

The Advisory Alliance

60-Second E-mail™ – December 29, 2005

Organizational Savvy: What it is & Why you need it

This month, in a special 2-part 60-Second E-mail™, The Advisory Alliance sits down with Martin Seldman, author and expert on Organizational Savvy. From 1972 to 1986 Marty specialized in the field of training. His work included training trainers, designing training content and programs, serving as Vice-President of Sales for a leading training company, and eventually heading his own company. Marty has coached more than 1200 executives since 1986, and his 35-year career includes expertise in group dynamics, clinical psychology, cross-cultural studies, training, and executive coaching.

David Harper: Marty, would you explain for our readers what “Organizational Savvy” exactly is. And what it is not.

Marty Seldman: Sure. Organizational Savvy is a set of skills and strategies that combine personal integrity with an astuteness about corporate politics and human nature. It’s being astute about power, politics, the importance of perception and deception, and above all, it’s about having integrity.

It’s *not* about getting ahead in the wrong way, nor about being political to advance one’s career or straying from one’s moral compass. In many ways it’s the more practical “cousin” of emotional intelligence, in that it goes further than emotional intelligence by dealing with the very real-world practical issues of corporate life, which can at times be less than uplifting.

Harper: Why is Organizational Savvy so important?

Seldman: Organizational Savvy is important both at the individual and the corporate level. At the individual level, it’s important in terms of career management. I’ve seen many people with good intentions, good values, possessing great competencies, and achieving great results fail to go as far as they deserve because of their political blind spots. What might be called “apolitical” people are most at risk. They tend to be blind-sided by the realities of corporate life, and are at the risk of plateau-ing early in their career. Typically these are people that rely on knowledge, logic, fairness and objective measurement in their jobs and careers. Savvy, however, is not based on these. If these individuals do not develop these skills, they make it easy for those who are very political to get into positions of power.

On the other hand, I’ve seen “empty suits” who are very political, use their politics to go further, but their lack of a moral compass puts the company at great risk. That’s the reason why Organizational Savvy is important for the organization as well as the individual. A company and its leaders need to be watchful for those who will put their own ambition ahead of the company’s, thereby risking the reputation and the future of the organization. Enron, Tyco, and Andersen are all examples of what happens when Organizational Savvy is not part of a company’s DNA.

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Harper: Can Organizational Savvy be taught? And if so, how?

Yes, the book we wrote, *Survival of the Savvy: High-Integrity Political Tactics for Career and Company Success*, comes out of the seminars in which these skills are taught. In our seminars, we talk about things most people don't want to discuss. Being savvy does not mean schmoozing, being political, or, if you'll pardon the expression, sucking up. We focus, in part, on what's between the ears, the need to change one's attitude about what it means to be savvy. The key skill is the ability to detect deception.

Harper: As an individual, how can you best develop it (other than hiring a coach)?

Seldman: There are a couple of books I recommend. Obviously our book, *Survival of the Savvy*, is one of them. The other is *Political Savvy: Systematic Approaches to Leadership Behind the Scenes* by Joel Deluca. Additionally, one of the best ways to develop savvy is to find a mentor who possesses good integrity and who is also very savvy him/herself. Again, you're not seeking someone who's very political. You need someone who speaks from a moral compass.

Harper: In which industries do you typically find savvy? And in which industries is savvy often lacking?

Seldman: Although it varies across industries and companies, people in entertainment and media tend to be very savvy about impression management. Conversely, people with more technical backgrounds tend to be less savvy. Their academic and career background tends to lead them to assume that their results and accomplishments will speak for themselves, that logic will prevail. Unfortunately, that's not often the case.

Harper: Is Organizational Savvy a concept that applies just as strongly in other cultures as well?

Seldman: Yes indeed. In fact, in many cultures you need to be much more savvy than in the U.S. When there's a concentration of power, being savvy is crucial. Again, being savvy is knowing about power, who has it, and who is using it as well as abusing it.

In some countries, not being savvy can result in your suffering personally, as well as putting your family at risk. Many street smart executives from the U.S. get blind-sided when they assume positions in other countries. An example that comes to mind is of a U.S. executive who was sent to Russia 8 years ago. He was honest, sincere and hard-working. But he was not prepared for the level of deception that was rampant in the country at the time. Instead, he tended to trust people. He was not prepared for the extensive deceit, bribery, and threats made.

Beyond other cultures and countries, the importance of savvy applies when moving from company to company as well. Mergers are another example where people need to be savvy. Fundamentally, the need to be savvy is dependent upon the situation. There are so many situations where the road to the top is filled with power struggles.

Marty Seldman's book, *Survival of the Savvy: High-Integrity Political Tactics for Career and Company Success* is available at Amazon and all fine book stores. To learn more about Marty Seldman's work

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and success in helping build organizationally savvy companies, please contact the Advisory Alliance at (912) 898-2255, or e-mail me personally at dharper@advisoryalliance.com.

You can access this and past 60-Second E-mails™, as well as subscribe to our mailing list, via this link: <http://www.advisoryalliance.com/detail.php?page=newsletter>

Next month, Marty discusses what an organizationally savvy company looks like, the differences between men and women, and how new leaders and managers can develop Organizational Savvy.

Until next month and next year, best regards,

David

David Harper
Member and Directing Manager