# Transforming Youth Recovery
One Community, One School, One Student At A Time

# Navigating Institutional Politics

## Quick Guide

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## Organizational Models

Organizational models typically fall into one of 4 models:

- *The Collegial Model* - Decisions are not made by a single party, but rather with the input of many individuals. No one person has the power to arbitrarily make decisions.
- *The Bureaucratic Model* - Hierarchy and organizational models are key, and these determine boundaries and purposes, which are formalized in written job descriptions.
- *The Political Model* - Classified by competition for limited resources. The leaders of the organization are responsible for deciding how resources are distributed, and often does so based on relationships rather than policies.
- *The Anarchical Model* - Typified by the lack of a central authority figure and a great deal of autonomy granted to individuals within the organization.

## Power

In 1959, psychologists John French and Bertram Raven introduced the concept of types of power. They are:

- *Legitimate Power* A person derives legitimate power from his/her position or title.
- *Coercive Power* - This type of power is characterized by threat and force.
- *Informational Power* - Sharing information with someone creates a bond.
- *Reward Power* - Reward power involves giving a person something they want, such as a bonus, raise, promotion, or extra time off from work.
- *Referent Power* - Referent power is gained through the consistent application of a set of positive values over time. Many believe this to be the most valuable type of power.
- *Expert Power* - Expert power results from the perception that an individual possesses advanced knowledge or experience in a particular area or subject.

## Higher Education as a Political Organization

### Campus Ethos and Culture

Although most colleges and universities have many things in common, each also has its own unique culture. Knowing this culture – both the what and the why – can help you act in a politically savvy manner. Focus on:

- The campus's needs
- The environment in which the community works, lives and plays
- History and tradition

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- The strategies that people use for communicating to senior leadership
- How students have responded to those who came before you
- The organizational chart for your department or division

*Constituents and Stakeholders*

Once you understand the campus culture, your next step is to learn who the players are. Follow these steps:

1. Start with your own people – the students you work with and the people you supervise.
2. Spend some time learning about the expectations within your division or department.
3. Be aware of who your constituents and stakeholders are.
4. Know how others perceive you and those you work with.

*Relationship Building*

Once you've identified the players on and around campus, figure out who you need to get to know, who your confidants are, and whom you should most likely avoid. Try these tips:

- Join campus committees or working groups
- Find ways to be visible on campus
- Use your existing contacts to introduce you to people you'd like to meet
- Practice positive regard and reciprocity
- Put some time and energy into developing a good relationship with your supervisor and building a strong network

*Decision Making*

Knowing how decisions are made on your campus and how the decisions you make will impact others are key to navigating the politics of higher education. Follow these steps:

1. Learn how decisions are made by others on campus. (Find out how budgets are determined, how resources are allocated and how priorities are assessed by the decision makers on your campus.)
2. Start to think about how you make decisions within your locus of control, and how this impacts your political standing on campus.
3. Involve key players.
4. Give yourself time to think through a situation before jumping to a conclusion or announcing a decision.
5. Run through the possible consequences of your decision in your head. Remember that you are responsible for the impact of your decisions.

*Ethics*

Whether you consider yourself a politically savvy expert or totally new to the world of politics in higher education, it is important to behave within the ethical boundaries of your profession. Here is a checklist to ensure you behave ethically as you work to grow your CRP:

- Assess your values and where they might conflict with the ethical guidelines of your profession. Determine how you will navigate these situations.
- Remember the population who you are charged to serve, and keep them a priority.
- Keep in mind that process is as important as outcome.
- Don't make promises that you are unable to keep.
- Use your power and influence carefully.
- Consider social justice and equity, the boundaries of your role and your own competencies.
- Educate those you work with about important issues.
- Create inviting spaces where others feel welcomed to share their honest feedback.
- Always act with compassion.

## Dos and Don'ts

*Dos*

- Do get to know who you can trust and talk to.
- Do be respectful of those who are trying to help you or educate you on an issue.
- Do talk to stakeholders.
- Do find a mentor at your work that you can confide in.
- Do understand who your decisions will affect.
- Do collect all the facts before moving forward.
- Do ask for help from a trusted colleague or supervisor when faced with a difficult situation.

*Don'ts*

- Don't send an e-mail when you are angry or frustrated.
- Don't assume that you know everything.
- Don't introduce yourself via an e-mail to colleagues or senior leadership by "hey."
- Don't go above your supervisor's head if you are not getting the answer you want right away.

## Strategies and Tips

- Know your local community and its leaders.

- Read the Chronicle of Higher Education.
- Don't do or say anything you wouldn't want published on the front page of *The New York Times.*
- Work to make your supervisor look good.
- Choose your battles.
- Write everything down.
- When asking for something, be sure to have quantitative data to back up your request.
- Find a way to align your goals with the school's strategic plan or mission.
- Achieve balance. Spending time with students is important, but carve out time for other administrators as well.

## Reflection

Here are some questions to ask yourself as you work to navigate the political climate of your institution.

- When I think about my own capacity to navigate politics as a professional, what am I most concerned about?
- When I hear the word politics within the context of my institution, what feelings come up for me?
- My institution is making a big push, but I am getting mixed messages at the department level. How do I handle this?
- How does administrative turnover affect me?
- If two people in my department don't get along, when does and doesn't this matter for me?
- How and when should I use my internal filters?
- If my department has a lot of unhealthy relationships, how can I foster collaboration?
- When is it safe to say no?

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