

The Advisory Alliance

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Organizational Savvy: Companies, men, women and you.

This month, in the second installment of a special 2-part 60-Second E-mail™, The Advisory Alliance speaks with Marty Seldman, author and expert on Organizational Savvy. 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: What can companies do to prevent being exposed by highly political individuals?

Marty Seldman: My experience suggests that companies that are most admired are scrupulous about conflicts of interest. Conflicts of interest are the slippery slope. The need for controls is paramount; don't leave people on their own. Companies need to be able to sniff highly political people out. They need to be able to spot who's holding back and who's being superficial.

Harper: What does an organizationally savvy company look like?

Seldman: When I work with a company and its leadership, my goal is to develop critical mass in the company. I'm looking to make it difficult for an overly political person to hide. Examples of organizationally savvy companies include Becton Dickinson, where the company has made the biggest commitment to having their top leaders develop organizationally savvy. More than 1000 executives have gone through their program. T. Rowe Price also uses Organizational Savvy to get the best people in key positions. Finally, Mike White, President of Pepsi International; has committed himself and his leadership to the development of Organizational Savvy in his emerging leaders.

Harper: Do you see any differences between men and women regarding Organizational Savvy?

Seldman: The research is pretty clear. Although savvy is found in both men and women, there are differences in the use of power and self-promotion. Women tend to use non-coercive power. They tend to prefer to "power with" others; their style is more collaborative. Men tend to be more comfortable with coercive power. They tend to prefer to "power over" others.

With regard to self-promotion (and I'm assuming this is with integrity), many women have heard early in their lives, messages about the value of not bragging, not self-promoting. Perhaps as a result, women tend to be more comfortable with networking and reading people. Men, on the other hand, tend to be more comfortable with bragging and overt self-promotion.

Harper: What would you recommend to the new leader or manager to develop Organizational Savvy?

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Seldman: When people ask me to what extent they need to develop Organizational Savvy, I tell them it's like flossing your teeth. You don't need to floss all your teeth...just the ones you want to keep. I can't underscore enough how important it is to develop your level of savviness, especially for the new leader or manager.

First, study the culture and learn the core values. Culture is incredibly powerful. Network and make connections. Establish relationships early on. Get clear on expectations and how things get done. Find out whom you can trust, and whom you can't. I'm reminded of a very senior executive who would start a meeting with a certain position, and then later change that very position to its opposite. He would sit back and assess the members of his team by how they changed their own position. Would they flip-flop and change theirs to reflect his? Or would they hold true to their convictions? Interestingly, the one individual who had the conviction and courage to routinely challenge him ultimately became CEO of the company.

Secondly, look for patterns. You don't need to be paranoid. Consider the analogy of the parent. If you raise a child to be cynical, she will not trust anyone. True, she won't get hurt, but she won't trust anyone either. Instead, you want to show her the importance of knowing whom to trust and whom not to trust. It's the same thing for a leader. The difference though is that as a leader, you're looking at trust from your perspective and from the company's. In fact, the higher you go as a leader, the more you need to be protecting the reputation and integrity of the company. For large "expanded" companies, you need a leader capable of protecting the entire company by knowing when he or she is receiving the truth from direct reports, different divisions, different geographies, etc. At this level, Organizational Savvy becomes a form of risk management for the corporation.

Harper: How does being organizationally savvy help one's career?

Seldman: Having Organizational Savvy doesn't help you get more than you deserve, but it will help you get what you deserve and it will help you go as far as you can in an organization. Again, getting full credit, recognition, and opportunity are not all givens. You must earn them beyond just doing good work.

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 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>

Until next month, best regards,

David

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