

OFFICE POLITICS

SEIZING
POWER
WIELDING
CLOUT

The
definitive
training manual
for everyone who
wants to get to the top—
and intends to stay there!

Marilyn Moats Kennedy

OFFICE POLITICS

*Seizing Power
Wielding Clout*

Marilyn Moats Kennedy



WARNER BOOKS

A Warner Communications Company

WARNER EDITION

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DEDICATION

For my parents,
Orin and Georgia Moats,
who provided
the opportunity
for me to study journalism,
and for my husband,
Daniel Joseph Kennedy, Jr.,
who insisted I make
something of it

Acknowledgements

First, I wish to thank Deborah Lynn Panter, who left a very good job to work as my editorial assistant on this book. Without her patience, good judgment, encouragement, help in the research and editing, and occasional dog-walking, this book would still be aborning.

Second, let me thank Elaine Goldberg, managing editor at Follett Publishing Company, who encouraged me to write the book. I really had no intention of doing anything but talking about it, but she egged me on.

Third, let me thank the faculty of the Medill School of Journalism, Northwestern University, for the invaluable training I received there. I am especially grateful to Ben Baldwin, an exceptional teacher and critic.

Most of the research described in the book came about as a result of the need to help clients of Career Strategies, the career-planning and consulting firm I began in June 1975. My clients—almost ten thousand in all—have contributed substantially through their experiences and feedback. They have given hundreds of interviews and shared their experiences with me freely, for which I am deeply grateful. There are no personal experiences in the book simply because, compared with the problems some of my clients have faced, my own fade. I have tried in each case to use only experiences shared by a number of people—not the one, most outrageous case.

Most of the research was done during and after seminars between January 1977 and June 1979. The first seminar on office politics was done with Lynda Duncan Carney for DePaul University in 1977, and feedback from it provided the basic idea as well as much of the basic direction for this book.

The chapter on nonprofit organizations (chapter 9) is the result of many, many interviews with people who have worked, and currently are working, with such organizations. Most of these people demanded anonymity for reasons you will understand when you read that chapter.

The names and kinds of businesses but not their size or type (i.e., profit and nonprofit organization) have been changed in every case. We have disguised the individual who gave us the information completely, but we have kept the political characteristics of the organization intact. All cases have a factual base.

The research, ideas, and expressions of opinion are entirely my own, as is every word in the book. I stand accountable for what I've written.

Preface

This book is dedicated to the proposition that we all have choices. We can choose the skills we use on our job, the kind of job we take, and for whom and with whom we work. That's career planning. We can also use tools of analysis to look closely at the work environment before we begin a job—and then we can constantly make use of these tools on the job. That's practical politics as exercised in the office. Either we learn to manage the politics of our place of work, or we are its victims. It's as stark as that. You can learn how the process works, or you can fail. The choice is yours.

But most people don't believe this. They insist on the mythology of St. Horatio Alger. Even though his books have never been turned into a television miniseries, and if you read them today, they seem

quaint and out of touch, he is still believed religiously. What Alger said was that if you worked really hard, pleased your boss, didn't make waves, and were ethical and morally upright, you'd rise to the top in business just like cream in a milk bottle.

While Alger was no Mark Twain (and is never even mentioned in college literature courses), there was no question that he was persuasive. All of Alger's heroes were boys who began life in poor circumstances and rose to success through hard work. I read and understood the message and believed it.

I believed in the work ethic fervently. If I worked hard, and if I were very competent, I would succeed. I did not meet Niccolò Machiavelli until I was a student at Northwestern University.

Machiavelli said flat out that the political process was a vital part of human organizations, and that you couldn't get away from it. The political process controlled who got what, when, and how. It was a short leap from world or local governmental politics to the politics of the work place.

I soon found out. I graduated and went to work. Like most of the people who will read this book, I resisted the idea that office politics was a fact of every person's working life. I believed that if, as Alger said, I worked very hard and behaved ethically, I'd beat the system. I haven't. What I have discovered, which I share with my readers, is how to make office politics work for, rather than against, a person's career.

Until you understand why the myths we live by are false, you'll always be a victim. As long as you believe that, out there somewhere, there's a universal definition of hard work that you can know and meet, you will be unpleasantly surprised at every contact point with the world of work. You will be seriously

disappointed as you discover that nobody understands, much less shares, your idea of what constitutes hard work.

As long as you believe that performance appraisal can be valuefree, and that your employer can and will lay aside his or her personal values and prejudices to look at your work objectively, you are going to be miserable.

As long as you believe that people, including yourself perhaps, are fired because they are incompetent and can't do the job, you'll never understand how you or anybody else comes to be abruptly unemployed.

As long as you believe that all actions in the office are based on fairness and rationality, you'll be hurt, confused, and disillusioned.

Finally, as long as you look for a formula for success, you are doomed to frustration. There are as many formulas as there are work environments and bosses managing them. You don't have to make the same mistakes over and over—or even once. Read on.

OFFICE POLITICS

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