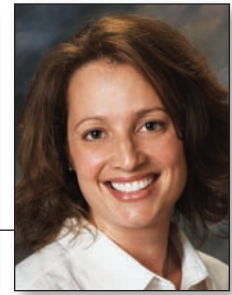


MESSAGE FROM THE EDITORS

Playing Law Firm Politics



By Jeff Scalzi & Melissa Hoff

He Said

The three places where I have lived in my lifetime, thus far, are each very different, but they have one thing in common: Politics is always front-page news. In Boston, it feels like the races get more heated with each passing cycle. In New York, if a candidate makes one false move, he or she ends up being parodied on *Saturday Night Live*. And then there is Washington, DC. Say no more.

As I exited a Washington hotel on a recent trip, I passed throngs of visitors hoping for a chance at a White House tour that autumn day. I continued on to K Street, bound for another day of battle on the front lines in that other very political arena: the law firm.

The law firm is not unlike a governmental body. The matrix structure lends itself to all kinds of power levels created across a diverse terrain, whether these factions are divided by stairwells or by oceans (or both). To succeed and be effective within the firm, independent of position, one must understand the politics. And the roadmap to navigating through those dynamics is not always found on the pages of an HR orientation manual.

I've never thought of myself as active in politics. It's not that I don't care about issues or who is leading us, because I do. Do I vote? Always. Would I stand on a street corner wearing a gorilla suit to garner attention from passers-by in favor of a particular candidate? Unless my children run for office some day, I probably won't. But as I walked up K Street that morning, I realized that the old adage that politics are local really is the truth.

While I'm not going to start printing 'Scalzi 2046' bumper stickers just yet, I am actually quite active in politics that affect me—every day (heck, every hour) at the law firm. Each time I assert an opinion (of which there is no shortage), make a decision or pick up the phone to lobby for a client, I am making a political overture. The way I prioritize my daily, weekly or monthly activities and those of my team is driven by politics.

The political game is something we all must play each day, whether we choose to be aggressive with our opinions or not. And I don't care what position someone has in the firm, when the phone rings and it's *that* partner, you pick up (either literally or metaphorically with skillful triage). I like to think that perhaps one measure of success at the firm is whether those on the receiving end of our phone calls are doing the same. ■

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She Said

I never know what will catch my eye in a given issue of *Strategies*. Sometimes it's an article or a news blurb, other times it's an announcement that so-and-so is now at thus-and-such firm or an ad that resonates. This month, I got to thinking about the article about navigating law firm politics. This subject has long-held interest for legal marketers as a group, although the focus changes and it often masquerades as a more benign topic, like "getting things done in law firms" and "managing expectations" and "building credibility internally." But at the core, the issue comes down to working with other people, and, to put it bluntly, sometimes with people we don't like or with whom we have competing interests.

I don't pretend to have the answers, but the best advice I ever received on the subject of office politics came from my friend and mentor, Mozghan Mizban, who once told me: "The less you deal with it, the less you'll have to." Her words have stayed with me, and I think of them when I'm confronted with an attorney's pet project, a managing partner's temper, an office manager's agenda or inter-departmental strife. Her advice has proven true. Sometimes, the only way to have the last word is to keep your mouth shut.

Of course, I'm not saying that following this advice is always easy. Office politics are part of the work environment as people vie for power, status, money and accomplishment. "Staying out of it" is much easier said than done, and indeed not always possible. If we can treat the ups and downs as part of the office landscape, set appropriate boundaries and quickly move on when things take an unexpected turn for the worse, we won't necessarily win every battle, but we'll preserve our sanity and save our power for when it really counts.

To quote another wise mentor, my father, "Only the faces change. The personality types are the same wherever you go." Which is why I've always valued my legal marketing colleagues beyond measure: Sometimes you need a fresh perspective or a reminder about what's really important. Other times you need a sharp glance or kick under the table to keep quiet. But we always know that we're never alone. Yes, we all work with different faces, but we all work with the same people. ■

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