

# @WORK

YOUR GUIDE TO A SUCCESSFUL CAREER



## HOW TO ... AVOID OFFICE POLITICS

Ditch the drama and work your way around any prickly problem on the job

### COLLEAGUES WANT TO DRAG YOU INTO THEIR CONFLICT

Try not to take sides, says Edwin Trevor-Roberts, CEO of career-management firm Trevor-Roberts Associates, “but don’t appear insensitive. Most of the time people just want to be heard. Use reflective statements such as, ‘You sound really frustrated.’ This shows you’re listening, but stops you from becoming involved.” Organisational psychologist Kathryn McEwen suggests advising on process, but not content: “You might emphasise that it’s important for them to get along, or offer to invite them both for coffee to talk face to face.”

### OTHERS TAKE CREDIT FOR YOUR WORK

It’s your responsibility to make sure you’re visible to those who matter, states Kate Boorer, employee engagement specialist at Employerability. Speak up in meetings, initiate email discussions and keep your manager across your work. She adds that you’re more likely to be targeted if colleagues think they can get away with it. But confronting the behaviour may put an end to that, advises McEwen: “Say, ‘I noticed you put out that idea at the meeting as something you came up with. I’d like some acknowledgement.’”

### THE OFFICE GOSSIP IS IN YOUR EAR

Gossip is a two-person sport, points out Boorer: “For it to gather momentum, you need someone to play with.” Divert hearsay by asking an off-topic question. “People love to talk about themselves, particularly their success,” says Boorer. “Ask about a project they’re working on.” Or casually inform your colleague that you’d “love to stay and chat, but are under the pump and don’t have the time at the moment”. As Boorer puts it, “Once they realise you have no comment, opinion or judgement to add, the game becomes boring.”

### THE BOSS SEEMS TO PLAY FAVOURITES

Don’t make assumptions about why you were overlooked for praise or a promotion. Rather, seek as much feedback as possible, advises Trevor-Roberts. “Have an honest conversation with your manager, acknowledging your disappointment at missing out, but affirming your desire to learn as much as you can so you’ll be ready for the next opportunity,” he says. And be specific when it comes to the feedback: “Ask what you need to develop, learn or do differently in order to be ready in future.”

### YOUR DESK MATE BELLOWS ON THE PHONE

Bite the bullet and ask them to turn down the volume. “When giving feedback of any kind, you need to make it specific and non-personal,” comments McEwen. “Say, ‘You may not realise it, but when you’re on the phone you’re a little loud and it’s distracting. Would you mind talking more quietly so I can get on with my work, please?’ It’s all about tone – and requesting, rather than telling.” Raise the matter casually. “But don’t go whingeing about it to anyone else at work. It’s your issue and you’re dealing with it.”

PHOTOGRAPHED BY GETTY IMAGES. TEXT BY BESSIE REEPE. COMPILED BY KERRY MCCARTHY