

Don't be political. Be politically savvy.

Stay ahead in the race without resorting to questionable tactics.

FEATURE ARTICLE
By Adrian Lim

WHEN Yvonne (not her real name) joined a small IT start-up with just four people, including herself, she expected to be in an open, nurturing work environment.

Given the small set-up, the marketing and business-development executive thought that the likelihood of office politics would be non-existent.

Continued overleaf 

NEWS FLASH

Singaporean government keen to woo overseas citizens back home

Singapore - Contact Singapore, a government agency meant for attracting skilled foreigners, is now turning its attention towards enticing overseas Singaporeans back to the country.

The organisation has encouraged recruitment firms to formulate proposals to allow overseas Singaporeans to secure jobs back home. It has even developed a new mobile app for Overseas Singaporeans to conveniently get event updates, receive industry highlights and find jobs.

Besides sourcing for jobs, it also wants headhunters to issue personalised career coaching services, such as enabling returning Singaporeans to chart career goals, beef up their resume and prepare for job interviews.



Japanese flock to Vietnam to use cheap labor force

Vietnam - Hirota Yasuzumi, managing director of the Japan External Trade Organisation (JETRO) in HCM City, noted that a wave of Japanese enterprises in Thailand are relocating their operations in neighboring countries, including Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia where wages are lower.

However, he clarified that Japanese would not move the production divisions that bring high added value, and need high technologies and equipment, but only the labour intensive ones.

Vietnam is JETRO's preferred recommendation because of the superior quality of the labor force. However, weak supporting industries and shortage of materials locally are significant considerations.

Chronic illnesses heavily impacting productivity levels globally



World - According to a report by the World Economic Forum, diseases are costing approximately \$2 trillion in lost productivity, including healthcare expenses, absenteeism and presenteeism, annually worldwide.

Some of the most expensive ailments contributing to more than 80% of the expenses include diabetes, coronary diseases, hypertension, obesity, cancer, depression and back pain.

The chief causes of these illnesses are smoking, physical inactivity, poor diet, alcohol consumption, poor stress management, insufficient sleep and lack of health screening.

The impact of wellness programmes on company performance is significant in curbing healthcare expenses and productivity losses.

However, during Yvonne's one-year stint, she found herself in the cross-hair sights of her manager, Lilian, who, besides claiming credit for her work, also bad-mouthed her to the firm's founder, Adam.

"Lilian, in particular, gave me the hardest time in the organisation... and was informing Adam that I was slacking on the job and could not meet deadlines," Yvonne said.

"This led to one of many humiliating situations, when he would shout at me," she added. She eventually tendered her resignation.

Yvonne's experience is not uncommon in today's highly-charged corporate race.

Said Stefanie, a marketing and communications executive: "Being caught in office politics stifled my creativity and I felt like I was treading on eggshells every day at work."

In Stefanie's case, she found herself caught in the middle of a power struggle between partners in the law firm.

Human-resource (HR) experts My Paper spoke to said that office politics is part and parcel of working life, and it pays to be able to navigate this minefield.

"Whether it's favouritism, backstabbing, silos or alliances, taking credit or outright manipulation, office politics can happen anywhere in any organisation, and to anyone at any level," said Ms Evelyn Kwek, director of thYnk Consulting Group.

Office politics rears its head because everyone brings with him different values and motivations to the workplace, added Ms Kwek.

Mr Josh Goh, assistant director of corporate services at HR consultancy The GMP Group, said it is difficult to avoid office politics totally but it is in employees' best interest if they develop skills to stay attuned to the political landscape.

Knowing your own job thoroughly is critical, said Mr Goh. "Employees open themselves to others' criticisms and attacking of loopholes when they cannot perform their job well," he explained.

Ms Kwek said: "In the longer term, colleagues and bosses appreciate people who add value to the organisation, contribute to the business' bottom line and create a positive workplace."

And while it is one thing to be "political", being "politically savvy" is different and can help a person stay ahead in the race without resorting to questionable tactics, she added.

Ms Kwek said it is important to build trust, by being honest and genuine in relating to everyone. In this way, your influence increases and it is harder for others to manipulate perceptions about you.

Mr Goh suggested: "The rule of thumb is to remain objective at all times and never get personal."

Should one be victimised by an immediate superior, like in Yvonne's case, it would be useful to engage in a little self-reflection - did one contribute in any indirect way to the deteriorating relationship?

Mr Goh advised having a frank and respectful chat with one's supervisor about work performance.

Yvonne's story, however, ended on a happy note. A few weeks before she was to leave her job, Lilian went on a week's medical leave and she was left to pick up the slack. She surprised Adam with her efficiency, and earned an apology from him.



This article first appeared in My Paper on 13 April 2013.

Source: My Paper c Singapore Press Holding Limited. Reproduced with permission.