

Leadership Barometer 180 Political Success Robert T. Whipple, MBA CPTD



Political success is sometimes a bit elusive. There is an old saying “Too soon old, too late smart.” During my long career in a large organization, I somehow managed to do some pretty bonehead things politically. I will never be someone who is politically brilliant because I am far too outspoken. There have been many times I wish I had kept my mouth shut.

Mistakes I have made

I realized in retrospect that there were plenty of times when I shared my opinion and nobody wanted to hear it. If I had learned to button my lip and observe what was happening, I would have made fewer blunders. This article will share some of the valuable lessons I have learned so far. I also share some rules I have made for myself.

My learning style

In some training sessions, we learn about how people have their own unique learning style. Some of us learn only by doing, some by hearing, some by visualizing, etc. I remember one class where we all had to reveal our most useful learning style. When it got to my turn, I said, “My style of learning is the rake.”

Everyone in the class looked a little puzzled, so I explained. If I step on a rake and the handle comes up and thwapps me in the face, I have learned something. I will never forget it.

That is a pretty accurate description of how I learned my horse sense on political mistakes to avoid. It is not to say I have found all the potential rakes out there. I still get konked from time to time. Hopefully, each new learning is from a rake I have not experienced before.

Ideas I have learned

I will share my own list below only as an example. It is more helpful if you make up your own list based on your personality and situation or the mistakes you

have already made. Start with just one or two key things and build your list over time. It is a simple matter of keeping a computer file. Remember to add to it every time a rake handle hits you in the face.

Bob's 14 Rules for Political Survival

1. Know who butters your bread and act that way.
2. Act consistent with your values and spiritual rightness.
3. Make 20 positive remarks for every negative one.
4. Don't grandstand. Practice humility. No cheap shots.
5. Understand the intentions and motivations of others.
6. Follow up on everything. Be alert & reliable.
7. Do the dirty work cheerfully, not too good for it.
8. Agree to disagree. Walk away with respect.
9. Don't beat dead horses. Repetition is a rat hole.
10. Be aggressive, but not a pest. It's a fine line.
11. Constantly read people's intentions and desires.
12. Administrative people have real power. Cultivate them.
13. Keep an appropriate social life with work associates.
14. Always, always be considerate and gracious.

I often wonder how long my list will be when I take my last breath in the nursing home. We tend to learn political lessons in all areas of our life, not just at work.

Conclusion

Keep track of how you want to show up for the world. We all step on a few rakes in life, so learn your lessons from your mistakes.

Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD, is a consultant, trainer, speaker, and author in the areas of leadership and trust. He is the author of: *The Trust Factor: Advanced Leadership for Professionals*, *Understanding E-Body Language: Building Trust Online*, and *Leading with Trust is Like Sailing Downwind*. Bob has many years as a senior executive with a Fortune 500 Company and with non-profit organizations.