Best Practice in Managing Office Politics and Generally Knowing the Ropes

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Description of Practice: Sharing guidelines and suggestions for dealing with colleagues, bosses, and direct reports. This best practice will cover the characteristics of an effective leader and then delve into what works well for an advancement services professional.

Prospective Users of Practice: Aspiring and rising professionals in our field.

Issues Addressed:
1. Challenges when accepting a new position;
2. Ways to get quickly settled in;
3. Alliances to establish;
4. Awareness of major movements in the politics of an organization;
5. Some best practice activities to build a solid organizational awareness and foundation.

Desired Outcome: Experiencing success in your professional development because you are aware of opportunities and challenges and have a definitive road map.

Process:
- Evaluate both short and long-term opportunities and challenges for the new position.
- Analyze the things that can be done to get quickly settled in.
- Determine the introductions, general alliances, partnerships and resources that need to be available in order for the goals to be accomplished.
- Evaluate the political climate of an organization and recognize organizational shifts that are planned and eventually executed.
- Plan activities, including education, discussions, strategic planning and other actions, in order to build a solid political awareness and foundation for future next steps.
AASP Recommendation:

1. Challenges When Accepting a New Position

Evaluate both short and long-term opportunities and challenges for the new position.

As a new employee, establishing a launch team is an important first step. Members should include peers who know the ropes of the organization and how to get things done. Meeting regularly is a sure way to build a successful start. In a confidential setting questions can be answered about the most effective way to approach an assignment, how to handle a challenging colleague or difficult situations. Advice can freely be given about the nature of activities that are going on and the timing of deliverables. Feedback can be received about how you are doing: where you did well and where you can improve. These kinds of exchanges assist you in building a successful start.

Suggestions to build into your day to day activities include:
● Take good notes and heed advice
● Learn names.
● Ask questions, ask for help, and say thank you often
● Take what you hear into consideration and interpret what is right for you.

Additional suggestions.
● Find a mentor.
● Discover high performers and influential colleagues.
● Acknowledge which hoops you always need to jump through.
● Learn what behavior develops credibility within the culture.
● Discuss how organizational rules and regulations are learned and enforced.

Within advancement services, it is important to understand the overall needs and resources of your organization. This can include financial reports, technology training and/or partnership to execute on common goals. Building relationships with colleagues vertically and horizontally will provide the best perspective on what each team member, department and the organization’s goals and how you can add value.

2. Ways to Get Quickly Settled In

Analyze the things that can be done to get quickly settled in.

There will be many relationships to build as a new employee. Some initial key contacts can include: your supervisor, your direct reports, and the benefits coordinator at your organization. Whether you are asking for professional or personal advice or for information about how the organization works on the personnel side – it will be important to have a few resources and perspectives.

Building relationships with others promotes:
● Additional contacts,
● More resources for information,
● Established networks within organization, and
● Individuals willing to help when asked about their expertise and knowledge.

As a new member of an advancement services team, there are also opportunities to ask questions, share ideas and a fresh perspective, and finally establish ‘quick wins’. Initially building a network within the organization will provide critical insight, but using that knowledge to prioritize and implement some small yet effective changes will enable you to build trust and appreciation for more significant projects or changes.
3. Alliances to Establish

It is very important to build bridges to individuals who think like you do, are in the same situation as you are such as being a new hire, over similar areas, having tangential responsibilities, etc. Often these bridges will facilitate problem solving and the successful execution of projects during the course of your work. Among other things these alliances also prove helpful by providing a strong network for gathering information, knowing the lay of the land, being made aware of red flags and other more subtle warning signals, and more than anything else, establishing like-minded friends who can support you in your endeavors and help facilitate your accomplishments.

As you build out your area of influence, ways to build bridges include:

- Attending lectures,
- Learning about initiatives from other programs,
- Meeting someone new each time you attend a meeting,
- Reading the daily, weekly, monthly news of the organization and
- Being active in town and among the organization’s supporters and general community

Within advancement services, building alliances with departments with whom your group regularly works closely, areas for which you often provide services and those service providers (internally and externally) upon which you depend to assist you in reaching your goals and getting your work done is very important.

Also, joining professional organizations provide access to training, enhanced networking opportunities and a set of experiences that can further develop skills or interests as you build your career path.

4. Awareness of Major Movements in the Politics of an Organization

There will be a time when organizational change happens. Evaluate the political climate of an organization and recognize organizational shifts that are planned and eventually executed.

Communication is a key to discovery. When you are part of an organization, learn who the respected players are and who seem to stand out while readily sharing knowledge and information. Determine the alliances and friendship that are already in place and learn how far back they go and why they exist. Acknowledge where you are, where you see yourself and opportunities to build relationships within the organization or grow.

Considerations:

- Organizational change is common and affects everyone, albeit differently.
- With change, there is always an opportunity to improve relationships and build new bridges.
- A diverse network provides many resources, personal and professional for navigating through change within an organization.

Advancement services staff balance multiple roles and projects – providing services to advancement staff and providing strategy and planning for the division. Both offer opportunities to be involved in either executing change (i.e. database conversion) or helping organizations navigate others through change (i.e. onboarding/training). A key ingredient is to be an active partner and anticipate major movements or political climate and changes.
5. Activities to Build a Solid Political Awareness and Foundation

Be engaged in your own professional development. Plan activities, including education, discussions, strategic planning and other actions, in order to build a solid awareness and foundation for career advancement and growth within your organization.

Suggestions for skills to build for professional advancement and annual performance reviews:
- Leadership evidence
- Problem solving ability
- Flexibility in assignments
- Willingness to take on special projects
- Running strategic plan initiative for the division
- Hiring only the best – never compromising
- Rewarding and acknowledging your high producers
- Promoting professional development for all staff
- Benchmarking work and results

Additional considerations for organizational awareness and opportunities:
- Be aware of opportunities to be a player at the table
- Give and provide feedback regularly
- Be aware of your champions and critics
- Recognize when you are the go to person for certain people who need something done;
- Be present at important organizational events
- Always be enthusiastic, can do, fair, ethical…always
- Regularly check in with colleagues to collaborate on strategies, share information, begin to form a team, anticipate and solve problems
- Acknowledge that there will be instances where you will be left with the short end of the stick, these are good learning opportunities too.

Advancement services staff have many skills based on their overall responsibilities. It is everyone’s responsibility to be engaged in their professional development, especially if the goal is to advance within the profession. Demonstrating success includes gaining personal and professional skills and competencies along the way, building a network, and also being able to effectively understand your organization’s needs, culture, politics and how you can add value and build a foundation for professional growth.
AASP Summit 2014 Track 4: Advancement Services at the Leadership Table
Thomas Chaves, Associate Vice President, Lehigh University

At Lehigh University, all aspects of Advancement Services are being represented at the highest levels of advancement & campaign strategy. Read about the road to the leadership table and learn some valuable approaches that might allow your institution to invite and encourage Advancement Services to be there.

Primary Learning Objectives
1. Understand key approaches for building the value of advancement services to advancement leadership.
2. Learn what is seen as valuable to advancement management and how to accomplish that.
3. Be able to assess your organization's advancement services value to your organization and develop a roadmap for increasing your value and communicating that to advancement management.

Effective Leadership, Peter Drucker, 2004 Harvard Business Review
1. What needs to be done?
2. What is right for the enterprise?
3. They developed action plans.
4. They took responsibility for decisions.
5. They took responsibility for communicating.
6. They were focused on opportunities rather than problems.
7. They ran productive meetings.
8. They thought and said we rather than I.

They have developed four perspectives, or frames, for understanding organizations and leadership; structural, human resource, political and symbolic.
Political Frame: How to cope with power and conflict, build coalitions, hone political skills, and deal with internal and external politics.

Force Field Analysis – Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Community and Economic Development http://www.extension.iastate.edu/communities/force-field-analysis
“A method for listing, discussing and evaluating the various forces for and against a proposed change. When a change is planned, Force Field Analysis helps you look at the big picture by analyzing all of the forces impacting the change and weighing the pros and cons.”