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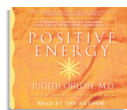
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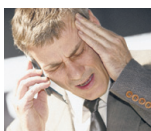
School blues

Around the time when students start heading back to school, it's common for those who are working to feel a lack of inspiration. To counter that, Judith Orloff, author of "Positive Energy: 10 Extraordinary Prescriptions for Transforming Fatigue, Stress & Fear into Vibrance, Strength & Love" (Harmony, \$24), says to identify workplace relationships that bring you down, and take action to correct them. "Instead of stewing in job discontent, present new project ideas and explore options with your boss," she says.



Fever pitch

How often do you call your boss complaining of a stomachache or bad cold — even though you feel just fine? According to a recent survey by Hudson Employment Index, nearly one in three U.S. workers admits to taking a sick day when they are not truly sick. Of those, nearly half choose to do so because they need a break and 22 percent do it to take care of an ill family member. Those most likely to fake sickness were workers aged 18 to 29 and those making under \$20,000 a year.



Happy face

Dale Carnegie Training for Young Adults, offered in California, offers youths the same skills as the courses, which are based on the principles self-Dale Carnegie coined in the 1930's. "We teach things as simple as smile," says Peter Handal, CEO of Dale Carnegie Training. "When you first meet somebody, if you smile, that sets them in the right direction. If you have good eye contact and if you turn off your phone, these are important to making a good first

Backstabbed? Unite!

Don't let office politics ruin your career

Rumors, lies and even backstabbing are all common elements of workplace politics. So what can you do to avoid getting caught in the crossfire? According to Gerald Groe, adjunct professor of organizational design, development and change at the University of Tampa, office politics will happen whether you like it or not. The trick is learning how to maneuver around such a common office problem.

"If you're very senior level, I suggest you think like the CEO; if you're fairly senior level, then think like the department head," explains Groe, who is also the author of "Was Your Boss Raised By Wolves? Surviving the Organizational Food Chain" (Career Press, \$14.99). "Basically, [it's about] stepping back, looking at the big picture, and trying to understand things from a higher perspective."

Groe says that by putting yourself in the position of your superior, you are more likely to recognize what issues they are dealing with, which could come in handy if you are trying to get ahead in your career.

"Try to understand what's going on, then position yourself accordingly," he says. "I don't mean that you need to be a suck up, but do try to understand their perspective on things. That will help you deal with them better on a one on one basis, as well as deal with the decisions that are making the office politics that may be swirling around you as well."

While it is sometimes difficult to stay a safe distance away from politics in the office while maintaining friendships with co-workers, some experts believe that by disassociating yourself with rumors and other forms of gossip, you immediately set yourself apart from the crowd.

"If people knew just how easy it is to stand out in the 'no office politics' crowd, they would gag," explains Lynda Ford, president of the Ford Group, a human resources consulting, training and development company based in Rome, N.Y. "It's the person who actually comes in, is pleasant and produces work that moves ahead with both co-workers and bosses. In fact, slipping into the office politics abyss is exactly what prevents people from being successful at work."

Ford advises employees to simply be pleasant, don't speak negatively about anyone, and, of course, produce high-quality work. By choosing more interesting things to talk about, you are less likely to get caught up in the "political spin," she says.

MOVING FORWARD

Moving ahead in your career is difficult enough. Let alone dealing with workplace politics to boot. Here are five tips for moving forward in your career without alienating those around you:

1. Less is more. Debbie Mandel, radio host and author of "Turn On Your Inner Light: Fitness for Mind, Body and Soul" (Busy Bee Group, \$14.95) advises workers to offer your opinions to others without being too overbearing.

2. Give credit. While many projects at work are team efforts, it's important to address your co-workers' strengths and appreciate their contributions, she says.

3. Never stop learning. "Make learning a top priority," explains Mandel. "Don't be overly concerned with performance — show how you learn from your mistakes and assume responsibility."

4. Hone your skills. Becoming an authority on a particular aspect of work allows you to develop into the go-to person for that particular topic.

5. Give respect and be positive. "People gravitate to positive people," says Mandel. "When you are criticized, don't get defensive."

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