

Workplace Diplomacy: Why It's Critical to Your Career Success

KATHERINE SPENCER LEE

The greater the role technology plays in the success of companies, the more visible IT professionals become. No longer hidden behind computer screens or in server rooms, today's IT workers are key contributors to the decision-making process and, as a result, must be able to work effectively with individuals throughout an organization. The following are some strategies that can help you stand out as an office diplomat.

Adopt an Open Mind

Whether you're helping an employee with a computer problem or presenting a new idea to an executive, enter every discussion willing to listen intently to what the other person is saying. That means not only paying close attention throughout the conversation but also checking any assumptions at the door. For instance, assuming people lack IT expertise because their position is outside your department might cause you to undervalue their opinions. People also might pick up on your negative mindset, which can further damage the interaction.

Communicate Clearly

As the adage goes, "It's not what you say but how you say it." It's always best to err on the side of formality when dealing with others in the workplace. To that end, double-check all e-mails before sending them to make sure nothing could be misinterpreted. Without the aid of verbal inflections or body language, the undercurrents that accompany these communications can be notoriously hard to decipher.

When presenting negative information, try to highlight a positive. Although you don't want to make excuses or appear to minimize others' concerns, sometimes there might be benefits to the situation that aren't apparent at first glance. For instance, if a client's project is going to be delayed, you might point out that the development will allow the firm to take advantage of product discounts being introduced at a later date.

Demonstrating patience is another hallmark of effective communication. For instance, when you interact with an employee who can't figure out how to use a new application, consider other ways of explaining the information. What might be confusing through discussion might be clearer in written form or as an illustration. Sometimes, being patient is easier said than done, but you should try your best.

Don't Take Criticism Personally

Criticism is frequently part of IT work. The best technology professionals are able to step back, put their emotions aside and truly listen to feedback. They also know how to keep their cool when criticism is unwarranted and determine when it's appropriate to get a supervisor's take on a troublesome dispute.

Understand Key Players

One of the easiest ways to become a workplace diplomat is to get to know your colleagues better. The more you understand what motivates others, the better you will be able to work with them. Make the effort to talk to people outside your immediate group during company events. Also, take the time to ask colleagues about their work and personal interests. Just be careful not to pry if someone seems hesitant to open up.

Respect Office Protocol

In addition, be sensitive to the way things are traditionally done in your department. For instance, although you might have the flexibility to work from home periodically without seeking management approval, it might be an unwritten rule to check with a supervisor first to make sure the timing is right. If you're unsure about expected procedures, always play it safe and ask a co-worker before proceeding.

Share the Credit

Finally, keep in mind that few IT projects are successful because of the efforts of a single person — there usually are supporting players who contributed in some way. So, when you are praised for your work, be sure to publicly thank others who were involved. If you're a team leader, acknowledge the specific contributions made by everyone in the group.

Being diplomatic in your everyday activities can go a long way to enhance working relationships. When others feel you respect them, they're more likely to respect you in return. 🙏

Katherine Spencer Lee is executive director of Robert Half Technology, a provider of IT professionals on a project and full-time basis. She can be reached at editor@certmag.com.