Win the Career Race with Organizational Savvy

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Want to win in the career race? Of course you do. So think about the extent to which you either disagree or agree with the following statements:

✧ I am able to make most people feel comfortable and at ease around me
✧ I pay close attention to people's facial expressions
✧ I am good at getting people to like me

Congratulate yourself if you strongly and wholeheartedly agree with those statements. Because you're probably strong on a skill called organizational savvy.

There is published research on what has been shown to predict success. One key finding is that people – spanning diverse groups such as finance analysts in the Midwestern United States, construction workers in China and experienced managers in Germany – get ahead when they have the skill of organizational savvy.

Organizational savvy has been called different things such as "interpersonal style", "political finesse" and "street smarts". But what we call it matters less than what it measures: **the ability to understand people, build relationships and persuade others to side with us on projects**.

The research tells us that our performance at work is judged as much on our relationships – our ability to form them, strengthen them and rally support for ventures through them – as on our completion of mere tasks. Push a plan through to completion in spite of how people feel and you may create more enemies than friends in the long-term. But if you can persuade others that they have a stake in your project, you win both in terms of getting the work done and building a coalition of allies for the future.

That's how the world works nowadays. Simply presenting even a fantastic idea to colleagues or proposing a project that is good for customers is not enough; we need to pitch things to people so they personally get something out of it too.

I'm not saying this state of play is necessarily desirable or healthy. All I'm reporting is what the science tells us. Whether we like it or not, we must accept that those individuals who invest in reading their colleagues and focusing both on relationships as well as tasks tend to get promoted more frequently.

To hone your organizational savvy, make it a priority to observe your colleagues more intently. Spend more time with them. Try to work out why they behave the ways they do. Are they motivated by money, recognition or status? Do they act out of greed, fear or passion? Do they have the organization's best interests at heart or their own? The more you spend time with people and immerse yourself in the language of their inner motivations, the more you will understand how to influence and persuade them.

Now, there are people who win the career race without organizational savvy. But then there are those who succeed without a good education too. It just makes life more difficult if you don't have it. And why make life harder for yourself than it already is?