hartford/Springfield

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What comes to mind when one thinks of Political Savvy in the workplace?

On the plus side, consensus, influence, leadership, collaboration, win-win negotiations and appreciating the style of others. On the down side, turf issues, plotting, egos, credit-claiming and the like, i.e. all the things that get in the way of good relationships with people. Perhaps it all boils down to being genuine in one's relationships with others (be they supervisors, subordinates or peers) rather than taking a contriving approach where it quickly becomes obvious to all that "it's all about me." Political savvy, one might argue, is an art that, for some, comes quite naturally. "But, that said, it may be an art that can also be learned.

What do actuaries think?

The work of science is to substitute facts for appearances and demonstrations for impressions. – Ruskin

Could be that they are more interested in facts than appearances. Unarguably good when it comes to analysis; but potentially bad when it comes to relationships.

Political Expediency or Political Savvy?

Several of the next scenarios are arguably ethics-related, but ethics and political expediency often collide. Hence, they're included here. Which also leads to the open question concerning political expediency vs. political savvy. How does one navigate those waters in the corporate world?

Consider these scenarios:

Scenario 1: The HR department is hosting a half-day session for all its summer interns to learn more about the company, but the head of the committee which oversees the actuarial interns thinks the session won't be "meaty" enough for the actuarial interns and opts to pass on the event.

Scenario 2: The HR department sends a resume up to the actuarial department for an open position but the candidate, while an actuary, isn't much of a fit for the position, so the actuarial hiring manager calls the HR staffing specialist to ask if "they have any clue what they're doing down there."

Scenario 3: A new underwriting student raises his hand at a department staff meeting and asks a question about the new mortality table that's being used, and the actuarial presenter suggests that the table is far from new.

Scenario 4: An actuarial manager sends his staff a short thank you note for their input on the project they've been working on for the last three months, then cuts and pastes their conclusions and recommendations into an email from him to the CEO.

Scenario 5: A product development actuary, given the opportunity to meet with the top sales staff to find out what they need and want, spends the meeting explaining why none of it can possibly work.

Scenario 6: One of your up and coming actuaries explains that, for personal reasons, they may be forced to relocate to a city where you have no actuarial presence in your office, so you decide to help by telling them the name of good recruiter who specializes in that location.