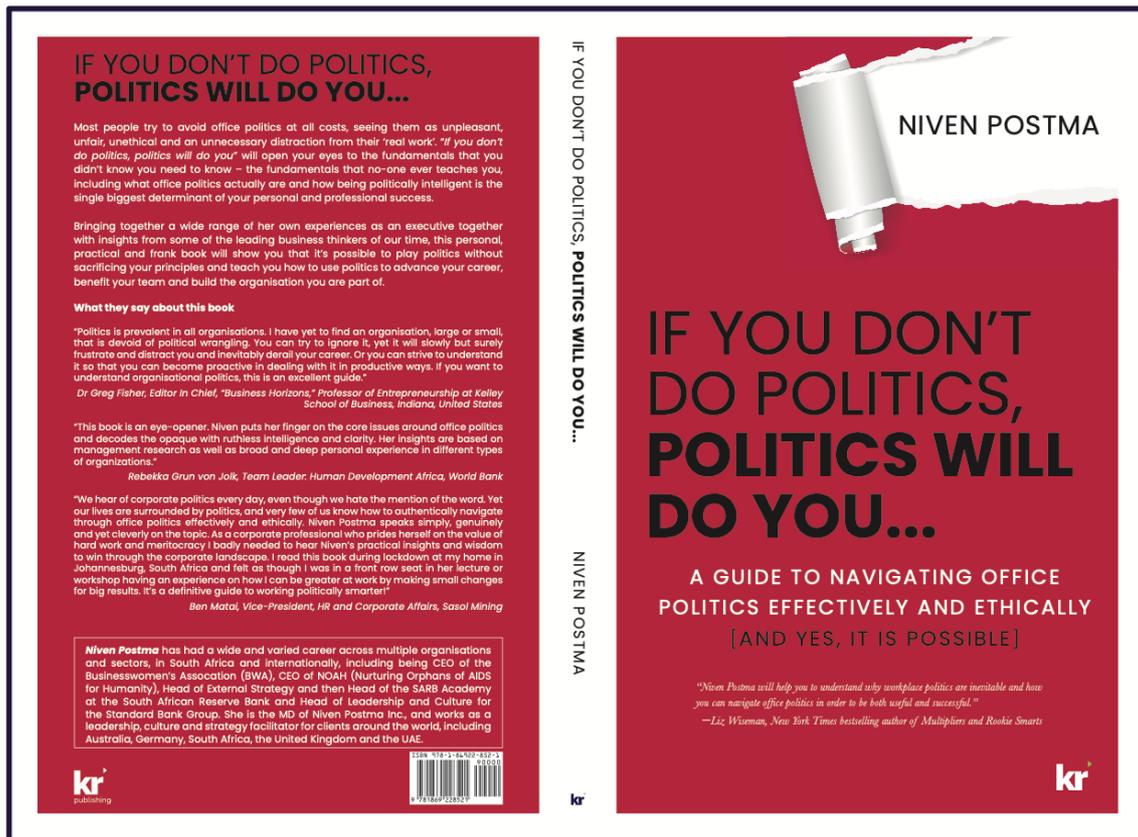


N I V E N
P O S T M A
I N C. WORK FORCE
ACTIVATION

Navigating Politics Workbook | July 2021



The lessons that I share in my book and in my classes are based on my own experiences, along with frameworks from leading management thinkers and stories that have been shared by delegates over the years.

If you are downloading this workbook from my website (www.nivenpostma.com) you'll have seen that there are a whole host of free videos that you can also watch. This workbook can be used as a stand-alone or as an accompaniment to the videos. It has a number of invaluable self-assessment exercises, most of which drawn from Marie McIntyre's excellent and eye-opening book, *"Secrets to Office Politics"*. I have either included the assessments as she developed them or with adaptations that I think makes them even more insightful.

I hope that this rich store of materials will enrich you personally and professionally, help you understand what's *really* going on around you at work and save you from some of the painful political suicide mistakes that are unfortunately all too easy to make.

I would love to hear what you think. So please connect with me on LinkedIn or send me an email with feedback to change@nivenpostma.com.

Niven Postma
MD, Niven Postma Inc.
Johannesburg, South Africa | July 2021

- Answer the following questions:

	1 Strongly agree	2 Agree	3 Unsure / Neutral	4 Disagree	5 Strongly disagree
Politics have made all the difference in my career success					
Work would be so much easier if it weren't for the politics					
At work, other people may be playing politics. I'm just trying to get on with things					
I use politics to my advantage and encourage others to do the same					
I think politics can be good or bad - it depends on who is playing them and how they are playing them					
I can either be a good person OR I can play politics but I can't do / be both					
At the office, I get on with my work and hope that the politics will just pass me by					

Don't look at your self-assessment again until you have finished all the material.

It's going to be interesting to see how your answers change by the time you have finished!

Exercise 2: Identifying toxic environments

Professor Kathleen Kelley Reardon pinpoints a number of signs to look out for to identify an environment that is pathologically politicised or on the way to becoming so. Ask yourself the following questions to see if they apply to your environment at work. Too many 'yes' answers might signal a serious problem.

	Yes	No	Maybe
There is frequent flattery of the person / people in power, while those who are weaker are dismissed, side-lined or abused			
Information is continuously massaged so that anything that might upset those higher up or people in power is downplayed. Honest, direct communication is rare. Instead, people are constantly on tenterhooks and making sure that they don't do or say anything that will 'rock the boat'			
Vicious gossip and backstabbing happen all the time, even when on the surface, things are seemingly polite and professional			
There is widespread lack of care for people. People are dispensable and disposable and the best (only) way to survive is to get to others before they get to you			
Fake left, go right , i.e. what you see is the complete opposite of what you get and what is actually going on. People and departments deliberately set others up to fail, so that they can look good when they do. Hardly surprisingly, teamwork is non-existent and any idea that others - colleagues or managers - 'have your back' is a fantasy. Instead, they are all out to stab you in the back.			
There is an atmosphere of constant and debilitating fear as people's competence and abilities are constantly questioned or belittled in front of others, so that they start to seriously doubt their basic competence			

Exercise 3: How much power do you have?¹

Think about someone you admire and that you use as a role model when it comes to using power wisely and for the benefit of others. Then use this table to compare how *they* use power and how *you* use it. What are the differences and how can you learn from your role model?

			3 = Definitely	2 = Somewhat	1 = Not Really			
Me			A Power Builder...			My Role Model		
3	2	1	Has responsibility for results that are perceived as valuable			3	2	1
3	2	1	Is included in, or consulted about, important decisions			3	2	1
3	2	1	Is allowed to make independent decisions about their work			3	2	1
3	2	1	Has information or skills perceived as valuable by management			3	2	1
3	2	1	Has contact with many people in many parts of the organisation			3	2	1
3	2	1	Is trusted with confidential information			3	2	1
3	2	1	Is involved in important projects			3	2	1
3	2	1	Has expertise that is hard to replace			3	2	1
3	2	1	Is listened to by others when speaking			3	2	1
3	2	1	Appears confident and self-assured			3	2	1
3	2	1	Is well regarded by people at all levels			3	2	1
3	2	1	Turns disagreements into productive discussions			3	2	1
3	2	1	Conveys interest and enthusiasm about work			3	2	1
3	2	1	Includes other people in decisions and activities			3	2	1

¹ Marie G. McIntyre, "Secrets to Office Politics", 2005

Exercise 4: Power players in your environment²

This model of power players comes from Marie G. McIntyre. Think of at least one person of each type in your work environment. What do they do that makes you classify them as such? How does it impact how you and others engage with them?

1. Weakling (low level position, low position of influence)
2. Persuader (low level position, high position of influence)
3. Empty suit (high level position, low position of influence)
4. Power player (high level position, high position of influence)

² Marie G. McIntyre, *"Secrets to Office Politics"*, 2005

Can you think of situations where you have showed up / do show up as each of these types? What triggered / triggers your behaviour?

1. Dimwit:

2. Martyr:

3. Sociopath:

4. Winner:

Exercise 6: Auditing your network⁴

I have a broad and extensive network of people across levels, functions, demographics in the organisation and outside of it	My network shows signs of Clustering , i.e. everyone - or almost everyone in it - is of the same demographic (white, middle aged women etc) and / or Layering , i.e. is concentrated only at a particular level so that it doesn't extend up or down levels and / or Having occupational tunnel vision , i.e. consists mainly of people in my own department or particular function
I have identified the people I need to know to achieve what I want to	I have no idea who could or should be helping me achieve what I need to
I actively look for opportunities to interact with others	I spend most of my day at my desk, doing my work or by myself
I push myself outside of my comfort zone to try new things or meet different people	I tend to prefer sticking to people who are like me
I try to find things that I have in common with other people and then build conversations on these common interests	I only ever speak to people about work matters
I try to help others where I can	If something is not in my job description I don't do it
I allow myself to be helped by others where and when I need it	I'm not a big believer in asking others for help. Even if I did want to ask them for help, I wouldn't know who to turn to

If your answers tended to be in the left hand column, you are on the right track in building up a wide and useful network. If your answers were much more in the right hand column, then you need to look at what you can do to improve your network and your networking skills.

⁴ Adapted from Marie G. McIntyre, "Secrets to Office Politics", 2005

Exercise 7: How much leverage do you have?⁵

Leverage boosters	Definitely	Somewhat	Not really
Results: I produce results that provide a clear benefit to my organisation	3	2	1
Knowledge: I possess knowledge that is quite useful to my organisation	3	2	1
Attitude: I am viewed by almost everyone as helpful and cooperative	3	2	1
Empathy: People often come to me for help with their problems or concerns	3	2	1
Networks: I know many people throughout my organisation	3	2	1
Inclusion: I typically try to include other people in my decisions or projects	3	2	1
Detachment: I am known as someone who can view situations objectively	3	2	1
Total points:			

Score of 18 - 21: You probably possess a great deal of leverage. I only say “probably” because we must always be open to blind spots in how we are truly showing up. If your self-assessment is accurate, well done! With this amount of leverage, you should be able to get a lot done.

Score of 11 - 17: You certainly have opportunities to increase your leverage if you want to

Score less than 10: You definitely have some work to do

If your score is lower than you would like it to be, identify the categories where you could improve. What specific steps could you take to increase your leverage in these areas? What could you do differently, either in terms of what you are doing at work and/or how you are interacting with people at work?

⁵ Marie G. McIntyre, “Secrets to Office Politics”, 2005

Exercise 8: How good are you at self-management?⁶

	Almost always	Often	Seldom	Almost never
1. I am always able to view my actions with the eye of an outside observer	4	3	2	1
2. I am often surprised by the way others view my behaviour	1	2	3	4
3. I tend to act without thinking	1	2	3	4
4. I am good at anticipating how people will react in different situations	4	3	2	1
5. I am able to keep myself from saying things that might be unwise	4	3	2	1
6. I believe in "doing what comes naturally" so that I can really be myself	1	2	3	4
7. I stop myself from doing things that could have negative consequences	4	3	2	1
8. I often regret the actions I have taken	1	2	3	4
9. I say things to others without considering how they may react	1	2	3	4
10. I find it hard to stop myself from doing things that I really want to do	1	2	3	4
11. I am consciously aware of my actions and reactions around others	4	3	2	1
12. I have tried to develop behaviours that are outside of my comfort zone	4	3	2	1
13. I tend to do things that are against my better judgement	1	2	3	4
14. I make conscious choices about what I say and do with others	4	3	2	1

⁶ Marie G. McIntyre, "Secrets to Office Politics", 2005

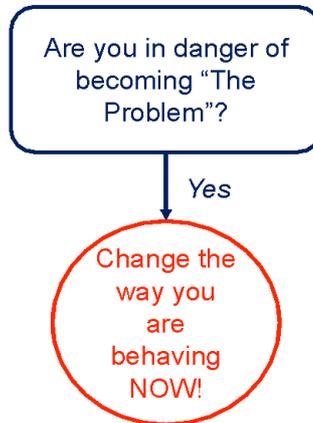
Count the number of 4, 3, 2 and 1 scores that you gave yourself.

Higher Self Management Skills		Lower Self Management Skills	
Total 4's	Total 3's	Total 2's	Total 1's

The more scores you have on the left side of the chart, the better your self-management skills appear to be. The more scores on the right side, the more problems you may encounter in this area.

Exercise 9: Crafting your political strategy⁷

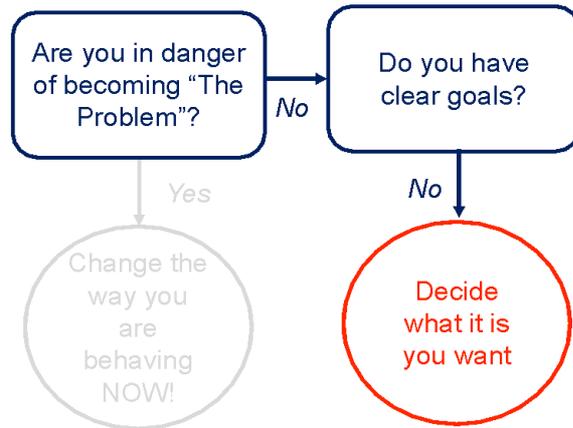
First and *most* important place to start



"Sociologists and marketers describe a phenomenon known as the tipping point. A tipping point occurs when, for example, a disease unexpectedly begins to spread like wildfire, becoming an epidemic or a new product suddenly catches on all over the country, quickly selling out in every store. Tipping points are also reached in troubled marriages; after accumulated stress and unhappiness, a particular event may 'tip' one partner into seriously contemplating divorce. I often witness this 'tipping' phenomenon when managers are grappling with difficult employee situations. The decision to demote or fire someone is seldom made suddenly. But the point at which such drastic action becomes an option - the tipping point - is when the person begins to be seen as The Problem. Once someone is tagged with that label, a marked shift occurs in the manager's thinking; instead of considering how to either coach or cope with the employee, the manager is now starting to fantasize about how pleasant life would be if this bothersome person were gone and to wonder how many 'last chances' need to be provided before the axe falls."

⁷ Adapted from Marie G. McIntyre, "Secrets to Office Politics", 2005

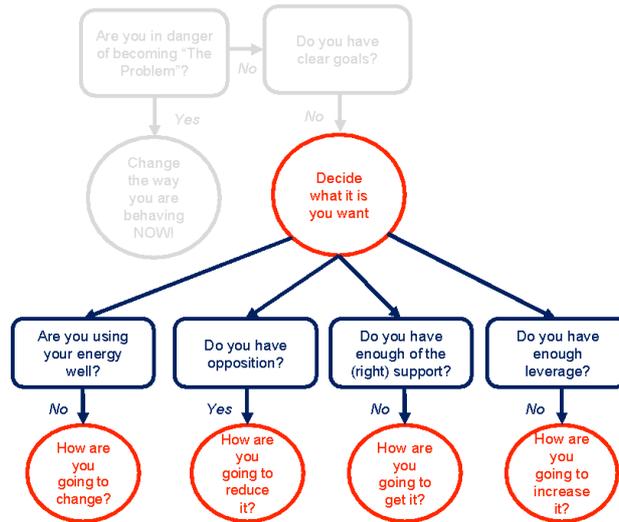
Second question to answer



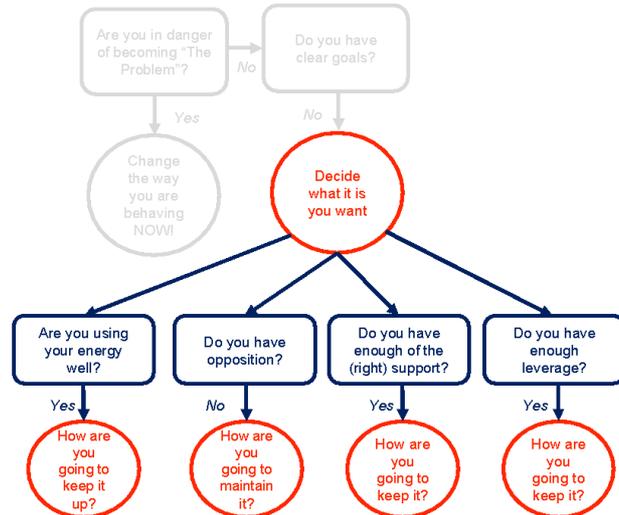
"Unhappiness is not knowing what we want and killing ourselves to get it"

Don Herold

Third set of questions to get to grips with



And finally...



Exercise 10: Closing activity: What are your views on office politics now?

- When I think of office politics, the words that come to mind for me now are:

- Because:

- The one thing that I am going to tell people about office politics now is:

- The things I know and am going to put into practice going forward are:

- Rate yourself against the questions in the table below:

	1 Strongly agree	2 Agree	3 Unsure / Neutral	4 Disagree	5 Strongly disagree
Playing politics well is something I want to do for my career success					
Work is going to be easier now that I understand more about politics					
I'm going to make sure that I do politics so that they don't do me					
I am going to use politics to my advantage and encourage others to do the same					
I am going to make sure that I spend my career being a good office politician					

Now go back to the self-assessment you completed on pages 2 and 3 when you started. If you were to answer those questions *now*, how would your answers be different to the ones you gave at the beginning?