

# How to crush office politics like a boss



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## **Chapter One: Figure out what people want**

The key to understanding office politics is to understand what other people want. With normal people, figuring out others' desires is simply a matter of talking to them in the right way. However, you might run into people who will not communicate what it is that they actually want. Why? Because what they want is pretty messed up.

For example, narcissists are people who need to feel like they have social status to feel safe. They are hopelessly addiction to admiration, adoration, and adulation from others. They will sacrifice the health of the business in order to promote employees who help them deal with their unusual emotional needs. Their unusual priorities are often the reason why many corporations are full of weird office politics and incompetent people who haven't been fired.

Once you figure out what it is that somebody wants, you can devise a win-win relationship where both parties get what they desire. Tell that person about how you can help them solve their problems. Once you have their buy-in, you can ask for what it is that you want in return. This is one of the easiest ways to convince somebody to help you with what you want.

### **To figure out what normal people want, just listen**

Here are some tips:

- They should be doing more talking than you.
- Give them cues to indicate that you are listening and that you care about what they are saying. React to what they're saying by nodding to acknowledge their point. Raise your eyebrows or go "ah..." if they say something really interesting or intriguing.
- If you don't understand something, feel free to ask for clarification.
- Ask open ended questions such as "why?". Open-ended questions will often elicit more information than yes/no questions.

### **Build a relationship**

Build strong relationships with others so that they will trust you enough to tell you what they really want.

**Slowly build up the relationship:** Close relationships start off small and slowly build up from there. You can initiate such a relationship by asking for a small favour (e.g. advice, borrow an object, etc.) or offering something small to the other party (e.g. send them an article that they may find very useful to show them that you are thinking of them). Once that happens, the recipient of the favour is, to some degree, obligated to reciprocate the favour when the need arises.

Because of the obligation aspect, some people will actively try to avoid accepting favours from others. They do *not* want a relationship with you. If they have social skills, they will indicate this through their body language by being a little standoffish. They may tell a white lie as to why they are declining your overture. If they do not have social skills, then they will be awkward and look like they do not want to talk to you. They will not smile at you, actively engage in your conversation, or otherwise encourage you to build a relationship with them.

If that is the case, then politely disengage with the person and end the conversation. It will take these people a much longer time to trust you.

**Don't be too friendly or not friendly enough:** Start with a low level of politeness and slowly escalate from there. If you've escalated too much too fast, then de-escalate. If you're saying hi and you need to tone it down, then face them at an angle rather than facing them directly. Make your eye contact briefer and show less excitement in your body language when you initiate a conversation. You can make it seem like you have other things on your mind, e.g. you are about to do something else like walking to where you want to go, multi-tasking between your smartphone/computer and the conversation, simultaneously scanning what's around you while talking, etc.

If you're not sure where you stand, just guess the correct level of friendliness and escalate or de-escalate from there. Read the other person's body language. If they show excitement in the conversation, then they are open to escalation. If they start giving you less eye contact than before, then they want you to de-escalate. Body language can often be ambiguous because there needs to be some level of plausible deniability so that people can save face. When somebody wants you to de-escalate, they will often send you mixed signals so that they don't seem like they are being unfriendly to you by rudely rejecting your overture. So, you will need to dance with them a little bit to confirm their body language. De-escalate and see their reaction. If they suddenly

escalate their body language to drag you back in, then their body language is saying that you have misread them. Otherwise, they probably want you to politely disengage.

To understand what mixed signals look like, watch [the Youtube video where Robert Downey Jr walks out of an interview](#) at the 5:36 mark. He doesn't actually want the interviewer to ask him deeply personal questions about his father, his drug use, and his past. He politely encourages the journalist to ask his questions, and then breaks eye contact to look at his publicist. One signal is positive and the other is negative. Publicists never get involved in their client's 1-on-1 interviews so his eye contact is a way for him to say that he has little patience for the current interview and wants the interview to wrap up. The journalist misreads the situation and asks a deeply personal question anyways, leading to Robert Downey Jr walking out.

## **Pay attention to a person's emotional needs**

Some people have emotional needs that are very easy to fill. Some people are simply lonely or misunderstood. They simply need somebody to listen, to sympathize with them, or to support them with encouragement. The simple act of talking to them can make a world of difference.

In the workplace, it can be incredibly easy to spot the victims of workplace abuse as toxic people tend to be toxic towards everybody. If you want to make easy allies in the workplace, go to the victims of workplace abuse and validate them. Tell them that they have been wronged and that it wasn't their fault. If their criticism was undeserved, tell them. You can point them towards [this guide on recovering from abuse from narcissists and controlling abusers](#).

For other life problems, you can refer them to peer support groups on Reddit or other places on the Internet (e.g. Metafilter).

- Abusive parents → [r/RaisedByNarcissists](#)
- Abusive romantic partner → [r/NarcissisticAbuse](#) [r/DomesticViolence](#) [r/AbusiveRelationships](#) [r/Abuse](#) [r/AbuseInterrupted](#)
- Rape or sexual assault → [r/AdultSurvivors](#) [r/Rape](#)
- Relationship problems → [r/Relationships](#)
- Toxic workplace → [r/ManagedByNarcissists](#)

Whatever the problem is, there is probably a group of people on the Internet talking about it. If you have no idea as to how you can help somebody with their problem, you can create a Reddit account and get advice from people who have gone through the situation. Or, you can simply point your colleague towards online resources so that they can get help. They will likely appreciate the referral (even if they don't find it helpful) because it shows that you listened and thought about them. Actually fixing their problem is relatively unimportant.

Helping somebody with their emotional problems often takes little effort and gives you a quick ally.

## **Some people will not tell you what they want**

In the corporate world, you may find plenty of toxic people in management with deranged emotional needs:

- **Narcissists.** Narcissists are people who are afraid of not having social status. Their brain associates low social standing with bad things happening to them because they have been traumatized by their mistreatment in the past. They need to be seen as a giant. If they can't, they will try to turn everybody else into midgets.
- **Controlling abusers.** These types of abusers were horribly mistreated in the past when somebody (e.g. a parent or romantic partner) controlled them through emotional, physical, or sexual abuse. They don't feel safe unless they are in control over other people. They need to hurt other people to verify that they're in control and to increase their control over their victims.

Toxic people are not going to explain their deranged emotional needs to you. You will need to carefully pay attention to the signs and to pay close attention to how they behave.

## Chapter Two: How to deal with narcissists

To spot narcissists, here are the key signs:

- **They constantly seek validation** by boasting, talking about themselves and their grand ideas, hop onto hot trends to make themselves look good, etc.
- **They cannot handle criticism.** Their strategies for dealing with criticism are quite maladaptive and often socially inappropriate.
- **They scam themselves** because they are allergic to admitting that they are wrong. They repeat their mistakes over and over. Their delusions of grandeur make them vulnerable to being scammed by others.
- **They promote incompetent people** because they prioritize their emotional needs over making money.

To co-exist peacefully with narcissists, first make sure that you do not devalue them through criticism. They typically cannot even handle the lightest forms of constructive criticism when they are afraid that constructive criticism somehow devalues them.

When they scam themselves into making poor decisions, you will not gain anything for getting in their way. Like an addict, narcissists have a problem and will make poor life decisions. Many narcissists are actually aware that their disordered personality causes problems for them and that they can't turn it off.

Secondly, you need to supply them with at least a trickle of validation. If they do not get validation from you, they will put in a lot of work to try to get your validation.

(Narcissists are used to working hard for validation... it is the story of their life.) If they never get validation from you, then they will be very uncomfortable and will try to have you fired or they will talk trash about you.

If you want to get what you want out of a narcissist, then supply them with what they want:

- **Genuine praise.** You can always find something positive to say about a narcissist, whether it's their physical attributes (e.g. great hair), work ethic (narcissists often work incredibly hard for validation), or some part of their crazy plans that has worked out well.

- **Subtle praise.** To avoid the appearance of insincere flattery, you can be subtle with your flattery. For example, you can casually remark that the narcissist has great hair and then immediately ask them for advice/information: do they use a special shampoo, what is their secret, do they simply have great genetics, etc. Ask them *how* they achieved their praiseworthy achievement.
- **Help them deal with critics.** Point out flaws in the critic's arguments, ways to attack or discredit the messenger, etc. etc.

Then, once you have the narcissist hooked on your supply, you should cut it off every once in a while. Do not criticize the narcissist but do not praise the narcissist either. This will throw them off and make them wonder why they are not getting your validation. Because narcissists are used to working hard to get validation, they will try to figure you out (it's often a game for them). They will pay attention to you and what they have to do to get your validation. This is where you start talking about what it is that you want. You essentially become their drug dealer and make them pay for your supply. While you can't negotiate with them directly, they will actively figure out what it is that they must do to get your validation.

To understand whether or not this will work, simply look at all of the people promoted by the narcissist. If the narcissist surrounds themselves with questionable or incompetent people, then you can be assured that there is a reason to the madness. Their questionable underlings are serving some purpose for the narcissist. Or, you can look at the resources that the narcissist expends to keep their image up. Narcissists often sacrifice their resources and money so that they can feel like they have social status. Understand that there is a reason why they hurt themselves.

## **How to get a narcissist to dislike a co-worker**

Narcissists will not like it if a co-worker:

1. Is criticizing them openly or behind their back.
2. Is hurting their reputation in some way, e.g. by hurting the company's reputation.

One way to plant an idea in their head is to describe something that the co-worker has done. State that the co-worker's actions *seem* to be critical of the narcissist or are causing harm to their reputation. Then ask a leading question: "To be clear, they are NOT trying to harm the company's reputation and there's something going on here that I

don't know about right?" There is no need to accuse somebody- especially because an accusation can backfire on you. Simply put the idea out there and do not accuse your co-worker of acting against the narcissist. Because narcissists are extremely sensitive to criticism, they will definitely think about the idea and form their own conclusions about it. Presenting the evidence and letting the other party form their own conclusions is one of the best ways of convincing somebody that something is true.

If you want to get somebody fired, pay attention to why the narcissist fires employees. If the organization is filled with incompetent people, then clearly personnel decisions are not being made on the basis of competence. If the narcissist fires people who humiliate them, then you will need to convince the narcissist that they are being humiliated by a co-worker.

## Chapter Three: How to deal with controlling abusers

Spotting these people can take time, but here's what you should look out for:

- **They hurt people** even when there is no clear incentive to do so. For example, they insult strangers such as employees in a store.
- **All their relationships begin with light and subtle abuse.** Whereas normal people are nice to others to build good relationships, controlling abusers are constantly trying to manipulate others. They will scan people for weaknesses and may attempt to chip away at others' self-worth with subtle put downs. They are unrelenting in trying to figure out how to control people they meet. Their subtle probes will not stop.
- **High turnover due to a toxic workplace.** If an abuser is in charge, then the abuser will have difficulty retaining employees due to a toxic culture. The culture tends to be toxic because only codependents (people who were raised in abuse and learned to be abuser pleasers), narcissists, and other controlling abusers do not leave toxic environments.
- **They lose a lot of friends and close relationships.** Because they need to hurt the people closest to them, they usually destroy all of their closest friendships. If they are in a relationship, their partner is either allied with them in abusing others or is being abused. The latter can be difficult to figure out because abuse victims commonly seek validation from their abuser. They often hide their abuse because their self-worth has been destroyed, they are embarrassed that they don't leave (similar to how people with eating disorders can eat properly but don't), or because they are trying to please their abuser.
- **They try to hide their abuse,** making the abuse much harder to spot. Abusers figure out that hiding their agenda makes it easier for them to control others. They will hide behind excuses such as "being unkind is necessary to motivate people", it's "not" abuse, their alcohol problem, substance abuse, being a jerk, a bad childhood, mental health illness, etc.
- **Others in the organization may be protecting them.** If a controlling abuser has been in an organization for a long time (e.g. sexual predators in certain church systems), it's likely that higher ups in the organization know what's going on and

enable the abuser by helping them get away with their abuse. These unspoken alliances can make it more difficult to verify the abuse.

- **They spend a lot of resources on hurting others.** They are quite serious about controlling others. They will threaten suicide, hurt themselves with psychiatric drugs, pretend to be sick, actually get sick, etc. if their victims are vulnerable to guilt tripping or feelings of obligation.

Unfortunately, because the abuser and possibly others in the organization hide the abuse, the controlling abuser's hidden agenda may not be apparent right away.

As well, controlling abusers will be quite difficult to deal with because of their need to hurt others. What they want is almost always problematic for your best interests.

## Options

1. **Find a new workplace.** There is no shame in this. If the organization doesn't care about results and prefers to protect toxic abusers, then walking away is not a reflection on your talents or self-worth.
2. **Gather evidence and ask for the toxic person to be removed.** If the abuser has been with the organization for a long time, it is likely that the abuser is being protected and therefore the chances of this working are low.
3. **Ignore, confuse, and avoid them.** This will only work for so long until the abuser catches on. Then they will continue to try to control you.
4. **Make the abuser feel powerless and not in control.** This will make them go away, although they may still act against you and try to get you fired. You should manage upwards to maintain your job security.
5. **Create fake buttons to distract them.** This involves hiding your weaknesses and creating false weaknesses for the abuser to go after.
6. **Manipulate them into discrimination that is illegal and socially reprehensible.** Suing the organization for workplace discrimination would be an unconventional way of making money in the workplace.
7. **Ally with the abuser to help them control other people.** This path is morally bankrupt and risky. It's generally a better idea to ally yourself with healthy

people. Normal people want to build healthy relationships rather than waste their resources on hurting others.

In most cases, finding a new workplace would be the simplest and most beneficial path of action to take. Some of the not-so-obvious options will be described in the following sections.

## **Ask for the toxic person to be removed**

You can try going to the abuser's superior and suggest that the abuser be fired or reassigned. The risk here is that the abuser may be feeding their superior's emotional needs. There may be a reason as to why their superior wants to protect them. Because normal people do not protect abusive monsters, the abuser's superior likely has toxic emotional needs themselves. If that is the case, then you will need to figure out what the boss wants and to feed their needs better than the abuser.

## **Make the abuser feel powerless and not in control**

It is highly likely that the toxic individual became an abuser as a result of being horribly mistreated by other people. Abusers are incredibly afraid of things that superficially resemble the life experiences that traumatized them. It is the reason why they work so incredibly hard on avoiding the feeling that they will be traumatized again. There are two ways to take advantage of this:

1. Bully them. They were controlled before so it is highly likely that their original vulnerabilities remain. Obviously, this is not an ethical way of behaving. This path is risky and generally should be avoided.
2. Convince them that you might traumatize them if they continue to mess with you. While there are seemingly ethical ways to do this, you will essentially make them go away by making them deeply uncomfortable and fearful of you. One simple way of doing this is to confidently act like they can't control you. Explain their tactics to them. Then smile and rhetorically ask them how well those tactics are working on you. You want to convey to them that you are more powerful than them and that you can make them feel powerless if you really wanted to.

While you can make a controlling abuser leave you alone, they may still act against you and try to undermine you. You should manage upwards enough so that you don't get fired. If their superior is a narcissist, feed them with enough validation so that they will

want you to stick around. Once you have a reasonably good enough relationship with the superior, then you can ignore all of the toxic employee's toxicity.

The tactic of making the abuser feel powerless over you will not work on your boss because they can simply fire you.

## **Make fake buttons for the abuser to push**

Controlling abusers have two weaknesses that can be exploited:

1. They need to control other people. They can't simply turn it off.
2. They need you to tell them when they've hurt you because they don't know. This is because specific insults and specific abusive tactics often don't work on their intended targets. Abusers do not know if they've pushed one of your buttons unless your reaction gives it away.

One tactic is to pick something that doesn't bother you and pretend that it actually does. You can pick some form of socially unacceptable abuse as it will give you more options later on. There is a good chance that you are in a protected group when it comes to gender, race/ethnicity, religion, disability, or sexual orientation. If not, you could be open about supporting LGBT rights and get defensive when challenged about self-identifying as a cisgender heterosexual. (In other words, be ambiguous as to whether or not you are in the closet.)

To plant the idea in the abuser's head, you could talk about how you get triggered at particular forms of discrimination. Or, talk about how uncomfortable you were when you were attacked in the past. Or better yet, have a co-worker talk to your abuser and tell the abuser to avoid certain types of insults that you are extremely sensitive to.

Enforce your boundaries and show that you've been "hurt" when they push your fake buttons (you can be angry at the bully for being a toxic person). When they push your real buttons, minimize your reaction as much as possible.

## **Document the abuse**

Start recording key pieces of it. You can use your smartphone or laptop to record in-person conversations, although test out the technology beforehand to check sound quality and whether your laptop stops recording when it goes to sleep. You can use Google voice, free Android apps, and commercial iPhone apps to record phone

conversations. If you live in a state/province that requires the consent of both parties to record a private conversation, there is probably an exemption in the state law that allows you to secretly record your private conversations if there is a “reasonable suspicion that another party to the conversation is committing, is about to commit, or has committed a criminal offense against the person or a member of his or her immediate household, and there is reason to believe that evidence of the criminal offense may be obtained by the recording.”<sup>1</sup> You probably should not post secret recordings on Facebook as it may violate your jurisdiction’s laws; check the laws first.

For all of the abuse that you do not have audio recordings of, write down notes in a journal. Google Sheets (a free web app) allows you to track events in a spreadsheet and saves a history of major edits.

## **Take action**

You can try complaining to human resources or the abuser’s superior. Evidence will bolster your case when you complain. If the abuser has been around the company for a long time, there is a good chance that the bully is being protected (usually because their superior is a toxic individual). You should document your interactions with HR or the abuser’s superior in case the abuser is being protected.

## **Play hardball**

If you work for an organization with deep pockets, you may want to consider suing the organization for discrimination. This is a different and unconventional way of making money from the workplace. You may have a strong case if you have evidence of unlawful discrimination and the company protected the abuser. You should get legal advice from a civil lawyer if the abuse gets serious.

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1 The article “Applying Illinois’ eavesdropping law to government practice” has a great discussion on the legalities of secret recordings in Illinois. One risk for engaging in legal behavior is that an overzealous prosecutor might go after a dumb case.

<https://www.isba.org/committees/governmentlawyers/newsletter/2018/09/applyingillinoiseavesdroppinglawtog>

## Chapter Four: How to deal with specific quirks

Some people have particular behaviours that can make them very difficult to deal with at times. Often they have picked up these behaviours as a result of being repeatedly exposed to traumatic events. It is highly unlikely that you can change these behaviours so you will need to work around them.

- **Anger, vile diatribes, and tantrums:** Some *but not all* angry people have subconsciously learned that anger is an effective strategy for coping with stress or getting out of bad situations. However, there is an important nuance to the strategy: they have to rage *hard enough*. When they were children and were being abused by their parents, their abusive parent would not stop unless they threw a tantrum hard enough. If their anger isn't working, their natural instinct is to rage harder. To invalidate this problematic strategy, do not give the angry person attention and trigger them further. If you simply walk away like [the guy in the Hugh Mungus video](#), the drama will die down. Or, you can pull out your smartphone and record the rage. Then you will have evidence about who behaved appropriately and inappropriately.

Keep in mind that anger is sometimes a conscious strategy used to manipulate others. Controlling abusers may specifically try rage to have other people give them what they want.

- **Casually pointing out everybody's flaws:** If somebody has grown up in an abusive household, their normal meter may be broken. They may not realize that it's rude and tactless to point out somebody's flaws. If they do this to everybody and there is no intention of controlling others (e.g. coercing victims into acting against their own interests) or destroying somebody's self-worth, then you can conclude that there is no malice behind their put downs.
- **Can't admit that they are wrong:** Some people have a deep fear of admitting that they are wrong or showing weakness. Triggering them by telling them that they are wrong is not going to be productive as their behaviour will continue. You can try gently leading them to the truth by asking "what about \_\_\_\_" questions. However, this won't always work as some people are hellbent on scamming themselves. Just let them do it. They are used to it and do not want you to stop them.

# Chapter Five: People skills

## Don't argue and don't criticize

Arguments are not productive and always risk hurting relations with the person you are arguing with.

Instead of arguing, try this:

- Present your point of view. Then ask them what they think *and let them disagree*. If you don't push your argument onto other people and let them come to their own conclusions, they are far more likely to agree with you.
- If they can't handle that approach, then try a gentler approach. Ask them questions in a calm manner to lead them to the right conclusion. Or, tell them what will probably happen if they execute their plan or believe in something that is wrong. Hopefully you can lead them to the right answer. Otherwise, let them fail. If they fail or screw up, do not make them mad by saying "I told you so". It is not productive so just leave them alone.
- Ask them if they want advice before giving it. Some people cannot handle unsolicited advice or react very badly to it.
- Some people are simply extremely sensitive and cannot handle anything even remotely resembling constructive criticism. Just leave them alone because they do not want your input. They are used to scamming themselves.

If you need to enforce your boundaries:

- If you haven't already done so, clearly communicate your boundaries and make sure that there is no miscommunication.
- Say something like: "Hey, what are you trying to do? Is everything ok with you?" You do not need to accuse them of maliciousness right away.
- If they don't stop (e.g. they try to shift the blame or gaslight you), then escalate. "Hey, you are doing \_\_\_\_\_. It is not ok."
- If it is safe to do so, stop them from violating your boundaries. If they are verbally abusing you, walk away from the conversation. If you want, pull out your smartphone and record them so that the abuse is documented.

- Some abusive people will intentionally violate your boundaries as a form of harassment. Try not to give them the satisfaction of knowing that they have pushed your buttons. See the section on controlling abusers for more information.

## **Validate somebody when they are venting to you**

If somebody feels like they have been wronged, you will not be helping if you tell them that they have not been wronged. They want you to sympathize with them. If it is not a good idea to do that, then simply ask them how they feel and sympathize with the unpleasantness of having those feelings, e.g. “I’m sorry that you feel so frustrated”. If you really must explain to them why they are in the wrong, bring up the topic in a future conversation. Start by latching onto a problem that they have, e.g. feeling frustrated. Then suggest a solution for their problem. Do not tell them that they were in the wrong as you can simply let them figure it out for themselves.

## **Don’t tell people what they don’t want to hear**

In many cases, you can simply repackage your point of view into something that the other person wants to hear. For example, some people have strong opinions for or against gun control. Instead of disagreeing with their political views, find some common ground. It can be something like “we should protect innocent lives” or “the government should respect civil liberties”. Usually you can repackage your ideas into something that the other party wants to hear.

Of course, this will not be possible all of the time. If you really must tell somebody something that they don’t want to hear and you cannot avoid it, then simply ask for their buy-in first: “Hey, I’m going to tell you something that you’re not going to like at all. Is that ok?”

## **Tell people what they want to hear**

There are certain things that people want to hear.

- People with some degree of narcissism want to raise their social standing. They are interested in ideas that would make them look good (e.g. cutting edge technology and fads like blockchain/cryptocurrencies). They want to hear that their ideas are good.

- If somebody is looking for recognition or validation from others, they will be highly susceptible to ideas that promise them such recognition or validation from others.
- People who are interested in making money (e.g. starting a business) are often more interested in appearing smart, ambitious and successful than the money itself. You can improve relations with them by praising their ambition.
- The type of person who is modest about themselves does not want to be at the top of the social pecking order because of the drama that comes with being at the top. They do not like being worshiped or having their achievements excessively praised. They respond better to admiration of their moral character and other areas where success does not attract jealousy and people trying to take them down.
- Some people take on the identity of a virtue signaler. They engage in charitable acts and may take up social justice causes. They want to be seen as good people. Every once in a while, they want their efforts to be recognized and validated.
- Some people take on the identity of a victim. They are public about their medical problems or being part of a disenfranchised group (e.g. race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, etc.). They realize that people treat them better when they play up their poor fortune. They do not want to be mistreated so you should treat them with normal human decency. For obvious social reasons, they want to hear that people in their protected class deserves sympathy. However, because many of these people play the victim card to be manipulative, you should avoid going out of your way for them. Allowing them to manipulate you will not improve your relationship with them and will only encourage them to manipulate you more.

Almost all people in the world would like to hear certain things about particular topics because it would give them a social advantage. These topics will vary from person to person so you need to tailor your message to your intended audience.

## **Make a connection**

People like to be around other people who are like them. One way to do this is to slowly find the common ground between both parties. Usually there are some common interests, values, political views, etc. When having social non-business conversations,

stick to the common interests rather than talk about the things that you're interested in that the other party doesn't care about.

Another way to make a connection is to slowly develop "in jokes" and inside references that only you and the other person would understand. It's another way that you can bond with people.

## **How to motivate others**

When they do something good, take some time to give that person positive reinforcement. Praise people for good work. Sometimes a simple acknowledgment like a smile, thumbs up, or a nod is enough. When they fail, do not blame the person for the failure. Focus on their process and the things that they did right. They will naturally try to avoid failing again- you do not need to criticize them for failing. If you want to offer suggestions on how to avoid a future failure, ask them what would happen if they did X. This is a gentler way of critiquing somebody that does not involve ramming ideas down their throat and demotivating them.

Instead of micromanaging somebody else and doing their work for them, give them space to take initiative and put their own creativity into a project. That way, they can feel a sense of pride and accomplishment at having done something (mostly) on their own. When they succeed, make them feel like their accomplishments are well-deserved.

Once you have gotten others (e.g. contractors, vendors) used to positive reinforcement, they will naturally want to work hard to please you. The next level is to strategically withhold positive reinforcement so that you challenge them to do even better. If they simply receive positive reinforcement all the time, it will mean a lot less because there was no challenge in obtaining it. People will value something more if they have to work hard for it, so challenge them a little.

If you need to correct bad behaviour, withhold positive reinforcement and express your disappointment. This is less risky than punishing an employee (e.g. scolding), which can risk making them feel like they've been unfairly punished or can make them feel resentful.

## Chapter Six: Putting it together

To understand a workplace's social landscape, simply look at management's actions rather than their words. If there are clearly incompetent people at the company who have been there for a long time, then it is highly unlikely that management cares about good work. The employees trying to advance their career based on good work may become confused, frustrated, and demoralized.

In such workplaces, the usual refrains of "office politics" and "being friends with the right people" don't fully explain what's going on. The reality is that the people in charge have deranged emotional needs. Usually, such people don't have real friends because their toxicity inevitably destroys all of their friendships. These people are too damaged to be able to form healthy relationships. They aren't promoting their friends because they don't have any real friends. Instead, they promote the people who trigger them the least. This tends to be other toxic individuals who grew up in abusive environments and have figured out how to co-exist relatively peacefully with other damaged human beings. What's actually happening is that the workplace is being warped by damaged people trying to stumble their way through life.

When narcissists are in charge, navigating the workplace's social environment can be easy *if* you are willing to supply them validation. These damaged people want something that they cannot ask for. As they live in a proverbial desert, a little water will go a long way. Most employees simply do not supply narcissists with the validation that they're addicted to. As a result, the organization may churn through employees until it fills up with damaged people who happen to have mediocre social strategies for dealing with management. In reality, most people don't even realize how exploitable narcissists are. Narcissists constantly scam themselves and are vulnerable to being scammed by others.

If normal people are in charge, there are still angles in which an enterprising employee can get an edge over their co-workers. Having the people skills to easily form friendships is helpful as managers like to deal with people that they trust. Soft skills are also useful in the workplace so that time isn't wasted on arguing and infighting. There is value in people who can guide teams of employees into being efficient and cohesive units.

All in all, the key to navigating the social environment of a workplace is to figure out what people want. In most cases, there is no need to manipulate or trick others when you can simply get what you want by giving other people what they want.