



January 2008

Masterful Mentoring

▼ TIP

Tip of the Month

Be forthright when discussing your peer interactions with your partner.

JANUARY IS
NATIONAL MENTORING
MONTH.

Celebrate your efforts
and commitment to this
worthwhile endeavor!

▼ MANAGING SIDEWAYS

An important aspect of navigating your career path is the ability to manage your peer level relationships across the organization. Unlike managing upward or downward, there is very little direct influence you can wield in order to get your will acted upon by peers. As you navigate your career trajectory within an organization, the need to be able to influence peers increases. Those who learn to manage sideways in the organization increase the likelihood of advancing higher and faster than those who simply concern themselves with managing up and down. In this article, we will discuss best practices for managing sideways in an organization and how to leverage your mentoring relationship to increase your effectiveness with this skill.

The Political Problem

When managing sideways, not only do you have the issue of no direct control over your peers (see the [November 2007](#) newsletter for more information on this topic), but you also have the added complexity of having to manage the inherent political dynamics. Aristotle said, "Man is by nature a political animal," and went on to imply that at the root of politics is a diversity of interests. This is a reality that can be felt in all organizations that consist of more than one person. Politics stem from the various work focuses, roles and power bases of those who make up the organization. Rarely are peers viewed as equals by those in positions of power in organizations. Usually, one or two will rise above their peers and be seen as more influential and consequently more likely to advance. Those who refuse to become political (only seeing the negative side of organizational politics) may adversely affect others' perceptions of them; people may see them as not influential and not able to work well with others. Unless you do not want to advance very far in the organization or you work in a very small organization, you need to gain political savvy to help you make the most of your peer relationships.

Gaining Peer Power

Leaders are those who have the drive to differentiate themselves from their peers. At this moment, you are either gaining or losing influence, meaning you are either building collegial relationships with your peers that are adding to your ability to influence desired outcomes, or you



RESOURCES

Triple Creek offers many free resources on our web site, including booklets, research papers, and an archive of past newsletters.

Visit www.3creek.com for access to these additional mentoring resources.

MANAGING SIDEWAYS (cont.)

are eroding your power base by not working to strengthen your peer presence. To help you increase your political savvy and be better able to manage sideways, consider these best practices.

- *Invest Your Time Wisely* – A very common political mistake is to only pursue issues you are deeply passionate about, regardless of their feasibility. It is better to be perceived as being judicious by supporting peer-related issues that have high chances of succeeding and are viewed as inspiring positive change. Be careful not to over commit yourself to too many causes that are outside your direct area of concern or control, however.
- *Find the Common Ground* – Since the political tension in peer relationships involves competition for organizational attention and resources, it is difficult to simply expect your peers to cooperate with your desires out of a sense of fair play or perceived rightness. You will find it easier to gain peer cooperation if you are able to appeal to the values and challenges that you hold in common. This common ground could include areas of mutual interest, and professional or personal growth.
- *Prove Your Trustworthiness* – The amount of trust and confidence your peers hold toward you will dictate the form of political behavior you will experience. Lower levels of trust lead to subversive behaviors from your peers. They will either ignore your desires or work around you to accomplish their ends. Trust is built through establishing high levels of rapport and respect with your peers, and with higher levels of trust comes an increased willingness to work with you.
- *Excel in Doing Good Deeds* – The law of reciprocity is based off of the principle of mutual exchange. If you give support to a peer, they then feel a sense of obligation to return the favor in equal amounts of realized value. The other side of this principle demands that you only take as much as you are given. It's important to make sure that the ledgers that record the give and take with your peers are equal or tipped in your favor. Endeavor to be perceived by your peers as a giver and not just as a taker.
- *Ask Great Questions and Listen* – It is important that you are perceived as an expert by your peers. The preferred way to build your credibility is by asking probative questions and using active listening, rather than telling your peers what you know and possibly implying that they are ignorant. By asking thoughtful questions and listening for meaning, you can create an image of respectful intelligence amongst your peers.

By gaining peer power and building influence among your peers, you can take steps to actively manage sideways in a positive manner.



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MANAGING SIDEWAYS (cont.)

Political dynamics are ever changing and gaining mastery can take a lifetime. This is why these types of career management discussions are ideal within the confidential confines of your mentoring relationship. Your mentoring partner can help you process the political environment that you are operating in, as well as provide his/her perspective and experience on managing similar situations.

Practice Exercise

The following exercise can help you construct a plan for increasing your effectiveness of managing sideways.

1. Assess the strength of your position among your peers. Ask yourself:
 - How determined am I to distinguish myself above my peers (low, moderate, high)?
 - Among my peers, who have I aligned myself with and how are they perceived (low, average, above)?
 - If a new promotion were to be given, what are my chances of getting it (low, medium, high)?
2. Discuss your conclusions with your mentoring partner and solicit his/her perspective of your assessment.
3. If you have determined that you need to strengthen your peer relationships, determine what new techniques you will apply.
4. Set up a time to review your progress with your mentoring partner.