**A Woman’s Guide to Navigating Office Politics**

**How to Avoid Getting Blindsided On Your Way to the Top**

A Book Proposal

By Bonnie Marcus

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Book Overview ………………………………………………………………3

About the Author …………………………………………………………….6

Competition ………………………………………………………………….9

Marketing and Promotional Opportunities …………………………………12

Manuscript Specifications ………………………………………………….18

Book Outline ……………………………………………………………….19

Sample Chapters ……………………………………………………………23

**Book Overview**

The corporate environment today is very competitive and especially challenging for women who aspire to leadership positions. Despite their education and talent, women are often overlooked and passed over for promotions while their male counterparts, who may or may not be as qualified, rise to the top. Ambitious high achieving women who focus on their performance as their ticket to advancement are sabotaged by the political realities of the workplace every day. Their failure to understand and embrace office politics make them vulnerable to being blindsided.

While it’s true that both genders need to embrace the culture and politics of their organization to advance their careers, women face different challenges. Many of these challenges are rooted in unconscious bias that is still prevalent in the workplace. Today this subtle bias adds to the complexity of navigating the political landscape for women. Women, who focus more on their performance than understanding the culture and engaging in the politics, are vulnerable to being blindsided. They are outsiders to the networks of power and influence. Therefore, they lack the critical information about how decisions are made that impact their career. In order for women to compete in the current workplace, they need the tools to navigate a politically charged environment. They must learn to be politically savvy, to self promote effectively, and build allies and champions across the organization.

The premise of this book, *A Woman’s Guide to Navigating Office Politics*, is that women’s avoidance of politics is a formidable barrier to their advancement. The author, Bonnie Marcus, makes the case for women to change their negative mindset about politics and outlines a process for them to comfortably promote and position themselves across the organization to build influence and social capital. Without these skills, women are likely to be blindsided by the politics.

2013 was the year of “Leaning In”. Sheryl Sandberg revived the discussion about the importance of having more women leaders. Her book sparked many conversations in the C suite as well as among professional women about what it takes to advance women to top leadership positions. *A Woman’s Guide to Navigating Office Politics* is the next phase of Sandberg’s book, providing women with the strategies to be successful when they “lean in” by learning to be savvy and circumventing the potential landmines present in their organization.

To date little progress has been made in women’s leadership. Catalyst’s 2013 census of Fortune 500 companies validated what many of us in the workforce know to be true. Women are stuck for the most part in middle management.

“Women held only 16.9% of corporate board seats in 2013, indicating no significant year-over-year uptick for the 8th straight year. And only 14.6% of Executive Officer positions were held by women—the 4th consecutive year of no year-over-year growth. 10% of companies had no women serving on their boards; more than 2/3 of companies had no women of color directors. And women held only 8.1% of top earner slots—again no change from prior year!”

Many ambitious women are left scratching their heads; wondering why they are stuck and not getting appropriately rewarded for their talent and hard work; why they are continually blindsided and passed over, and why they remain invisible despite their great performance. There are many books, such as Lean In, that advise women to be more assertive and embrace their ambition. There are also books that address office politics. Yet, there is little information that is focused specifically on how women can successfully navigate the politics in the current work environment.

*A Woman’s Guide to Navigating Office Politics* is the essential tool kit for high achieving women to get savvy about what it takes to get ahead and stay ahead in today’s workplace. The author, Bonnie Marcus, provides specific strategies and exercises that guide women to successfully navigate the political realities of their organization. A Forbes contributing writer, executive coach, and radio host, Marcus also includes anecdotes from her interviews with top women leaders and women at all stages of their careers. Her perspective is that of a woman who herself climbed the corporate ladder to run a national company, and from the vantage point of a seasoned executive coach. She understands firsthand what challenges women have promoting and positioning themselves due to their gender, and tackles the difficult real life scenarios that women face every day in the workplace. What she offers in the book, Anatomy of a Blindside, is a proven method and toolkit to guide women through the complexities of office politics and avoid a political blindside that can sabotage their career.

Women need to be at the table! They need to be at the table because they bring value and a unique viewpoint. Research validates the business case for diverse talent. But getting a seat at the table is still complicated for women. *A Woman’s Guide to Navigating Office Politics* demonstrates to women the importance of understanding workplace politics and provides them with the necessary tools to survive and thrive in a politically charged environment.

**About the Author**



**Bonnie Marcus, M.Ed.** is President of Women’s Success Coaching, a company she founded in 2007 to assist professional women in successfully navigating the workplace in order to better promote themselves and advance 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 by using her savvy promotion and relational skills. Her passion is now helping other women do the same by teaching them about being sensitive to the culture of their organization, embracing the politics, and actively and intentionally moving their careers forward with a sound strategic plan. As an award-winning entrepreneur, a contributing writer for *Forbes*, and a much sought after professional speaker, Bonnie shares her message globally through keynote speeches, live workshops, blogging, and her popular radio show and podcasts. Forbes.com honored Women’s Success Coaching in 2010, 2011, and 2012 as one of the Top 100 Websites for Professional Women stating, “Women’s Success Coaching weighs on the many building blocks of empowering women in business, from assertive communication to self-promotion to sensitivity training.”

Bonnie’s keynotes, workshops, and webinars on the subject of how women must learn to navigate workplace politics are so popular that she delivers consistently sold out presentations several times per month, speaking at large conferences to audiences of over 800 as well as at small to medium size events. Her webinars done in partnership with industry organizations such as Women in Technology International and Smith College have had as many as 300 women in attendance.

Bonnie understands firsthand what it takes for a woman to survive in a politically charged environment. Her own blindside experience occurred when she was passed over for a promotion after eight years with a national healthcare organization. She had been consistently recognized for her outstanding performance, but a reorganization and a new boss resulted in her losing that opportunity to someone less qualified. Bonnie thought she was doing everything right but she failed to build allies and champions across the organization and had no knowledge of how this decision would be made. Her avoidance of the politics was her downfall. Bonnie’s experience is so common with professional women today that she knew this was a hot topic that needed to be addressed if women are to succeed in corporate environments. Her mission is to teach a larger audience of ambitious women how to become politically savvy and promote and position themselves to advance their careers.

With 20+ years of sales and management experience, Bonnie’s extensive business background includes CEO of a ServiceMaster company and VP of Sales at Medical Staffing Network and two others national companies in the healthcare and software industries. She has held executive positions in startup companies and Fortune 500 companies. In each position, Bonnie has learned some valuable lessons that allow her to provide great wisdom to other professional women.

Bonnie received a BA in Sociology from Connecticut College and a M.Ed. from New York University.

**COMPETITION**

1. *Lean In*, Sheryl Sandberg (Random House, 2013, ISBN 987 0 385 34994 9)

Author Sheryl Sandberg addresses how women fail to put themselves forward. This failure results in what she calls “The Leadership Ambition Gap” that stems from both internal barriers unique to women as well as external institutional barriers. Though Sandberg does not address women and office politics directly, she does call for women to assert themselves in the workplace by speaking up, asking for what they need, and taking a seat at the table. Her book does not, however, provide the tools for women to be able to “lean in” safely.

In *A Woman’s Guide to Navigating Office Politics,* Marcus speaks to “looking out before you lean in,” and she helps women to assert themselves successfully by understanding workplace dynamics and the importance of building relationships. Marcus answers the question, “How can I lean in without being blindsided by the politics?”

1. *Nice Girls Don’t Get The Corner Office*, Lois Frankel, PhD (Time Warner Book

Group, 2004, ISBN 0 446 53132 4))

Frankel identifies important barriers to women’s success in the workplace. Similar to *A Woman’s Guide to Navigating Office Politics,* Frankel starts with raising awareness in order to help the reader understand the consequences of her behavior and mindset. She offers concrete suggestions for behavioral change. Frankel states that business is a game and she offers tips and strategies for women to compete and win. Although the book does not focus on office politics, the author does stress the importance of knowing the unspoken rules of the workplace and how women must learn to present and position themselves.

*A Woman’s Guide to Navigating Office Politics* is geared for high achieving women who have mastered many of the mistakes Frankel addresses, but are still vulnerable to being sabotaged by the politics. They need the specific tools Marcus offers to navigate the workplace successfully.

1. *It’s All Politics: Winning in a World Where Hard Work and Talent Aren’t Enough*, Kathleen Kelley Reardon, Ph.D. (Doubleday, 2005, ISBN 978 0 385 50758 5)

This book addresses the importance of engaging in workplace politics to succeed. Reardon offers examples of realistic conversations and situations as well as her best advice on how to position oneself for political power and influence. She does briefly mention the “double bind” in one of her chapters, but there is no specific advice for women to deal with gender bias or overcome their own fears and hesitation to self-promote and build relationships of trust and influence. *A Woman’s Guide to Navigating Office Politics* views the office politics through the lens of a high achieving woman in a competitive environment who not only has to deal with the politics, but also the subtleties of unconscious bias.

1. *PushBack: How Smart Women Ask and Stand Up For What They Want* Selena Rezvani (Josey Bass, 2007, ISBN# 978 1 118 10490 3)

*PushBack* is for women who want to leverage their skills, promote themselves effectively, and fast track their careers. The author, Selena Rezvani, interviews top women business leaders about their paths to success. She addresses the question women often ask about how to be both nice and assertive in the workplace. Rezvani’s main focus is helping women negotiate better so she offers them practical tips on how to advocate and negotiate for themselves.

Author Marcus believes self-advocacy is important, but she also believes that understanding the workplace dynamics and building and nurturing relationships is vital in order to advocate for yourself successfully. The tools provided in *A Woman’s Guide to Navigating Office Politics* supports self-advocacy in a savvy way.

1. *Secrets to Winning at Office Politics*, Marie G. McIntyre, PhD. (St. Martin’s Press, 2005, ISBN 978 0 312 33218 1)

This book offers practical advice on how to play the politics in your organization. McIntyre offers simple strategies on how to deal with some of the political games in the workplace. She also addresses how to assess your political power, map out the power grid in your company, and build influence and personal power. However, the book does not help women specifically given their unique challenges. *A Woman’s Guide to Navigating Office Politics* offers easy to follow strategies and practical tools for women who may hesitate to engage in the politics and are potentially vulnerable as a result. Not only do high achieving women have to compete in a politically charged environment, but they also need to develop the political skills to understand where the landmines relative to gender bias reside.

**Marketing and Promotional Opportunities**

Through her popular Forbes column, syndicated radio show, and large volume of speaking engagements, Ms. Marcus has built an expansive international audience of professional women who represent the ideal target market for *A Woman’s Guide to Navigating Office Politics.* This audience has already demonstrated its loyalty to the author and commitment to her topic of career advancement by its active engagement with her platform. Below is a detailed description of Ms. Marcus’ platform and how it will be used to promote the book.

**Speaking**

Each year, Ms. Marcus delivers over 20 keynotes/workshops and approximately 25 webinars. She has presented “The Anatomy of a Blindside” to corporate audiences such as Chubb, Daichi Sankyo, Prudential, EMC, Fidelity, Manatt, Phelps and Phillips LLC, Credit Suisse, Citi, and Johnson and Johnson. Webinars have been in partnership with organizations including Harvard Business School, MIT, Women in Technology International, Smith College Executive Education, Healthcare Businesswoman’s Association, Women Entrepreneurs in Science and Technology, National Association of Professional Women, and Retail Now. The audiences range from 50 to over 800 women.

**Forbes Column + Online Reach**

Ms. Marcus’s Forbes column, Head Over Heels, is one of the most popular blogs for women on the website. The Forbes.com site has 50+ million unique views per month.   
ForbesWoman has 3+ million unique views per month.

Recognizing Ms. Marcus’s unique insight for women, Forbes also named her website as a Top 100 Website for Professional Women three years in a row. She is a sought after contributor and guest blogger on other sites such as Women in Business, Women Entrepreneur, Women Who Run It and many others and is working with leading digital agency Shelton Interactive to pursue additional opportunities for online exposure.

**Social Media**

Ms. Marcus has a dynamic social media presence, interacting with Forbes readers and leading women in business across numerous channels. Here is a summary of her reach on each channel:

* Twitter – 3,248 followers
* LinkedIn - 500+ connections
* Facebook – New fan page is live
* Email list - 2417 recipients

Ms. Marcus has ramped up her social media strategy with direction from Shelton Interactive and her platform is growing rapidly.

**Syndicated Radio Show**

A dedicated and popular radio host, the author has hosted a radio show for the past 5 years on a variety of networks. Her most recent show, GPS Your Career: A Woman’s Guide to Success, was featured on a CBS station and syndicated in 4 markets. The show attracted approximately 1.8 million listeners each year. Her show is moving to a new network in April 2014 and will keep the same title and platform.

**Promotion Plans for the Book**

To promote this book, the author will do the following:

* Marcus has hired Shelton Interactive of Austin, Texas, to build a pre-launch audience for the book and manage the PR for the book launch. Shelton specializes in working with authors to build their platform and has promoted more than 20 bestselling books over the past four years. It is one of the top digital agencies in the country, developing digital strategies for some of the top brands in the world and creating platforms for some of the world’s most influential thought-leaders. Shelton has a strategic partnership with the country’s top business book PR firm, Cave Henricks Communications. They are the lead digital agency for Chicken Soup for the Soul and Harvard Health Publications. They have worked with top brands like IBM, Amazon, Thomas Nelson, Zondervan, B&H Publishing Group, Vermillion and numerous individual thought leaders.
* Through her Forbes column, newsletter, and website blog, Marcus will promote the topic of women and office politics. She will conduct a series of interviews with women leaders about their blindside experiences and accompanying lessons. This will be a Forbes series and potentially a radio show series as well.
* Marcus will use her newsletter to build awareness by soliciting stories from readers about their blindside experiences and their experiences with workplace politics.
* Marcus will use her radio platform to promote the book, run contests for giveaways.
* Marcus will create an eBook from the first chapter for promotional purposes. This eBook will be available on her website and available to partner organizations and individuals.
* Marcus will use the Political Skill Assessment and other exercises in the book in her webinars and workshops. The Political Skill Assessment will also be available as a download.
* Marcus will utilize her relationships with prominent organizations such as Harvard Business School, Smith College, Women in Technology International (WITI), Healthcare Businesswomen’s Association (HBA), Women Entrepreneurs in Science and Technology, to promote the book as part of her webinar series. Audiences range from 50 to 300 per webinar. She will continue to market the topic to other organizations as well. She will negotiate book sales as part of her fee. Marcus will develop curriculum based on A Woman’s Guide to Navigating Office Politics for corporate clients in partnership with Women in Technology International. June 2014 is the target date to roll out and launch ongoing programs for WITI corporate partners. The book will be a necessary part of the future curriculum. Target corporations for these programs include ADP, AT&T, EMC, Geico, IBM, Thomson Reuters, and TEK Systems.
* Marcus will develop workshop curriculum based on the book topic in partnership with Women of Influence Inc. in Toronto, CA. The book will be part of the pre work for the course.
* Partnerships with other authors, coaches, speakers and organizations will be created for the book launch, each contributing substantial contacts. The goal is to reach an additional 100,000 contacts through these partnerships.
* As part of the media plan developed with Shelton Interactive, Marcus will promote a Facebook Fan page to further engage an audience and use as a platform to run contests, giveaways, and build the interest and audience pre and post launch. LinkedIn as well as Twitter will promote the interview series on women leaders and workplace politics and other related podcasts. Both platforms will be used to further engage women in the topic and its importance.
* Marcus will seek endorsements from prominent women thought leaders and authors such as Lois Frankel, PhD,(bestselling author and executive coach), Betsy Myers (Center for Women in Business at Bentley University and former senior advisor to Presidents Obama and Clinton), Tiffany Dufu (Levo League), Gloria Feldt (bestselling author and founder of Take The Lead), Marilyn Tam (bestselling author and former C level executive at Aveda, Reebok and Nike), Alison Maitland,(bestselling author and expert in women’s leadership), Margaret Heffernan, (former media executive, bestselling author and prominent thought leader), Sally Helgesen ( bestselling author and expert on women’s leadership), Jennifer Kahnweiler (bestselling author), Maria Gamb (bestselling author and expert in gender dynamics), Carol Frohlinger ( bestselling author and executive coach specializing in gender bias and negotiation skills), Carolyn Lawrence (CEO of Women of Influence CA), Linda Tarr Whelan (former diplomat and author), Pamela Ryckman (journalist and bestselling author), Toddi Gutner (journalist and author), Anne Weisburg (expert in second generation gender bias), Davia Temin (bestselling author, corporate communications expert and consultant).

**Manuscript Specifications**

*A Woman’s Guide to Navigating Office Politics* will be approximately 250 pages. There will be fill in the blank worksheets and assessments at the back of the book.

The book will be completed within four months of contract.

**Book Outline**

1. Introduction: The Blindside
2. Politics in the Workplace: How it works and how women fit into it
3. Political Tool #1. The Mirror: Your Tool for Savvy Self Promotion
4. Political Tool #2. The Magnifying Glass: Your Tool to Observe Workplace Dynamics
5. Political Tool #3. Pass Go and Collect $200 Card: Strategic Networking
6. Political Tool #4. Get Out of Jail Free Card: Sponsorship
7. Political Tool #5. The GPS: Executive Coaching
8. Summary. The Action Plan: Where do you go from here?
9. Chapter One. **Politics in the Workplace: How it works and how women fit into it**

Every organization has unique political dynamics. Politics are everywhere and politics can make or break your career. To their detriment, women’s avoidance of workplace politics puts them in a vulnerable position. Their continued belief that their hard work and performance will get them ahead, sets them up to be blindsided and passed over for promotions. There are many theories that explain the lack of women in leadership positions but the bottom line is that the optimal way for women to circumvent obstacles is through political savvy and relationships. This chapter covers:

* What is political savvy?
* The importance of political will
* The four stages of political savvy
* Your political skill assessment
* The Political Toolkit: Your Secret Weapon To Compete In a Political Environment

1. Chapter Two. **The Mirror: Your Tool for Savvy Self Promotion**

Promoting yourself with political savvy allows you to compete. Promotion is the tool for competition; to gain access to the networks and information that impacts your career. You need to master the art of promotion to get to the top and stay on top. The mirror, the first tool in the Political Toolkit, helps you to discover your unique value proposition in order to promote yourself effectively. This chapter covers:

* The reality of the workplace today
* Why do women hesitate to promote themselves?
  + Our upbringing
  + The failure to see self promotion as a leadership skill (We only see it as self serving and therefore distasteful)
  + Our fear of potential backlash: the Double Bind
  + Our lack of understanding our value proposition (the contribution we make to business outcomes)
* Your Unique Value Proposition
  + How to identify your value proposition?
    - Worksheet (self reflection exercise)
  + Aligning your value proposition with what others want and need
    - Connecting the Dots: Going from Me to We
  + Demonstrate your value proposition

1. Chapter Three. **The Magnifying Glass: Your Tool to Focus on Workplace Dynamics**

The only way women will avoid being blindsided is to understand the workplace dynamics. This is a critical component to political savvy, and requires a special focus in order for women to connect with the realities of their organization. This chapter helps the reader to understand what to look for and how to listen and grasp the subtleties of power and influence behind the organizational chart.

1. Chapter Four. **The Pass Go and Collect $200 Card: Building Critical Workplace Relationships That Count**

Women are great at networking, but rarely use networking for their career advancement. They tend to network with people they like and fail to leverage relationships for their benefit. This chapter stresses the importance of strategic networking. The question is, “who do you know and who do you need to know” to help you realize your career goals?

This chapter covers:

* What is strategic networking and how does it work?
* How to break out of your comfort zone and build relationships that count
* Quid Pro Quo
  + The importance of leveraging relationships
  + Women’s hesitancy to “ask” and the consequences
* 3 workplace networks and how they work for you
* Mapping your Power Network
  + Rating their influence and your connection
  + Identifying mentors and/or sponsors

1. Chapter Five. **The Get Out of Jail Free Card: Sponsorship**

Research confirms that women can benefit greatly from working with a sponsor, yet these opportunities are not readily available for women in most organizations. This chapter helps women to position themselves as a high potential in the company to obtain a sponsor, to identify and approach potential sponsors, and build and nurture these relationships.

This chapter also helps the reader to understand:

* What is sponsorship?
* How to identify a sponsor
* How to use this relationship for your advancement
* Framing the sponsorship relationship

1. Chapter Six: **The GPS: Executive Coaching**

Executive coaching increases social awareness and helps women to understand the workplace dynamics. The coaching process assists women to shift their focus from their technical skills to relational skills and develop and maintain effective interpersonal relationships.

This chapter covers:

* What is executive coaching?
* How to find the right executive coach
  + What to look for/what to avoid
  + Setting up a complimentary session.

1. Chapter Seven. **Summary and Action Plan**

This chapter is a review of the key elements of the book and guides the reader to create and commit to an action plan using the political toolkit. The action plan is broken down into these major sections: self-promotion (the mirror), understanding the workplace dynamics (the magnifying glass), strategic networking (Pass Go Card), sponsorship (Get Out of Jail Free Card), and executive coaching (GPS), and provides suggestions for the reader to move forward in each category.

1. **Resources**

This chapter has fill in the blank worksheets and assessments for the suggested exercises in the book.

**Sample Chapters**

**Introduction: The Blindside**

You work really hard. You have what it takes to do a good job. All your skills and education have prepared you to have a successful career. You are passionate about what you do. . You enjoy your colleagues and you invest a great deal of time and energy into every project to make sure it’s perfect.

Perhaps you have been recognized for your top performance. You think you are well on your way to getting a promotion. There is a new opportunity to move up. You apply for the position. It would mean more compensation and more responsibility and you are ready to take it on. You know you are qualified, maybe even overqualified, and you are confident that the job will be yours. And then the bottom falls out. Someone else is chosen over you and they aren’t nearly as qualified as you are! You are frustrated and angry. You feel betrayed. Wow! You didn’t see it coming. That’s the blindside.

What happened? Politics!

Workplaces are highly political environments where decisions about who gets ahead, who gets more compensation, who gets access to scarce resources are not based on performance alone. Our naïve assumption that our performance will guarantee a successful career is a dangerous one. This assumption results in thousands of women being blindsided. And it happens every day.

Where does this assumption come from? As young girls we are taught that academic success is a must. Don’t you remember what a great feeling it was to come home with a good report card and have your Mom and Dad tell you how proud they were? I recall it well. Receiving good grades was important to me and I worked hard to excel in school. I wasn’t even sure what I wanted to be when I grew up, but I got the message that doing well in school was necessary for me to be successful in whatever I chose to do in life.

Success in school is based on industriousness. You work diligently, study and prepare, and you are rewarded with good grades. This belief and behavior, however, does not translate in the workplace.

Early in my career, I worked for a national healthcare organization. I joined this company as a regional manager and after eight years worked my way up to be an Area Vice President. I was a rock star! I won every award for top performance for my region and loved the work, loved the people I worked with. So I wasn’t terribly concerned when we started to hear rumors about reorganization. I had survived a couple of mergers and acquisitions and had always landed on top.

The reorganization became a reality, and one day we had a conference call with the CEO to announce the changes. There were two ways this would impact me. First, there were some changes in the structure of my region and a new Vice President role was created. Second, I had a new boss; a buddy of the CEO from outside the company and from another industry.

I was excited about the possibility of a promotion to Vice President. I asked for the promotion. I lobbied for the job. All of my eighteen direct reports called the new SVP and recommended that he choose me. I was confident that the job was mine.

And then I was blindsided. The Vice President position went to someone else from outside my region. I was devastated. I felt betrayed. After investing eight years of my time, energy and talent, I was overlooked. I was angry and frustrated.

What else did I need to do to move up? I had a history of great performance. And I worked the politics to some degree. After all, I asked my new boss for the promotion. I talked to my direct reports and let them know I was interested in the new position. Many of them recommended me for the job. I thought I had done everything right. But did I?

No!

I learned many lessons as a result of this experience. I learned that I was very naïve. I learned that focusing on my work alone was a mistake. I learned that it is critical to understand the way decisions are made in your organization. It is critical to know who has the power and influence over the decisions that impact your career. And it is paramount to build allies and champions across the organization.

I failed to build a relationship with my new boss because I didn’t like him. I didn’t understand how the decision about the Vice President position would be made. I didn’t get the politics.

In the workplace, the rules of the game are not so simple. Although hard work and performance are important, it is not the sole basis for advancement. Yes, your track record is critical, but unlike school, the workplace has different criteria for success. Often promotions are based on personality, on the ability to engage in the politics and promote oneself with intention; to network and build relationships.

Can you see what happens? We are still working on an assumption that helped us reach academic success. We behave as if this assumption is valid. But it doesn’t help us in the workplace. In fact, it works against us and sets us up to be blindsided.

Elizabeth, an executive in the Bio Pharma industry, was blindsided about a half a dozen times over the course of her career. This occurred when there was a change in senior management and the new leadership did not view her boss favorably. Unaware of the dynamics involved, Elizabeth lost her job despite the fact that she was a top performer. She lost her job because of her allegiance to her boss and her lack of understanding of the politics. She thought she was doing everything right.

She tells one story about the time she was working with a site president who gave her a nice promotion and then left to take a different role. Apparently, he gave her the promotion without asking permission from the parent company. She found out after she lost her job that the parent company didn’t like the fact that they were not consulted. Elizabeth had no idea she was vulnerable and her boss was no longer there to protect her. She was blindsided.

The potential landmines for women are everywhere. We would like to believe that gender bias has dissipated, but many organizations now have a subtle form of bias that is much more challenging to anticipate and navigate. This unconscious bias adds to the complexity of navigating the political landscape for women. This is the reason this book is so important. While it’s true that both genders need to embrace the culture and politics of their organization, women face different challenges. Due to their exclusion from the inner networks of power and influence, unconscious bias can ambush them at any point in time.

I have written this book because I believe wholeheartedly that women must get savvy about workplace politics if they are serious about their careers. We need to get serious, not only because we deserve it, but because companies need the expertise and perspective of both genders. Sure, there has been a lot of research and discussion about the challenges we face as women in attaining leadership positions. But I know, and I’m certain you do as well, that we have the talent to lead and our leadership helps organizations prosper.

We need to be at the table! We need to be at the table because we bring value and a unique viewpoint. But getting a seat at the table is still complicated for women. There are people in your organization with different agendas and allegiances that need to be understood in order for you to be successful. Political savvy is about relationships and a focus on what others think and feel. It’s about aligning yourself with key stakeholders and building relationships of trust and influence. You need these relationships in order to thrive. You need information about the workplace politics in order to survive! It’s important to understand that your attainment of a leadership position not only helps your career, but helps your company.

For those of you who have been blindsided, this book is for you. For those of you who still believe that your talent and hard work are enough to assure you a successful career, this book is for you. You are on a dangerous path that is filled with political landmines!

It is my hope that the information in this book will help you to avoid the misfortune of being blindsided. The tools provided here will show you a painless path to navigating the workplace effectively to achieve the career of your dreams. So let’s begin!

Chapter One: **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 that it felt like she was fired when a restructuring at Bank America eliminated her role in 2011. She had been asked to join the bank to turn around its Merrill Lynch and US Trust wealth managements 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 changes in leadership. 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 corporate headquarters in Charlotte.

“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 meeting 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).”

Sallie wasn’t in the “in crowd”. 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 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 resume 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**

F. Cathie Black, former Hearst executive, was appointed Chancellor of NYC schools by Mayor Bloomberg in November 2010. Mayor Bloomberg believed Cathie to be 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, New Yorkers viewed her from the onset 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 of 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 the 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 of understanding the political landscape and identifying potential landmines for all of us.

Every organization has unique political dynamics. In fact, each team within a line of business or function often has a different language, different success metrics and behavioral norms. You have to be willing and capable of adapting in order to not only get ahead, but 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 being blindsided and passed over for promotions.

You must ask yourself where would you be today if you were more savvy and tuned into the way decisions are made in your company?

And most importantly, 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, the progress of 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 the progress has been very slow. Currently, women hold only 4% of Fortune 500 CEO positions.

Are we frustrated yet? You bet!

We are certainly well prepared and well educated. Women now hold 57 % of all bachelor's degrees and 51 % of all doctorates. We now earn 47 % of law degrees and 45% 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.

There are many theories that explain the 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 super stars 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.

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 material. Three weeks into the job, one of the sales men 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, and Phillips, LLC, tells her story of gender discrimination early in her career as an attorney.

“I had a 3-year-old and a 10-month old. And 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 less valuable. And I asked whether I’d ever tuned 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. And, within 6 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 this overt discrimination any longer. Now we have the law on our side and this has forced gender bias to go underground. It is no longer legal or politically correct to discriminate against women based on their gender. But second-generation bias, as it is commonly referred to, 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 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.

My client Lisa V. tells me that the boy’s 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 does the wrong thing, that they're going to get sued for harassment. So, they need to keep their guard up.

Sometimes I think there's a "women versus man" 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 in 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."

“It was a man who I respected, who I knew liked me very much -- and, who was very much a straight-laced 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 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 and men are threatened by their assertiveness.

Lisa D. relates her current challenge with “leaning in” 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 8-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. 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. And of course, we still earn less money than our male counterparts.

Here’s Elizabeth T’s story.

“When I was pregnant with my first son, the woman who had hired me, actually, had then been re-allocated 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 things going to other folks. And so, I made an appointment and I walked into her office one day, and I said, “ Arden, can you help me understand why I’m not getting any of these opportunities?” And she did actually say to me, she said, “Well, I didn’t know how willing you were to travel.” And I said, “But you never asked me. You made that assumption for me.” You could see that she just never considered that I would want to do it, and it was a really good opportunity. And then, she did end up being very open about giving everybody opportunity. I mean, I could see how it really changed her approach. Because 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 would never have known the reason she was repeatedly passed over.

There are people in your organizations 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 overcome 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 their own lack of confidence. Do you wake up a 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 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; asking for more compensation and responsibility. I hear from these women that 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 and what they want and need. These relationships assist you to navigate the workplace by giving you important information about the 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 for women’s advancement. You live with this every day! And yes, we can look internally (our own limiting beliefs), and 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 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 to 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 you cannot afford to ignore the politics if you have any aspirations for advancement. 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 what ever 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 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. Research shows that 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. (Isaacson 2004). As a result, we do not have access to the privileged information about “the rules of the game” which 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; live 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 the unwritten rules.

I’m certain that most of you reading this know only too well that the strength of the Old Boy’s club persists in most organizations. What you may not know is that the best way for you to advance is to gain access to these informal networks by building relationships and through the use of political skill. Politics opens the door to valuable information and shows you the best road map to avoid landmines and build 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”. (Ferris, Frink, and Galang) 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 puts us in the “loser’s bracket” (Sandi Mann (1995). 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 get you ahead and help you stay there?

In this book, you will learn all the tools you need do 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 into 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 we 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 have developed relationships to increase their visibility and influence.

How do you become politically savvy?

You need to observe, listen, and ask questions.

Who is getting promoted and why?

With whom do they have relationships?

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 Franz 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. 3 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, former senior official in the Clinton Administration and Chief Operating Officer of the Obama’s first Presidential campaign, speaks to this point in my recent interview with 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:

“Who are the stakeholders here that care about the work that I’m doing?

What are the relationships that I need to build?

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, 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 you 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 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 how have kids or part time work. And you need to know who they are, and how to deal with them.”

**The Importance of Political Will**

Political skill is very important but it is only one part of the equation. Organizations are political arenas and to be effective in such arenas, one must have both the *political will* and *political skill*. (Mintzberg)

What is political will? It is the willingness to embrace the politics; to understand how decisions are made, and how the culture impacts those decisions.

The very first thing we need to do is to get real about what it takes to succeed. Time and time again I have seen talented and deserving women passed over for promotions because they are unwilling to pay attention to the way decisions are made and who has the power and influence over those decisions. Are you one of these women?

What will set you apart from others is having both the technical competence and the commitment to understand the political landscape and how best to use that information to build relationships that protect and position you going forward. Your deliberate avoidance of the politics and/or your lack of willingness to engage in the workplace politics put you in a vulnerable position. As with my own blindside experience, without essential information about how judgments are made and who makes and influences them, you can only react once decisions are made. You give up your power and influence to impact the decision making process.

Our mindset about workplace politics as negative, manipulative, and evil, keeps us from “leaning in” and understanding the reality of what it takes to navigate the workplace. It’s important to “lean in”, but you need to *look out before you lean in* and familiarize yourself with the realities of the workplace.

I asked the members of my LinkedIn groups some questions to determine how they felt about politics in the workplace and the people they viewed as political.

**The first question I asked was, “what comes to mind when you think about politics in the workplace?”**

Here are some of the responses:

“Within any group there is the unassigned "leader". This person may not always do the right thing, or is the best employee, but knows how to "play the game." ~Elizabeth

“There is entirely too much political up-man ship occurring in most workplaces. The person(s) who engage(s) in these games may not always be right or be the best employee, but has learned to work the system to make him/her the center of attention and project the appearance that they are the most important employee in the workplace.” ~Georgette

“Unnecessary waste of time. Losing revenue, limiting execution. There should be a course in politics in the workplace, not everyone likes to work in a manipulative environment and is wired to play games and present themselves as suck ups, pretending to do a job they cannot!” ~Catherine

“The idea of politics in the workplace immediately conjures up a pejorative image of someone who is trying to get ahead based on “schmoozing” versus merit. We have all worked with that person … the one who seems to have no substance yet continues to have more and more influence making you wonder “who exactly do they have pictures of doing what?” ~Stefanie

From these responses, it is easy to see that workplace politics and women often don’t mix well! You can definitely sense the anger and frustration. There is a very strong sentiment of trickery and manipulation expressed by these women.

Marilyn Tam, former the CEO of Aveda Corp., President of Reebok Apparel and Retail Group, Vice President of Nike Inc. agrees “that political savvy has a negative connotation because people seem to think that being politically savvy means that you’re somewhat sly. Anytime the topic of workplace politics comes up, there seems to be this perspective that there is personal gain involved and it is trying to get something out of the other person instead of understanding it’s about human nature. There seems to be a feeling that if we’re politically savvy, we must not be leading with our skillset and knowledge and experience. It’s almost like cheating.”

Linda Descano, Managing Director and Head, Content & Social, North America Marketing Citibank, North America and President and CEO of Women & CO affirms Marilyn’s point of view. “Office politics doesn’t need to be dirty or require that you check your integrity at the door. In fact, your integrity is a tremendous asset in building followership. And, workplace politics doesn’t have to be about win-lose competition, but collaborative competition through which you elevate yourself as well as others.”

One of my LinkedIn respondents saw the advantage of politics on one level, but also how power and influence was misused on another. “I have seen politics at the micro and macro levels of the company. I have seen leaders use politics successfully to get what they want for the benefit of their team, organization or the company. It can range from support from upper management to funding and resourcing for a new project or program. Or even acceptance of a new policy that has been rooted deep in the company culture for years. I have also witnessed and been the brunt of negative politics where leaders choose a side and stick to it no matter what the cost just for the sake of keeping their ego intact.” ~Cheryl

What do you observe in your organization? Can you see positive as well as negative politics going on? You can learn a lot from this observation. Find positive role models who exhibit the qualities you would like to emulate. How do they behave and communicate? How do they build influence and use their power? Let negative politics be a lesson for you as well. What type of behavior do the outright manipulators exhibit that turns everyone off?

The second question posed to the groups was, **“How do you feel about people who are politically savvy and work the system?”**

Some of the responses clearly indicate the point of view that people who work the politics are self-serving.

“Some people just know how to play the game. Could be an inborn skill, learned skill, birth date, seniority, the cookies, friendship, coffee making or they just self-manage very well. I just can't stand this type of creature.” ~Rosanna

“I feel discouraged many times because they often do the least work, or sabotage the harmony in the workplace with their constant need to "be the best" when the bosses are around.” ~Elizabeth

“It is very discouraging to try to work with the people who make their own rules. They are constantly putting themselves ahead of other employees to make the boss believe that they are number one and, on the side, will do anything necessary to sabotage the work of any co-worker that they may take a dislike to.” ~Georgette

Here are some positive responses. When women view using political savvy for the greater good of the team and the company, they acknowledge that it can be worthwhile and, in fact, beneficial.

“If you are politically savvy for the best interest of the company, and not stomping all over ethics and morals, than perhaps it is acceptable. ~Catherine

“Early on in my career I was naive enough to think that as long as you did a great job, politics should not matter. Hah hah. At this point I actually “admire” people who are politically savvy and work the system if they also deliver results, realize that it is just a means to an end and support the people who deliver results as well. Being politically savvy and working the system does NOT mean you do not treat people well along the way and have a positive impact on your firm and those around you. The best “politicians” I have seen in the workplace are also regarded as some of the best leaders (not managers, leaders) I worked with and remain some of the people I would be willing “to follow into the fire” any day.” ~Stefanie

“If their hearts and heads are in the right place, then I think being politically savvy can have its benefits not only for employee morale, but it can take a company forward. When people put others before self, being politically savvy, especially in male dominated organizations, the benefit can be far and wide. Others who have malicious intent and are politically savvy can wreak havoc on an organization, individuals and a company’s bottom line because their intentions are selfish and not for the greater good. They commit unethical atrocities or treat really great people poorly and because they can work the system, they get away with it for decades.” ~Cheryl

**The next question I asked was what specifically bothers you about these people?**

“It amazes me that some individuals can continue to blatantly use their power position to wreak havoc and upper management or peers do nothing about it. Individuals who get caught on the wrong side are too afraid to do anything and if they do, it can end up destroying a career. Individuals with such intent truly believe they are above the law and do not see their actions as bad which is also bothersome. It is interesting to me that politics are everywhere. I see it in small teams who refuse to accept new employees into their inner circle despite huge talent. At a company level where leaders are seen from those below them as a cancer in the organization but those above continue to raise them to higher levels. Our country is a great example of how bad the aftermath can be if the intentions are bad and they go unchecked.” ~Cheryl

“I seem to always fall for their tricks.”

“Everything. They can be very vindictive and seem to have a "God" complex.”

“Not a good use of time.”

“I get irate thinking about the number of people with whom I have worked that is more concerned about their own positioning than their impact on the firm or the people with whom they work. The people who are “political” solely to advance their own cause and are willing to throw anyone around them under the proverbial bus at a moment’s notice … while good well intentioned people are unmotivated or even worse lose their jobs just because they have not played the game.”

**Do you admire the people who are politically savvy and know how to work the system?**

“Not in the least. I see this personality as all about self.”

“No. Karma is evil - what comes around goes around.”

“Definitely not. I am who I am and have a great deal of hard work behind me getting to this point in my life without playing games. (Seems like that was my downfall).”

“NO - How can you admire anyone that works the system and is disrespectful. My father was a SWAT Team Commander, he put the first SWAT Team together in the early 70''s, and was praised for his concise training, his efforts and successful in what it truly means to be tactical. He also taught me to walk through life and behave with Grace, Dignity and Integrity. How is politically savvy and working the system dignified? Criminals work the system, there is no grace, dignity or integrity in this.”

Here, however, is one different response. This woman recognized what a leader can accomplish with political skill and admired her ability to use this skill well to influence others for the greater good of her team and her organization.

“I once worked for a manager who was incredible at politics. She could walk into a room of “good old boys” and completely turn them from against even listening to her to having them believe it was their idea. The great thing about this leader was that she put others before self. She didn’t care who got credit for her ideas but that they got support, funded and moved forward at the delight of her organization. This type of politically savvy leader you can’t help but admire.”

Do you know someone like this in your organization that has the savvy and skills to influence others? As I mentioned previously, make a note of how they achieve their influence; how they communicate; how they behave; who they have close relationships with. This person can be a great role model for you!

Now granted this quick survey represents a small sample of professional women, but I also get similar responses when I ask these questions in my live workshops. The overwhelming response about workplace politics is negative. Pay close attention to this! It is this very sentiment that prohibits you from seeing the benefit of working the politics in a positive and constructive manner.

Timi Hallem comments on this from the perspective of a female attorney.

“There are some women who are suck ups. And there are some men who are suck ups, and that’s life, right? I think it was worse when I was starting out in the 80’s because, my perception then was that the men had grudgingly come to accept women, but the women they liked the best were the most passive; who would do whatever they asked them to do and who never made any trouble, never made any waves. And I was not in that group. So ultimately, I made waves if I couldn’t politic my way into what I needed. But people who don’t understand office politics are completely short changing themselves. Because it matters for men and it matters even more in my view for the women. And the refusal to see that is a huge mistake.”

The majority of women I’ve asked about workplace politics view the people who a work the system for their benefit as political animals. They are seen as manipulative, self-serving, “suck-ups” who waste everyone’s time. But the fact of the matter is that these manipulative “suck ups” have no savvy at all! Their blatant misuse of relationships for their own benefit is proof that they are not socially astute. Politics can be utilized in a positive manner to help you achieve your goals.

Politically savvy individuals work the system in a subtle manner. They are often behind the scenes building relationships of trust and influence. They are not self-serving. They are using their relationships for the greater good of everyone. This sets them apart from the outright manipulators that give office politics a bad name.

“Politically skilled individuals not only know precisely what to do in different social situations at work: they also know exactly how to do it in a manner that diffuses any potentially manipulative motives.” (Perrewe and Nelson)

**I also asked my LinkedIn groups if their organization promoted people solely based on performance. All of the respondents agreed that this was NOT the case.**

This puzzles me. If you know this to be true, that the principles of meritocracy are not always upheld, why would you not seek out the people and information that will positively influence your career? Why would you continue to believe that your work alone will get you ahead? Why would you not embrace the politics to learn how best to navigate and realize your ambition?

Politics is everywhere.

Sure we sometimes get disgusted by the manipulators in our workplace as well as national and local politicians. Around election time, we are turned off by the candidates posturing, and we get tired of their commercials and the endless debates. But what we don’t see is that politics is ever present in our own lives as well and we use it every day to further our cause or personal goals on some level.

Let’s take a look at some examples.

It’s a girl’s night out. You are meeting five of your good friends for dinner at a local restaurant. Have you ever noticed how you and your friends jockey for position at the table? Who sits next to whom? Who shares information with whom? Maybe you choose to sit next to someone because you have some juicy information or gossip to share that you feel will strengthen your friendship with that person. Perhaps you feel on a subconscious level that your information positions you as someone with personal power by being “in the know.” Yes. This is politics!

Now I ask you to observe your child at school or at play. Do you notice how certain children play together and avoid others? Aren’t bullies seeking power over others? Do you see how children will try to influence the teacher? Maybe they bring in little gifts to get positive attention. Children are very savvy about getting the teacher’s attention by exhibiting either exceptional behavior or outright bad behavior. All of this is politics! Even at a young age, children leverage their power and influence for their personal gain or some goal.

It’s human nature and it’s politics. We use our power and influence every day with our friends and family.

Why are we surprised that there are politics in the workplace?

Ask yourself the five questions I asked my LinkedIn groups.

1. What comes to mind when I think about politics in the workplace?
2. How do I feel about the people who are politically savvy and work the system?
3. What specifically bothers me about them?
4. Do I admire them? Why or why not?
5. Do I work in an organization that promotes solely on performance?

Do you have political will? Are you willing to see the benefits of positive politics? What is your mindset? Are you willing to engage? Are you willing to learn how to use politics in a positive manner to help you achieve your career goals?

Be honest in your responses to determine if you have a bias against politics. Here’s the reality: if you are ambitious, your avoidance of the politics sabotages your efforts to succeed. If you view politics as evil and therefore ignore it, you are setting yourself up as a victim; a victim of potential landmines and blindsides.

If you have a negative belief about workplace politics, work on shifting your mindset. This is a critical first step! Politics is a fact of life. It’s everywhere. When you accept the reality of politics in the workplace and take the time to identify and shift your attitude, it is then that you are ready to navigate the system and position yourself for advancement.

Reframe it. Positive politics is an invaluable tool for you to survive and thrive in the workplace. The consequence of this avoiding it is a not only a lack of advancement but also the increased probability of you being blindsided at some point in your career.

Marilyn Tam offers a great tip on how to shift your mindset. “I say to women if I told you now that you need to learn this software program or this new device to be good at your work, will you do it? They all say, ‘Yes, of course. That’s part of my work.’ And then I’ll say this is also part of your work. So if you shift your thinking about some of these other things (the political skills such as networking, promotion etc.) as being part of your work, everything shifts.”

“Honestly, don’t think of it is politics. Think of it as relationships. And when you think of it as relationships, you’re not doing something that is bragging or boastful or negative or manipulative. You are doing something that is benefiting everyone in the organization because you are sharing and understanding how we can collectively come together in a way that serves.”

Here’s the good news! Political savvy is a skill not a trait and, therefore, you can learn this. What I’ve observed in my own corporate experience as well as speaking with hundreds of women is that political savvy is often learned over time and sometimes as the result of traumatic workplace experience. Many women including myself were forced to see the impact of politics when they were blindsided by it. Until this point in time, they were solely focused on their performance. They knew that office politics existed, but chose to ignore it. They considered it a waste of time until their very survival depended on it.

Marilyn Tam describes a situation early in her career that prompted her to learn the importance of the politics. As a senior leader in the company, Marilyn negotiated a severance package with the COO and CFO for an employee who was leaving the company. He was not leaving under the best terms but he did resign of his own accord. Marilyn believed the package was fair and everyone involved was in agreement with the terms. However, she overheard a conversation between the COO and this employee where the employee asked for more compensation. To her dismay, the COO blamed Marilyn for the terms of the agreement. He told the employee that it would be ok with him to offer a more generous package, but his boss (Marilyn) would never agree to offering more. Marilyn was shocked and blindsided by this. The COO apparently had the need to look like the good guy.

“I was so shocked. I didn’t know what to say. Because it was so different from everything I had experienced to that point. And I’d known both of these people by this time for 3 years. It wasn’t a new relationship. So what it brought to mind was, ‘I wonder what I really don’t know.”

Until that point I still was naïve to think that everybody would just do what’s right and work together and don’t we have the common mission of the company in mind? Then I realized that well, maybe not. Maybe some people want only the highest good for themselves.

It really made me much more aware of the power and the danger, if you will, of ignoring politics. And that it’s really part of human nature. It’s part of every human interaction. And it has to be addressed or else it can be very destructive to the whole organization as well as to the people involved. It really brought me into the awareness more and gave me the incentive to truly address that up front: private agendas, public agendas, company agendas, or global agendas.”

Political savvy can also be learned over time with the use of keen observation and listening skills. A mentor or coach can also help you to develop sensitivity to the culture of the organization before you step on a landmine.

In her research on this topic, Lisa Mainiero, interviewed fifty-five high profile executive women in the 1980’s to determine the role corporate politics played in their career histories. Her article, On Breaking the Glass Ceiling: The Political Seasoning of Women Executives, is the result of her interviews about their involvement in workplace politics. Most of the women interviewed felt that “politics” was a dirty word and did not admit to engaging in the politics.

Mainiero stated, however, “A careful analysis of the career histories of these women, however, showed that they developed a sensitivity to corporate politics that belied their comments. As they recounted key developmental events in their careers, it became clear that not only were these women astute observers of their corporate cultures, but they had an ability to build alliances and partnerships that were unequaled among their peers.” In essence, they became politically savvy over time.

My interview with Linda Tarr-Whelan confirmed this. Linda, former Ambassador to the UN Commission on the Status of Women in the Clinton Administration and Deputy Assistant to President Jimmy Carter for Women’s Concerns in the White House, said “I believe that relationships are primary and all else is secondary and thinking of this as ‘politics’ never really occurred to me.”

What is involved in learning to be politically savvy?

I have identified four stages of development. In each of these stages, there are specific characteristics and milestones indicated that will help you to figure out where you are in this process and where you need to go to further your savvy skills.

Stage One I call **Naïve Nancy**. Observing Nancy in the workplace, you will immediately notice that she’s completely focused on her work. In fact, if you want to find her, she is most likely in her cubicle or office. She’s not tuned into or even aware of the politics. Then something occurs that throws her off guard and opens her eyes to the culture and decision making process. At this point, she begins to move toward Stage 2.

**STAGE 1: Naïve Nancy**

* Unaware of unwritten Rules of the Game
* 100% work focused
* Learn thru positive/negative experiences

I can recall my own experience in this stage of development. I was interviewing for the CEO position at ServiceMaster and had been out to the corporate office in Downers Grove, Illinois many times for interviews and psychological testing. I flew out for what was to be my final interview dressed in my “power” red suit. As I was waiting in the Human Resource office for my appointment, a woman sheepishly approached me and whispered to me that we (meaning women) don’t wear red here. I knew that ServiceMaster was a very conservative company, but I certainly was unaware of the unwritten rules of etiquette and why red would be considered inappropriate for women to wear. (I actually never got an answer to the “why” on this). The fact is there was an unwritten rule that I had no knowledge of and I broke the rule because of that lack of information.

You can be in Stage One at the very beginning of your career or when you transition to a new role or company and need to learn the rules of the game all over again.

**STAGE 2: Great Work Greta**

* Building a reputation for great performance
* Aware of who has the power and influence in the organization.
* Understands the importance of relationships
* Focused on career advancement but does not yet have a plan to move forward

In this stage, Great Work Greta sees of the importance of developing her personal brand and creating visibility and credibility across the organization. She still works very hard, but now sees that relationships are also important for her advancement. However, she is not actively building relationships for her career or prioritizing this. She is also aware of the politics but does not yet engage. Greta recognizes that if she wants to get ahead, she needs to focus on her career, not just her work. She has yet to figure out yet how to fit this into her work schedule.

One of my clients, Katie, who works at a financial services firm managing a digital marketing platform had a very successful track record yet was trapped in a business unit that had no advancement potential. In this Stage 2 of development, I coached her to better understand her value proposition, and identify and build a network across the organization so others could easily see her competence and leadership potential. Building these alliances became the focus of her political seasoning and self-promotion efforts. Her efforts transitioned from a laser focus on her work to an outreach to others.

The Third Stage is Becoming Strategic.

**STAGE 3 Strategic Sarah**

* Learning delegation/management skills
* Building strategic relationships
* Seeking mentors/sponsors/coach
* Learning to talk about accomplishments

Strategic Sarah is looking at where she wants to go and creating a strategic plan to get there. Her plan includes building relationships with key stakeholders and influencers. Sarah is aware that if she wants to succeed, she needs to delegate and empower her team and develop her own personal influence and self-promotion skills. In this stage, Sarah first recognizes the importance of working with a coach and/or finding a mentor and sponsor.

Many of my clients are in this third stage. They have established themselves as talented and hard- working and now realize that they need to work with their team to reach the next level of success. The work involves how to motivate and inspire the team; how to sell their ideas to their supervisors, peers and direct reports in order to achieve business outcomes; in other words, how to create influence and be recognized as a talented manager.

My client, Patricia, contacted me to help her create more visibility and credibility for herself in the global financial services firm in which she works. Patricia describes herself as the “go to person”; the person who gets things done. My interviews with her peers, direct reports, and supervisors confirmed that this was Patricia’s reputation in the organization. Though her performance was exemplary, she was perceived as more of a doer than a manager. Coaching her to empower and delegate to her team has improved her executive presence and therefore leadership potential. Helping her to identify and build relationships with the power people resulted in her identifying a sponsor and her promotion to Managing Director.

**STAGE 4: Political Pam**

* Using personal influence
* Mentoring others
* Maintaining credibility/visibility
* Leading and inspiring others

In Stage 4, Political Pam has reached a leadership position by leveraging her talent and hard work along with the relationships she has built across the organization. Now at the top of her organization, Pam sees politics as a way of maintaining her status, promoting her ideas, and helping others to move up the ladder. It’s more competitive on top and Pam spends much of her time and energy working the politics. She is a great role model for other women in the company and mentors other men and women to achieve their goals.

My client, Dee, is at this stage. She is COO of a construction company. She worked her way up to senior leadership from an entry-level position. Her responsibilities keep her busy but she recognizes that she needs to use her personal influence to maintain her status. She hired me as her coach to strengthen her relationship with the CEO as well as the other members of the leadership team. She offers to mentor others and she focuses much of her attention to her relationships, especially with the CEO. The coaching has helped her to develop a keen understanding of what he wants and needs and she leverages this to position herself as an important member of the team and an asset to the company.

Where are you in terms of your political seasoning?

What stage best represents where you are right now? What do you need to do to move to the next stage of political savvy? Bear in mind, this is always in a state of flux. With a reorganization or new position, you might be thrown back to Stage 1 temporarily until you learn the new rules of the game.

INSERT worksheet

**Your Political Skill**

The willingness to accept the importance of workplace politics for your career advancement opens the door for you to learn how best to navigate the political landscape. It prepares you to learn the political skill necessary to thrive in your organization.

There is a common misconception that politically astute people are born that way; that they have the innate talent to understand what motivates and interests others and can modify their behavior accordingly. I do believe that some people are more tuned into their environment and the needs and desires of others by nature, but this is a skill that can be practiced and learned.

Political skill is a matter of focus and intention. You can learn to pay attention to your environment. You can learn to be more sensitive to what it is that people are really saying; to become more aware of what their body language reveals about their thoughts and feelings.

Because it is a skill, not a trait, it can be learned. Can you learn this? YES!

“Political skill is an interpersonal style that combines social astuteness and the ability to execute appropriate behaviors in an engaging manner that inspires confidence, trust and genuineness.” (Perrewe and Nelson, Gender and Career Success: The Facilitative Role of Political Skill).

How would you rate your own political skill?

INSERT POLITICAL SKILL ASSESSMENT

This assessment will help you to measure your own political skill. There are a total of fifteen questions that represent three different categories: strategic networking, promotion, and political savvy.

Answer all the questions and rate yourself based what best describes you.

Use on these guidelines:

1. Never or almost never true.
2. Seldom true.
3. Sometimes true.
4. Often true
5. Almost always true.

Once you complete all the questions, add up your score for each of the three categories.

Political Skill Assessment

1. I spend dedicated time at work each week networking with others.
2. I know my value proposition and can comfortably talk about my accomplishments.
3. I understand the way decisions are made in my organization.
4. I network to build allies and champions across the organization.
5. I have a good rapport with most people.
6. I communicate effectively with people at all levels of the organization.
7. I have strong relationships with decision makers and influencers in the organization.
8. I have identified my power network: who I know and who I need to know to achieve my goals.
9. I call on my network contacts to help me get things done and open doors for my advancement.
10. I am well known across the organization as a top performer.
11. I have or have identified a potential mentor/sponsor.
12. I readily promote the accomplishments of my team.
13. I pay close attention to what type of behavior and communication is rewarded.
14. I have communicated my career aspirations to my boss and my network.
15. I am tuned into the motivations and intentions of others.

Assessment Scorecard

1. Strategic Networking

Question Score

1.

4.

7.

9.

11.

Total

1. Promotion/Personal Influence

Question Score

2.

5.

10.

12.

14.

Total

1. Political Savvy

Question Score

3.

6.

8.

13.

15.

Total

Scoring

A high level of competence in a category would be 20 to 25.

A medium level of competence would be 15 to 19 and a low level would be below 15.

What have you discovered about yourself?

Any surprises?

**Networking**

If you scored high in strategic networking, you are well on your way to moving your career forward. You have identified the key stakeholders and influencers and you are actively networking.

A moderate level of competency in this area might indicate a lack of understanding of who holds the power and influence over your career or a lack of commitment to reach out to these contacts.

A low score in networking most likely means you are still focused on doing the work and not paying attention to the relational skills you need to succeed.

**Self-Promotion/Personal Influence**

If you scored high in this category, you understand your value proposition and are actively and intentionally promoting yourself and your team across the organization. You have a great reputation for solid performance. You are good at establishing rapport and building relationships of trust and using your personal influence.

A moderately high score might indicate the need for you to better understand how you contribute to the organization. It might also be reflective of your hesitancy to talk about your achievements.

A low score in this area means that you are most likely too focused on doing the work and believe that your work will speak for itself.

**Political Savvy**

A high score in this category means you are tuned into the way decisions are made and who holds the power and influence. You are actively building relationships of allies and champions and possible mentors/sponsors.

A moderate score in this area means that you are probably aware of the politics but not actively engaged; not tuned into what motivates and interests other people. You are cognizant of how certain behaviors are rewarded.

A low score indicates a lack of awareness and engagement. There is a high probability of being blindsided by the politics.

**What we’ve covered so far:**

* The importance of understanding the politics of your organization to avoid any blindsides.
* The necessity of reframing your negative view of politics and embracing positive politics as a critical part of your career development.
* The four stages of political seasoning that help you identify where you are in the process and where you need to go to move your career forward.
* An assessment of your current political skill with special attention to self-promotion, strategic networking and political savvy.

**The Political Toolkit: Your Secret Weapon to compete in a political environment**

In order to help women become more savvy, I’ve created **The Political Toolkit**. In the ensuing chapters, you will learn each tool in the process. Mastering these tools will help you to successfully navigate the politics in your organization and move your career forward.

The four stages of political seasoning demonstrate that political skills mature over time. We have also seen from the results of our Political Skill Assessment that some of our skills are stronger than others. The goal is to strengthen all your skills through the use of the tools in The Political Toolkit, and consistently use them to engage in positive office politics and avoid potential blindsides.

Early in my career, I found out the hard way that my involvement in workplace politics was necessary if I wanted to succeed. I was ambitious and though I was thrown off guard by my own blindside experience, I quickly learned not only how to survive, but how to flourish and build a successful career. After being blindsided, my trust and loyalty to that company dissipated and I found myself without direction. It took a while to recover, get over my hurt, and bounce back with enthusiasm. The company offered me a lateral position in a new region that would require relocation. I wasn’t interested. In fact, it was apparent to me that I no longer had passion for the work or the organization. It was time to move on.

Though the lack of political savvy caused my blindside, one skill I had developed over time was networking, and I excelled at nurturing relationships with former colleagues. It was one of my contacts who let me know about a position as CEO of a national healthcare company in which she was employed. She recommended me and I got the job!

**Here are the tools you need in your political toolkit:**

The first tool you need is a **mirror**. A mirror? How is that a political tool you ask? You are going to learn how to use the mirror for self reflection in order to identify your value proposition. Your value proposition is the unique way you do the work that contributes to successful business outcomes. Understanding your contribution is the foundation of savvy self-promotion. And authentic self-promotion is a necessary ingredient for political savvy. Articulating your value proposition to your network in subtle and effective ways is one of the most powerful ways to gain visibility and credibility.

The second tool in the political toolkit is a **magnifying glass**. We’re going to use the magnifying glass to look carefully at your work environment and observe the dynamics. The magnifying glass assists you to develop the keen observation skills and focus necessary to understand the politics. It helps you to see beyond the organizational chart to determine who really has the power and influence. This important tool helps you to figure out what people want and need in order to gain influence and build trusting relationships.

The third tool in the political toolkit is a **Pass Go and Collect $200 Card**. Remember this from Monopoly? It was to your advantage to fall on this square and get that card because you advanced faster around the board and you collected more money. Wouldn’t you like the ability to move forward faster and receive more compensation for your career?The Pass Go Card is strategic networking for your career advancement. An expansive and strong network helps you avoid blindsides and positions you for success. No career is built in a vacuum. We need others to help us do our jobs better and to help us navigate successfully in the workplace. With this tool, you will learn how to identify the power grid in your organization; who has the power and influence; who are the key stakeholders and decision makers. You will map out your own power network and identify who you know and who you need to know to move up the ladder.

The fourth tool you need is a **Get Out of Jail Free Card**. This is the fastest and most efficient way to get to the top of your organization. The Get out of Jail Free Card is sponsorship. A sponsor finds high visibility projects for you and paves the way for your path to leadership. They protect you and allow you to take risks. They promote you across the organization and provide introductions to other people with influence.You definitely want this card in your toolbox. How do you get this card? In this chapter you will learn how to position yourself to get a sponsor and identify who makes the best sponsor given where you are in your career and where you want to go. You will learn how to ask for sponsorship and clarify expectations for the relationship.

A GPS is the last tool is in the political toolkit. The GPS is executive coaching. An executive coach advises you how to use the other tools in your toolbox. They help you understand your unique value proposition. They assist you to communicate your value effectively and build strong relationships of trust. The coaching process helps you to identify your power network and look at your career strategically to forge relationships that will positively impact your professional growth.

We will discuss in this section how to find a coach and how to utilize a coach to reach your career goals.Once you learn how to use these tools in your toolkit, you will have a road map for success. These tools have been used by hundreds of professional women to successfully navigate the realities of the workplace. Now it’s your turn!

**Chapter Two: The Mirror: Your Tool for Savvy Self-Promotion**

A few months ago, I received a phone call from Cheryl who was looking for a coach to help her find a job. She had been out of work for eighteen months to have a baby and was ready to rejoin the workforce. She wanted some help interviewing and promoting herself for employment. I said, “Fabulous! I am certain I can help you!” I asked her what she did. There was no response. In fact, there was such a long silence that I actually thought we were disconnected. Finally she spoke and said, “This is my problem! I can’t talk about myself at all. I can’t articulate what I do let alone tell someone why they should hire me.”

Wow! I thought. She has no idea what value she has to offer an organization. She needs help to understand this if she is to be successful landing a new job and navigating the workplace. She was finally able to tell me she is a financial analyst, but had nothing more to add.

At first I thought this was an extreme case, and then I realized that most of us do not truly understand what we bring to the table, AND if we don’t understand our value, how can we possibly articulate our value to others? How can we effectively promote ourselves? We get so caught up in “doing” our jobs that we don’t realize how what we do benefits our company; in other words, our value proposition.

Self-promotion is an integral part of political savvy. You can’t build the relationships you need without it. You can’t get the visibility across the organization required to move your career forward if you don’t understand your value proposition and are not able to articulate it to others.

Promoting yourself with political savvy allows you to compete. Promotion is the tool for competition; to gain access to the networks and information that impacts your career. You need to master the art of promotion to get to the top and stay on top, and the mirror, the first tool in the Political Toolkit, helps you to discover your unique value proposition in order to promote yourself effectively.

Think about it. How can you promote yourself if you don’t understand your value proposition? How can you communicate your value to others so they get why they should hire you or give you new responsibilities at work if you don’t know your value? How can you build visibility and influence with key stakeholders and decision makers for your advancement? After all, they need to know how your work benefits the organization. How can you do this if you don’t get it yourself?

This is where the mirror comes in. You need to take the time to reflect and do the inner work to understand your unique value in order to promote yourself with confidence. Without doing this important work, you will continue to have a discomfort and hesitancy talking about your accomplishments. You will continue to be invisible. You will be vulnerable to the blindside.

The mirror helps you to see your value proposition; how the unique way you deliver the work contributes to specific business outcomes. It’s an important tool in the political tool kit because of our tendency to be externally rather than internally focused. We have a fascination with what everyone else is doing. We are constantly distracted by the activities and accomplishments of others and have little, if any, focus on our true gifts and talent.

**The Reality of the Workplace**

The current business environment is frenetic. People are too busy today to go out of their way to find you, recognize and reward you. The good news is, however, that you can create the visibility and credibility you need to move your career forward. You can control how others perceive you in the work environment. You can learn to communicate to others what value you bring to the table. In short, you can be visible, take credit for your accomplishments, showcase your skills, and build your reputation both inside and outside your company to strengthen your subject matter expertise.

If you are waiting for someone to promote you, you are wasting valuable time. It is essential to build your reputation across the organization. You need to promote yourself. You need to promote your team.

Research shows us that men are much better at this. They spend on average about 80% of their time doing their work and 20% of their time letting everyone else know what a good job they’ve done. You know this, right? You see it every day. And you may roll your eyes and say they are full of themselves, but the fact of the matter is, they are getting promoted faster. They are receiving higher bonuses and compensation. You shouldn’t be rolling your eyes. You should be taking notes!

The reality is that people need to know your value proposition. You will continue to miss out on great opportunities if you remain invisible. Yes, you still need to do a great job, but part of your job is also letting others know your accomplishments and those of your team. You must build influence and political capital.

Shereen found this out the hard way when she interviewed the second time for a job.

“I was not given the promotion the first time I posted for the job, but a year later when the girl who got the job quit, I reposted. Now, there was now a new Hiring Director in place, and I was unknown to this new Director. This time they also went with another candidate. It was a man who had less experience, but was very well-networked. Everyone knew this person well for doing an in-house experience – which I had completed 2 years prior. He was considered a hot ticket. I didn’t get the job. ”

Shereen made a couple of promotion mistakes. She didn’t build a relationship with the decision maker, in this case, the Hiring Director. She didn’t let people know that she also had successfully completed an in house project, the same project the man had done. The big difference was that even though they had both been successful with this project, no one knew about Shereen’s experience. The key stakeholders knew of the man’s accomplishments, but had no knowledge of Shereen’s. He was considered the hot ticket and she was invisible; a tough lesson to learn.

Have you had similar experiences? Someone gets the job you are more qualified for or someone steals your ideas because you failed to promote yourself?

Why do women hesitate to promote themselves? Intellectually we do understand the importance

The 2011, Catalyst published a study, “The Myth of the Ideal Worker: Does Doing All the Right Things Really Get Women Ahead?” (<http://www.catalyst.org/publication/509/the-myth-of-the-ideal-worker-does-doing-all-the-right-things-really-get-women-ahead>). This research supports the importance for women to communicate their value for their career advancement. After following 3,000 high potential MBA graduates, Catalyst found that doing all the “right things” such as being proactive, requesting high profile assignments, and asking for promotions and raises, did not significantly help women advance their careers. What Catalyst found to have a positive impact on women’s careers was the communication of their achievements. The women who were able to talk about their accomplishments got more promotions and higher compensation. And, they were more satisfied with their careers as a result.

This research clearly demonstrates the benefit of promotion for women in the workplace.

We can also learn valuable lessons from female leaders such as Sharon Allen.

Sharon served as Chairman of the Board of Deloitte LLP from 2003-2011. Early in her career, as a manager at Deloitte, she was blindsided when she received an announcement that several of her close colleagues were being promoted and she wasn’t. She was upset. After all, she was working very hard and had many accomplishments that demonstrated her qualifications for a promotion. After a day or so, she went to talk to her boss. She told him quite pointedly of her surprise at not being promoted given her performance. She then proceeded to outline for him all her achievements. Apparently, he was equally surprised and told her he had no idea she had achieved all that. “You didn’t let me know”, he told her. This was the very last time Sharon let that happen! From then on, she made it her intention to let everyone know of her achievements.

Here’s the great lesson in this story. We believe that our performance speaks for itself and that everyone knows what we do and how we contribute to the success of our department and our company. But guess what? This is a HUGE assumption and one that will set you up to be blindsided. It’s your responsibility to not only keep track of everything that you and your team have accomplished, but to let others know about those successes. Otherwise, you remain invisible and lack the credibility to move your career forward.

Intellectually we get it. We’re smart. We grasp the importance of communicating our value to others, but emotionally we still have trouble doing it.

What’s going on here? There are four basic reasons that women hesitate to promote themselves in the workplace.

1. Our upbringing.
2. The failure to see self-promotion as a leadership skill. (We only see it as self-serving and, therefore, distasteful.)
3. Our fear of potential backlash. (the Double Bind)
4. Our lack of understanding the contribution we make to business outcomes (our value proposition

**Our Upbringing.**

There is no doubt that, in the past, girls have received different messages than boys regarding the importance of humility. Somewhere along the line we got the message that we should be quiet about our talent. We should take the back seat and wait to be recognized. This message has affected generations of women currently in the workforce. Subconsciously, our upbringing has sabotaged us in this regard. It has contributed to our belief that it is wrong to promote ourselves and take credit for our accomplishments. Intellectually, we may understand how important this is, but we can’t help thinking that we are bragging. It feels like we are tooting our horn, and we believe no one will like us as a consequence. In other words, our effort to promote ourselves comes with a whole lot of baggage about how distasteful it is. We simply weren’t brought up to do this and we don’t know how to do it well.

On the other hand, boys are taught at an early age to compete. They are encouraged to differentiate themselves and play to win. It is natural for them to do this. As a consequence, when they enter the workforce, they do this well. They’ve had practice and support for this.

Hopefully, as more girls enter competitive sports, the message will change, and young girls will also be encouraged to compete and take credit for their wins. It is also my hope that we will realize how our own upbringing has put us at a disadvantage in this regard, and we will be more conscious of the advice we give our daughters.

The messages we receive growing up fuel our emotional reaction to self-promotion. It is critical to reframe this negative mindset before we can move on to learn the other political tools in the toolkit. Our hesitancy to take credit for our accomplishments results in a loss of power, influence, and political capital in the workplace.

Another contributing factor to our discomfort and hesitancy to promote ourselves is the emphasis we place on winning the affection of others. Our effort to please everyone shifts our focus from what we want and need to what others think and feel about us. We listen and watch intently for cues and signals from our loved one about who we are and what we should do. Their opinions soon drown out our inner voice. We lose the connection with what makes us truly unique.

How does this happen?

When we are infants, we want our immediate needs met. Everything is about us. We want to be fed. We want our diapers changed. We want to be held. We aren’t concerned about what others think about us. We don’t worry that if we cry too much, we won’t get fed or mommy won’t like us. As we get older, however, we become more aware of the people around us who love us and take care of us, and we want to please them.

When I was four years old, I started taking ballet. I loved it! As I entered elementary school, I took lessons three times a week. In my mind, I was a prima ballerina. There was no question. This was who I was and what I wanted to be when I grew up. It was my passion.

When I was six, our family was invited to my cousin’s wedding. The reception was in a large ballroom. All 125 guests were seated at tables around the center dance floor. There was a live orchestra. With my ballet shoes in hand, I took it upon myself to go up to the band leader and ask him if he would please tell everyone to sit down so that I could dance. And also, would he mind playing some slow soft music?

And there I was; center stage. Doing what I loved to do: dance!

I wasn’t embarrassed. I didn’t think I was bragging. I was sharing my love and passion for dance with everyone there. Now, perhaps my parents were a little taken back by my boldness, but I think they were proud. I know for certain my grandmother was ecstatic because she always encouraged me to showcase my talent.

I’m sure at the time, those in the audience thought I was cute and precocious. I was only six after all. They clapped and smiled and complimented me.

Over time, however, this all changed. As I continued to pursue my love of ballet as a teenager, I heard different messages.

“You don’t really want to be a ballerina.”

“I don’t?”

“No. That’s no life for you. It’s physically abusive. You can’t make a decent living dancing.”

And here’s the message that really stuck: “Besides, you’ll never make it as a ballerina. You’re not built like a ballerina. You will fail.”

The point here is that I started to listen to everyone else’s ideas about who I was and what I should do, and I changed to please them. I lost touch with what I wanted and who I was.

We grow up in a society where we are pushed and pulled by parents, friends, teachers who encourage us with mixed messages, telling us to be all sorts of different things. We lose the connection with the inner voice that once was so loud and clear. We no longer know where we belong. We lose the self-awareness we once had.

This level of self-awareness doesn’t necessarily come with intelligence or education. But it does come with self-reflection. We need a mirror to help us see clearly what we bring to the table.

One of my favorite quotes from Steve Jobs is a great reminder to stay connected with your inner voice and innate wisdom.

“Your time is limited, so don’t waste it living someone else’s life. Don’t be trapped by dogma, which is living with the results of other people’s thinking. Don’t let the noise of others’ opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary.”

Throughout our childhood, we get mixed messages about who we are. This results in a separation from our inner wisdom. Our default behavior is to listen first to others in order to please them. We have no clue, therefore, what we bring to the table because we are so occupied with what everyone else is contributing.

You will learn in this chapter to use the mirror for the self-reflection necessary in order to discover your value proposition and promote yourself with authenticity.

**Our failure to see self-promotion as a leadership skill**

Despite the fact that most women understand the importance of self-promotion for their advancement, they do not intentionally use it. We have been conditioned to take the back seat and wait to be recognized. As a consequence, we often have this inner argument about how to proceed with self-promotion. We know we should do more of it. We know we should be better at it. But at the same time, it’s much more comfortable to stay focused on doing our work.

We have the mindset that self-promotion is self-serving, and, therefore, distasteful. Even if we attempt to talk about our accomplishments and take credit for our success, we are challenged to do this with confidence and conviction.

It is important to see that self-promotion is a leadership skill. It is your responsibility to talk about what you and your team have achieved, not only for your own benefit, but for the team and the company. It’s how you create influence. It’s how you sell your ideas across the organization. It’s the basis of building relationships with key stakeholders and gaining access to the power networks.

From this perspective, self-promotion takes on a different purpose. You are letting others know of your accomplishments and your value proposition, and you are offering to help in ways that benefit the organization. Everyone wins. Your team benefits from your promotional efforts. They receive recognition for their efforts and success. You benefit as the team leader who spearheaded the project or initiative, and the company wins as well. The company can use your accomplishments to initiate other projects or ideas across the organization. They can use your success metrics as an example for future endeavors. Without the knowledge about your project, the company cannot leverage your success in other areas.

Self-promotion is not just about you. It’s about you, your team, and the organization.

Linda Descano received the Changing the Game Award from Advertising Women of New York this past year. This award recognized her initiative to change the use of social media at Citi and connect with women. She let her manager know about the award before it went to press.

She told him, “While I was the one recognized, this really is a huge win for the entire team.” She went on to tell him of a couple of things the team was doing to increase the value this effort was making to the business.

This is savvy self-promotion at its best! It demonstrates how to take credit for your work, give recognition to your team, and show how the initiative benefits the business.

Linda effectively uses self-promotion as a leadership skill. She is a great cheerleader for her team and her team looks to her to promote their accomplishments across the organization. This year, Linda had the honor of being invited by the global Chief Marketing Officer to make a presentation on social servicing at one of his town hall meetings. Instead of jumping on this opportunity herself, Linda suggested that Paul, one of her team members, do the presentation.

“I think the global CMO was sort of taken aback that I didn’t just take that opportunity for myself. But Paul was so thrilled that he could step into the spotlight and shine. I find opportunities to give those types of speaking occurrences to my team members. I will give shout outs when someone sends me an unsolicited shout out about someone, and I will copy my boss. I want my folks to be recognized. I want them to be sought out internally for other positions. And I’ve had a really good track record of folks who work for me being promoted and having great opportunities in other parts of Citi. I don’t try to hold them back and pretend that I’m the only one doing the work.”

Betsy Myers, former senior advisor to President Clinton and President Obama, has always been an advocate for women’s issues. She demonstrated promotion as a leadership skill when she aligned her skills and passion for women’s issues with President Clinton’s reelection campaign. Betsy ran the office for women business owners when she worked for the Small Business Administration. She recognized that women business owners were a potential voting block for President Clinton. Women had elected Bill Clinton the first time and they would reelect him. Women voters were very important for his reelection.

“I started to go over to the White House and meet with different people to say, ‘Hey, what can we do to make sure we harness this voting block and these women out there? They’re the fastest growing segment of the business economy.’”

Betsy worked her relationships and promoted herself and her ideas for the benefit of President Clinton’s reelection.

“I went over there to alert people to what I was doing; the conferences out there where I was speaking that were potential opportunities for the President or someone else to speak at; these state wide conferences on women. And that’s where I developed my reputation as someone who was an expert on a particular issue of women entrepreneurs; passionate, supportive of the President and his reelection. And then, when the President decided to create an office in the White House on women’s issues, I had made a name for myself and was appointed director of this department.”

This was a win for Betsy, for President Clinton, and for women entrepreneurs. This is a great example of using promotion as a leadership skill.

It is possible to use promotion to enhance your credibility by aligning yourself with business initiatives. Demonstrating your leadership and highlighting your team’s efforts increases your visibility and benefits your company. Once seen as a credible leader, you have more influence in the organization and can, therefore, gain access to the informal networks and relationships you need with key stakeholders. You are viewed as someone who adds value to the business. You have political capital.

Sometimes it’s just a matter of letting others know what you are accomplishing as Sharon Allen learned.

How do you do this?

Betsy Myers learned how to strategically inform other stakeholders of her ongoing efforts and successes from her boss, Erskine Bowles.

“Erskine Bowles, who was head of the SBA, was really strategic. Every week, he had the Chief of Staff of the SBA put together a very concrete simplified version of the contributions he made that week to support the President’s goals. It was delivered to the White House, to the Chief of Staff, Deputy Chiefs of Staff, the President, First Lady, and Vice President. And within sixteen months, Erskine went from being head of the SBA to Deputy Chief of Staff in the White House.”

Betsy recalls that initially she thought his weekly memos were manipulative. “But that’s how guys do it. The President was trying to get health care done. The President was trying to do these different things, and Erskine was working really hard. And at the time, he wasn’t a member of the Cabinet. But later, in the Clinton administration, he became a member of the Cabinet. So, how was he getting information in? How do you do that? How do you let people know? We get so busy and so caught up in what we’re doing that we forget to brief the people above us or the people that we’re helping.”

Betsy’s point is well taken. How are you helping? When you tell others what you and your team are accomplishing, you are letting them know how you add value to their project or initiative. You build a reputation as a leader.

Self-promotion is a leadership and political skill that is critical to master in order to navigate the realities of the workplace and position you for success.

**Our fear of potential backlash: The Double Bind**

Women face a unique conundrum in the workplace. In our culture, a great leader is thought of as someone who is decisive, assertive, and independent. These qualities are most often associated with men. Women, on the other hand, are expected to be nice, nurturing and unselfish. So what happens when women want to be considered for leadership positions? If we exhibit the assertive qualities associated with the ideal leader, we find ourselves in a “double bind”. We may be considered competent and qualified for the position, but we are also viewed as less likeable. We are expected to have more feminine qualities. On the flip side, women in positions of authority who have a more traditional feminine style may be liked, but they are not respected. They are considered to be too emotional and too soft to be a strong decisive leader.

When Lisa V worked on a trading floor with male NASDAQ equity traders, she was faced with the double bind when she asserted herself and gave her honest opinion.

“They were a very tough crowd. There were many traders and personalities on that floor that had incredibly high opinions of themselves. What I realized is that they liked me only when I was more deferential. And the few times that I dared to challenge them with a different opinion or different point of view on the way things were going, I literally got shut out of one head of the desk. He just completely shut me out. And I was never relied on with that particular trader again like I had prior to that. When there were things that he needed done for his desk, he’d go to somebody else and not me. So, it was clear. He just basically cut me off, out of his business line.”

In this example, Lisa was demonstrating her leadership and expertise. However, it was not well received. Fortunately for Lisa, his bosses liked and respected her and she was able to get around it using her political capital. She had strong upper level relationships that saved her and eventually she was moved to another division.

Lisa says she has difficulty promoting herself and managing up.

“One time, I was changing my jobs, and I had a boss who was one of the more junior bosses that I had ever worked for at UBS through the years. And I had to go to a training course. We had to do these 360 evaluations. And the feedback was that, I was overconfident. And they didn't use the word "conceited," but I almost had this feeling that, I was getting this feedback that was saying that I was conceited. And, quite frankly, I've never self-promoted, so I had no idea what I said or did to make that come out. But because that happened, and that happened years ago, I still don't know how to self-promote without putting people off. So, I haven't.”

When the reality of the workplace is such that assertive behavior is not viewed favorably for women, how do we manage to promote ourselves effectively so that key stakeholders understand our value?

Overcoming the double bind has everything to do with political savvy.

A [study](http://www.gsb.stanford.edu/news/research/womencareerresearchbyoreilly.html) done in 2011 at Stanford Graduate School of Business suggests that in the business world, women who are aggressive, assertive, and confident, but who can turn these traits on and off, depending on the social circumstances, get more promotions than either men or other women. Davia Temin, CEO of Temin & Company, states that she interacts more like a man than a woman. She attributes her success to being able to figure out the lay of the land by observing, listening and trusting her gut, and using assertive communication in a savvy manner.

“I’m quite ambitious. I’m straightforward but also fairly humorous, and that gets you through a lot. And I’m somewhat astute and pretty good at positioning things and talking about things in the best light.”

How do you know when to turn these masculine traits on and off? How do you know the most effective way to promote yourself in the workplace to gain political capital? Just as the Stanford study and Davia suggest, you do this by observing and learning as much as you can about the people and modifying your behavior and style in a way that will resonate with them. Generic messages are not nearly as effective as those that are customized for your audience based on what you know about them; what they want and need.

You can authentically promote your accomplishments and those of your team by understanding what is important to others and what they want and need. This takes political savvy. It positions you well in the organization as someone with leadership potential.

**Lack of understanding our contribution to business outcomes: our value proposition.**

We know that our default behavior is to focus 100% on our work. We have also learned that our external focus has disconnected us from our inner wisdom and clarity about who we are and our unique gifts and talent.

Our upbringing has sabotaged us by leading us to believe that we should take a back seat and wait to be noticed. For those of you who understand the importance of self-promotion and have attempted to do this and faced some backlash as a result, you have most likely retreated back to your cubicle and your comfort zone. The consequence is that the key stakeholders in your organization have no knowledge of what you and your team contribute to the business.

When you understand your value proposition, you can use this to build influence and relationships with key stakeholders. In other words, your value proposition is the foundation of authentic self-promotion which allows you access to the people in your organization who have the power and control over your career destiny.

Your value proposition is the unique way you deliver the work that contributes to positive business outcomes. The mirror helps you to see your unique value proposition. Without the use of this tool, you will continue to look at everyone else and miss what is unique about your work and how it impacts others and helps the company reach its goals. That’s your power.

**Your unique value proposition.**

Understanding how your work contributes to business outcomes is the key to effective self-promotion. It establishes your credibility with key stakeholders and influencers in the organization. Because we don’t often think about how we contribute or what we bring to the table, determining our value proposition can be challenging.

Here is an exercise to help you see your value proposition.

First, write down 2 to 3 successful situations at work in which you were recently involved. Perhaps you worked on a project or initiative that helped your department exceed their projected revenue goals. Maybe you found a way to increase the productivity of your team and that resulted in a decrease in operational costs for your department.

Next, ask yourself what your specific contribution was to the overall success of this situation?

If you were on a team, what was your contribution as a team member that moved the project forward and how did the project benefit the business?

If you were the team lead, how did you keep everyone motivated and focused? How did your leadership impact the success of the project and how did this impact the business?

Finally, review the first two steps and take some time to internalize this. What does this say about you? How did you contribute to the success? This is your value proposition; how you deliver the work that results in specific business outcomes.

Katy manages a digital marketing platform for a global financial services company. She has a technical background as well as an MBA. When we first started working together, Katy had the goal of increasing her visibility across the organization in order to move her career forward. Yet she had difficulty understanding her unique value. She couldn’t effectively promote herself or build the relationships she needed with decision makers and influencers. Katy knew that her management of this marketing platform resulted in a 34% increase in customer loyalty and revenue, but she couldn’t tie how she directly contributed to these outcomes.

With this value proposition exercise, I coached Katy to understand that she has a unique way of approaching the business. Her business education helps her to see the larger picture of what the requirements are and how best to create success metrics. Her technical expertise provides her with ideas for potential solutions. She is able to use this knowledge to find the right technology to solve problems. She now presents herself across the organization as an expert who can take a business initiative and find the technical solutions that will help the organization achieve their goals. She has the confidence to position herself this way and volunteer for high profile projects because she understands how she can help others achieve business results. Her connection to her value proposition allows her to present and position herself to help the organization. She is able to articulate how she adds value and positively impacts business outcomes. And Katy’s stakeholders and influencers are interested in learning more about how she can help.

How does your value proposition impact the business? Can you align your value proposition to specific business results?

Linda Descano always reminds herself to focus on aligning her value proposition with Citi’s business objectives. “How am I helping the brand? How am I raising and delivering value for Citi? Because just as much as Citi has helped me build my brand, my brand also delivers a halo back to Citi.”

In this way, you are able to use self-promotion as a political skill to build influence in the organization.

Betsy Myers says that finding out what’s important to a person and offering help and solutions is critical.

“What is important to this person, and how do I help you do your job? That’s how you get everything done. And you know what? I see all the time, even in my own team, people constantly coming in here with problems. And, you know, people who keep coming to you with problems that have nothing to do with helping you move your agenda forward. Because you know, people who are always putting a monkey on your back, they drain you of your energy. But it’s powerful if you say, “Hey, I know you’re trying to – your goal is to—and then offer to help.”

You offer to help based on the value you know you can contribute. Betsy learned a lot from her mentor, Erksine Bowles. “Take Erskine Bowles for example. He basically said, ‘What I’m trying to accomplish here, as the head of the SBA, after 10 town hall meetings with small business, is to increase loans for small business owners, because, during the previous administration, it was pretty bad. And President Clinton cares about small business owners, and my goal, as head of the SBA, is to increase loans.’”

“So, I’m head of the Woman’s Office. What do I do? I create a program to increase lending to women, right? Well, that not only is helping my job, it’s helping his job. And it’s helping the President. So, every time I go in to see Erskine, it wouldn’t be, “Let me tell you who is getting in my way, or who’s making me miserable, or can you do this for me?” I would say, ‘Look what I’m doing in my job that is helping you in your job. And by the way, can you help me in this way to make this happen, because it’s going make us both look good.’ That’s how I’ve operated, always.”

Self-promotion as a political tool is a two-step process. You use the mirror to do the inner work to determine your value proposition. Next, you need to figure out how to position your message in a way that resonates with your audience. What do they care about? What motivates and interests them? Once you know this information, you align your value proposition with their goals and let them know how you are willing to help.

What is the best way to find out this information about people so you can position yourself in a favorable manner?

Here are two suggestions:

1. Observe them in the workplace. What gets them excited? What upsets them? What type of communication do they prefer? How are they incentivized? What are their career goals? What are their business goals?
2. Don’t make assumptions. Ask direct questions to clarify and validate the information you have. Ask colleagues for additional information if needed.

Use this worksheet for each contact to help you position yourself effectively.

Dee is the COO of a construction company. She hired me as a coach to help her strengthen her relationship with John, the CEO. She felt that he didn’t understand the value she contributed to the organization.

The first thing we did was determine her value proposition. Detail oriented and highly organized, Dee has a solid understanding of the business and the ability to see what the business needs to move forward. She not only provides structure for the company, but adds value by her proactive approach. She clearly sees the necessity for certain initiatives before anyone else realizes the importance. In this manner, she has helped grow the business and create the underlying structure to support its growth.

We did the positioning exercise to get a better understanding of her CEO, John.

And so I asked Dee to tell me about John.

John is a visionary. He is a micro manager. He sits in on every department meeting and needs to know all the details about everything going on in the company.

Dee is focused on the details. At any point in time, she has a firm grasp on what is happening in each department.

Can you see the obvious alignment here between his needs and her value proposition?

John needs the details so he doesn’t spend all his valuable time micro managing his staff. Dee can help him by providing him with the information he needs to make business decisions.

I suggested to Dee that she offer to help John by preparing a weekly status report. In this report, she gives him a detailed account of what is happening in each department. She created the report with her knowledge of the success metrics and what information would be valuable to John.

When Dee offered to help John with this report it was with a firm understanding of what is important to him. She aligned her value proposition with what he needed to run the business. It was a win win. The result was amazing. Immediately, her relationship with John changed. He now clearly sees her value to him as COO and to the organization.

This is a very effective way to use self-promotion as a political tool. In this manner, Dee was able to let John know her value proposition and, therefore, solidify her position as COO in the company as well as build a stronger relationship with the key stakeholder, John.

Think about how you can inform your boss or decision makers in your company of your accomplishments and the successes of your team. One great way to do this is to prepare a weekly status report like Dee’s. If you meet with your boss on a regular basis, this report can serve as the agenda for your meeting. If you work virtually, send this report on a regular basis and schedule calls with your supervisor to go over the contents. Give some thought as to what’s important to your boss and design the report to include pertinent and appropriate content.

Who else in your company would benefit from this information? You can use this report to expand your visibility across the organization as well. You need to have a diverse network that includes those who have both the power and influence over your career at every level.

One major benefit to this type of status report is that you are promoting your accomplishments. Another benefit is that in order to complete the report, it is necessary for you to keep a record of everything you are doing. When it comes to performance reviews, you have all the documentation you need for your self-review!

**Connecting the Dots: Going from Me to We**

If Dee assumed that John knew her value to the company, it would have been a dangerous assumption. Our work does not speak for itself and believing this sets you up for a blindside. You need to connect the dots for people so they understand how you contribute to the business. Don’t leave it up to chance because chances are, they don’t get it.

Marilyn Tam has experience with many different cultures, and this helped her understand how important it is to appreciate another person’s perspective.

“Because a lot of times, we speak to people the way we want to be heard, the way we think of life should be. And the other person may not use the same words, or have the same common understanding. In fact, most of the time, they don't. We need to speak to them from where they are -- from where they come from. And having worked in a lot of countries various times in my life -- I've worked up to 120 countries. I understand that every culture, every understanding and every word means something different to different people. So we have to establish what each words means that is of importance in the mission that we're working collectively on, so that we really know, what it is that we are expecting from each other.”

When Betsy Myers took the position as Director of the Center for Women in Business at Bentley University, she made sure that she understood the overall mission of the Center as well as the goals of the President of the University.

“How are you helping the organization that you have chosen? I have chosen to be at Bentley. And so, my job at Bentley is to make this Center the best it can be, because my boss, Gloria Larson, who’s the President of the university, made this whole Center happen. This is one of the issues she cares deeply about. It’s one of her legacy items. So, my role here is to make sure that Gloria knows what I’m doing to support her initiative and her goals to create this Center, and to move the needle for women in corporate America.”

Positioning yourself to help others achieve their goals is powerful. It supports what we know about human nature; that people want to know what’s in it for them. You speak their language. When you tailor your conversation to align your value proposition with someone’s goals and interests, you have their immediate attention. They get how you add value to the business that is a critical component to your political influence. When you help them, you demonstrate your value. They have firsthand experience with how you contribute to the business; your talent and expertise. You are now on their radar screen and positioned well for future opportunities where they may have some influence.

Now you are known across the organization for your expertise, not just your job description. You are memorable. You have positioned yourself as part of the solution. Key stakeholders and influencers understand how what you do adds value because of who you are and your unique talent.

You can also spread the word about your value proposition and accomplishments in collaboration with others. Do you know some likeminded women in your company who are also talented and ambitious? Build relationships with these colleagues and meet with them on a regular basis. It’s a great idea to have a common goal to promote each other’s achievements across the organization. Make it your monthly agenda to share your successes and agree to talk each other up. Consistently meet each month, share your achievements and advocate for each other. This is an effective way to promote yourself without tooting your own horn. You promote your colleagues and they let others know about your accomplishments. You win. Your colleagues benefit from additional exposure as well, and the company wins because they can now leverage the ideas.

Mentors and sponsors help promote you as well, and this can be very powerful. It is your responsibility to keep them informed as well of your successes. We will discuss how to leverage these relationships in a later chapter.

**Demonstrate your value proposition**

Once you understand your value, what are some of the ways that you can demonstrate your value to others to show your credibility without bragging or proclaiming your greatness?

Here are some suggestions:

* Volunteer to take on high profile projects at work. Offer to help based on the value you know you can contribute to the project. This gives you the opportunity to show your leadership and ability to work well with a team, and has the additional benefit of giving you more exposure across the company.

My client, Katy, met with business executives in other departments, asked them if they had any projects that failed or were stalled, and offered her expertise to help them find a technology solution that would rescue the project. In doing so, they quickly learned her value proposition and were able to take advantage of her knowledge and talent. It was a win win for everyone involved. Katy built her reputation with key stakeholders as a valuable contributor. The executives were able to achieve their goals and the company met their business objectives.

* Community involvement can be a great way to showcase your abilities and meet influential people at the same time. In the past, I have worked with many organizations that provide resources for women to be successful in business and life. By volunteering my time and expertise with training and marketing, I was able to position myself for a seat on their board of directors.

What is your passion? Look for organizations in your area of interest. These are excellent opportunities for you to build your subject matter expertise outside of the workplace and expand your network.

Lisa V. took advantage of becoming involved in the women’s network at work.

“Somebody gave me advice a long time ago, and it was at the Women's Network at UBS. And this woman gave some of the best pieces of advice that I ever had. She basically told me, ‘You stand in a cocktail party, and nobody knows what you can do. But when you belong to these network clubs, or events, or these formal network and take a leadership role in those things, you get out in front of people. You organize things.’ Through my leadership at the Women’s Network, I had exposure to senior leaders in that company that I had never seen before. And through the years, because I built relationships while I was working with people, I was always one of these people that people could come to and ask me for advice, or ask me to help them -- even at work. So that, when I called them again, they had a good feeling about me.”

* Volunteer to sit on non-profit boards. This is a great way to showcase your leadership skills, your ability to work well with teams to accomplish projects/events and meet influential people. These people might be in the position to help you by making connections for you and opening doors for future opportunities.

If you are managing a team for the agency, you should include these experiences on your resume. When asked about your leadership experience, you can refer to this and your ability to manage the team to meet project goals.

* Speak up in meetings and let your opinion be known. Once you understand your value proposition, you realize that your opinion is valuable. You have a lot to offer. Let others know your thoughts and opinions by sharing them openly in meetings. Even if you have a different opinion, if it is presented well and based on sound facts, you gain the respect of your colleagues which demonstrates your value to the organization.
* Take credit for your accomplishments. Don’t minimize your success.

“Thank you. I appreciate you acknowledging the effort that was involved in completing that project.” Is that so difficult? Or do we always have to negate the compliment?

Linda Descano comments on this.

“I’m not a huge, extroverted, big loudmouth person; I’m an introvert. I’ve won like 4 or 5 awards this year – and I shared the news. When people congratulate me, I don’t act like it was nothing. I say, ‘Thank you.’ I say, ‘I feel really good. I’m really proud of what my team and I have accomplished.’ But I don’t shy away, like it’s not important or I didn’t do anything – or it was luck. Because I work darn hard.”

* A blog is a great way to showcase your subject matter expertise. Start your own blog or find blogs that have similar interests and offer guest posts.

There are many bloggers who have built a large following based on their expertise. Maybe you are a great organizer and can give valuable tips to others on how to improve their time management or declutter their work space. Maybe you have technical skills that can help entrepreneurs or startup companies. The possibilities are endless.

Start with you value proposition and go from there.

* Submit articles to publications in your industry or area of expertise.
* Offer to speak at local organizations or industry related events.
* Teach a local continuing education course. Teach a course at a community college. Perhaps apply for an adjunct professorship. Think about how you can help others with a particular skill based on your value proposition. As an instructor, you build your subject matter expertise and spread the word about your talent. And everyone benefits!
* Seek out radio or TV interviews. There are many radio interview opportunities. Look through the directory for internet shows or local terrestrial stations that would best showcase your expertise. Reach out to the hosts and offer an interview. You can even take it one step further by transcribing the interview and using it for an article or blog post.

All these suggestions contribute to creating not only visibility but credibility as you begin to establish yourself as a subject matter expert and demonstrate your value.

The first step is to use the mirror to understand your unique value proposition. Then you can see clearly how you can add value and help others while promoting your expertise. As you demonstrate your value, you are building political influence.

Once you establish the connection with what makes you successful, how do you stay connected and not get distracted once again by others?

Marci Shimoff was a guest on my radio show a couple of years ago. We were discussing women’s relationship with success and the challenges women have articulating their accomplishments. Marci described what she calls the Velcro/Teflon syndrome.

Marci says that we have a stronger connection to our weaknesses than our accomplishments. Our default thinking is to focus on how we didn’t measure up; what we should have said or done. In other words, we “should” all over ourselves.

Think about this scenario. You are driving home from work. What do you think about? Chances are you are beating yourself up over something that you failed to do or should have done better, right? How many of you actually spend time after work congratulating yourself on a job well done or giving yourself credit for something you accomplished that day that benefited the company?

I’m certain that there aren’t too many of you reading this that consistently do the latter. As Marci says, our default behavior is to see ourselves in a negative light. She says this is our “velcro” thinking. What sticks with us is everything we feel we should have done better.

“Teflon” thinking happens when we receive compliments and recognition for our work, but it doesn’t stay with us. Because of our tendency to beat ourselves up and not acknowledge our successes, these compliments roll off us like “Teflon”. They don’t stick.

In order to stay connected with our value proposition, we need to change this up a bit. We need to work on using Velcro to recognize and internalize our contributions.

How do you change your mindset? Keep a success journal.

At the end of each day, write down everything both big and small that you accomplished that day. Then at the end of the week, review all your entries and reflect on your week. What do all these accomplishments say about you? How do they support my value proposition?

A daily practice of journaling your successes can actually change your brain chemistry. It is possible to create new neural pathways that will reset your default thinking to be positive and self-affirming.

The journal strengthens your connection with your success and helps you to maintain your self-confidence. When you feel good about the value you offer the organization, communicating and demonstrating your value to others is much easier.

**In this chapter, we have learned:**

* How our upbringing has sabotaged our self-promotion efforts
* The importance of self-promotion as both a leadership and political tool.
* How to use the mirror to reflect and connect with our value proposition.
* How to use our value proposition to build influence with key stakeholders.

Now that you’ve learned how to use the mirror to identify and articulate your value proposition, it’s time to move on to master the use of the next tool in the political toolkit; the magnifying glass.

The magnifying glass is useful in order to focus and observe the work environment. The magnifying glass helps you to clearly see the realities of the workplace and assists you to create a road map to navigate successfully. Onward!