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Are Enemies Lurking In Your Workplace?

Coping with the cost of success and techniques for dealing with office enemies

by Dr. Beverly Y. Langford, author of "The Etiquette Edge" and president of LMA Communication. Dr. Langford teaches management communication in the Robinson College of Business, Georgia State University.

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Your coworkers invite each other to lunch, but never suggest that you come along. You discover that you were the only person not invited to a colleague's wedding. No matter how hard you work, your manager seems to minimize your accomplishments and focus on giving others credit.

Are you a wallflower or the office underachiever? Just the opposite. You are the company's rising star. Your division, which dragged through years of mediocrity, became the company's top performer when you took over the leadership. Unfortunately, the more things go right in your life and your career, the more some of your relationships seem to suffer.

Why is it difficult to get to the top without making people angry and resentful? Human nature makes it hard for the "have nots" to rejoice with the "haves." In fact, it's even hard for those who are among the "haves" to be happy for those who have just a bit more.



Our society worships heroes on the rise: the small college team that knocks off the national champ; the actress who wins an Emmy for her first series; the political novice who becomes president.

Once one reaches the top, however, that person becomes fair game, not only with fans or media but also with teammates or colleagues who resent or feel threatened by that person's success. Your own achievement may have created enemies who seem to have appeared out of nowhere.

How do you cope with this unfortunate price of success? Whether your adversaries actually dislike you or simply resent your accomplishments, some guidelines may help as you maneuver this tricky territory.

Do a reality check. Once you sense hostility toward you, step back from your natural reaction of shock and hurt, and ask yourself if what that person is saying is true. Have you been behaving narcissistically? Were you all too willing to take credit for a particular success without acknowledging others' contributions? Even mean-spirited evaluations may actually be a favor because they cause you to analyze your behavior and identify changes you need to make. Recognizing our shortcomings helps us to make progress toward development and maturity.

Talk about it. If your adversary is a specific individual, try to put a lid on the badmouthing. Is it someone who criticizes everyone, or are you the specific target? Does this person seek attention through controversy? Or, is the person someone whom you have wronged either deliberately or inadvertently? Perhaps he or she wanted the position that you now hold. In either case, a calm, low-key conversation could be in order. Choose non-threatening location and talk about the issues. Ask questions to get to the heart of the issue rather than making direct or accusing statements. End the conversation with by discussing what the two of you can do to get along better.

Don't take yourself too seriously. It's difficult to hold a grudge against a person who is the first to admit his or her failings and to laugh at them. Successful politicians have learned well the lessons of criticizing themselves before someone else does. Moreover, humor, particularly self-deprecating humor, can be engaging and can defuse a volatile situation.

Take the high ground. When we've been hurt, the natural reaction is to defend ourselves using the same weapons as our opponent. Retaliation, however, may make you look like a bully. Treat your attacker with respect, and avoid the temptation to tell the world how you really feel about the unfair treatment. In fact, if you say nothing but good things about that person, his or her verbal assaults on or about you will begin to backfire.

Accept the inevitable. Come to terms with the fact that getting to the top without causing resentment and jealousy is almost impossible. No matter how hard you try to avoid making

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enemies or what you do to make amends, some people are still going to be jealous of you or just aren't going to like you. That's their problem. You can make the choice to behave in a way that shows you deserve to be a winner.

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Yvette September 6, 2008, 2:37 pm
Right on target... excellent article

DCB August 1, 2008, 12:34 pm
Nice article.



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