

“NO POLITICS FOR ME”

Learning to recast “politics” as strategic alliances that advance the business

He was smart, attractive and quietly confident. His consulting background was proving to be a great asset in a new corporate role where he reported to a highly energized and visionary COO. Jeff* was a key driver of the many change initiatives the COO was spearheading, and with a dedicated team, he was focused and driven to excel.

And yet. His boss saw greater potential. Jeff had distant relationships with most of his colleagues, and was often characterized as speaking in jargon and trying to teach those who were equally expert in their own field instead of partnering with them as subject-matter equals. He was at risk of becoming increasingly isolated and decreasingly effective at leading the many cross functional projects that the COO had put him in charge of.

At first, Jeff dismissed his boss’s concerns as exaggerated and of little consequence to his success. He was skeptical that, as he called it, “playing politics” would increase the chances of implementing an aggressive business agenda. Yet interviews with peers and team members painted a very different picture: he was seen as aloof, difficult to get to know, and hard to read. He played his cards so close to the vest that others were reluctant to show theirs – they didn’t know how he would use the information, so peers remained silent, not asking the important questions and thereby slowing down the progress of critical initiatives.

Nancy worked with Jeff one-on-one using specific past events that had occurred with his manager and peers to help him recast what he called “politics” into a deeper

understanding of how to build and use strategic alliances. Which meetings were most important to his success? Where had he misread cues and created the wrong impression? Whom did he have to know better so he could advance his agenda? Whom did he need to better understand, so he could convert a bystander into a fan and ally?

Once Jeff started thinking more strategically, he began to be more thoughtful about his comments in meetings. He spent time developing closer relationships with peers, often asking their advice when he wanted to generate buy-in for a new concept or idea. He came out of his shell more and more, realizing that the investment in people, as much as in knowledge, was instrumental to his success.

In developing a greater awareness of not only how he was perceived, but how his aloofness was limiting his effectiveness, Jeff learned to dial down his resistance and create the relationships he needed to advance not only the business but his own career. The result: He is now Chief Operating Office and Interim CEO of a global organization, having successfully built teams across three continents. His new understanding of interpersonal relations was instrumental in his newfound abilities to manage globally and cross functionally.

**Name changed*