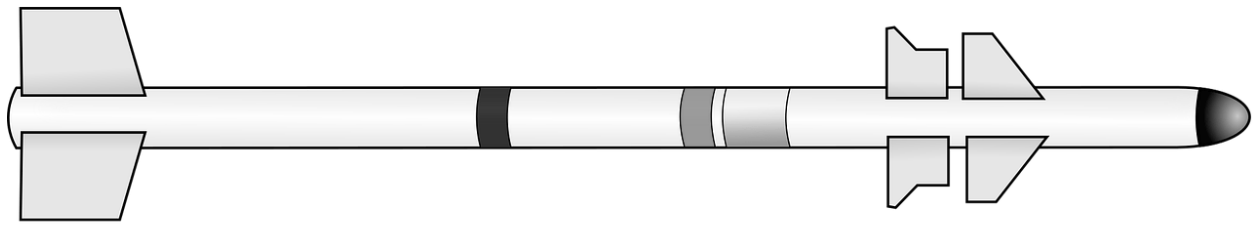


6. Sociopaths: Recognizing & Beating The Worst Political Animals



Political Heat Seeker

These are some of the toughest opponents you will ever meet.

If you cross their paths: get ready, it will be a struggle. And smile: it's going to be a hell of a social power training.

Who Are Political Werewolves

Political animals -or “werewolves”- are individuals who focus most of their energies in playing the political game and less on actual job performance.

Often they are -or overlap- with sociopaths.
But don't focus on diagnosis and labels, focus on their actions and your strategies.

These people can be so effective at politics that average job performance does not hinder them from their power climb.

The “heatseeker” in the opening image refers to their tendency to training their sights on power -and people with power- and looking for the shortest way possible to get there.

How They Operate: Sharing My Experience

The first time I have crossed paths with a political animal it was a mildly shocking experience.

There I was, focusing on learning new skills, improving my cold calls, enlarging my industry network and... Bringing in money. I thought that was the most important thing I could do to grow both personally and career-wise.

I was working in one of the hottest ventures of the incubator when the political animal joined. I was responsible for all the revenue up until that point... And I had never spoken to the incubator's founder (!). The political animal was on a first-name basis with the incubator's founder within a couple of weeks.

Little later the werewolf and I went to a conference together. I was busy speaking with all the prospects, working the conference like a hound-dog.

What did she do, instead? She sat down to watch a panel. She was there to see how the CEOs in the industry communicate.

See the difference?

She considered herself superior to "normal work". She wanted instead to acquire the traits and demeanor of the CEOs (shortcut).

I came back from that conference with countless conversations and a few good leads.

She came back with a single lead she had met at the event party. But she also made friend with the CEO of our main competitor, with whom she spoke for half an hour.

As I wondered why the f^*k she was wasting time with someone who could never be our customer, she was adding a huge heavy hitter in her network -and a potential new employer-. That guy would later mentor her.

I was astonished.

I knew she was going to give me a good run for my money.
Yet, I was glad about the learning experience.
I knew she had a few tricks on me and was a political beast, and I could learn from her. And deep down, I also knew I had a good set of cards and that the leverage was mostly on my side (you'll see why).

But the surprises weren't over.

One day we went out drinking with some colleagues one Friday after work.

Me not being too much into partying with colleagues, I went home relatively early.

She stayed.

Until the bitter end.

She stayed. She stayed with N., one of the early investors in our company and the interim CEO.

They ended up late at night to get food in a McDonald, where he told her "I know you want me". That's how *she* told the story though.

What's pretty much safe to guess is that she was getting sexual now with one of the high flyers.

Luckily for me, N. was a falling star on the way out, and she made the big mistake of clinging too strongly to the wrong person (remember the previous lesson on not getting too close to falling stars on the way out?).

N. was a very attractive man, and she let that steer her off the path.

I told you this story to provide you with a snapshot of how purebred political animals operate.

Now let's see how you can tackle them.

Limitations Of Political Animals

If political animals can marry results and politics, they are lethal.

But that's not often the case.

The political animal, which often has sociopath tendencies or is a full-fledged sociopath, looks for the shortcut.

They try to seduce, charm, threaten and bedazzle their way to the top. Lots of smoke, but little actual results.

Sometimes, if they hit it off particularly well with some high flyers, they can be successful with that strategy and they will take the elevator while most others are on the stairs.

And if you were former competitors with a successful werewolf, chances are they will want to exact revenge on you.

How do you defend -and beat- political animals?

Beating Political Animals

This guide will be nasty.

The usual disclaimer here is: make sure you can't make friends first. It's difficult to be real friends with werewolves because they want power without sharing.

But you might piggyback on part of the ride.

1. Get your hands dirty: get political

If you're the type of person who doesn't know the names of upper management and upper management has no idea who you are, you should probably start there.

Use the previous lessons to determine who's got the power in your organization, then start working them.
Attend all company events, stay until late.

2. Don't buy the stories: stick to what you see

Political animals love telling stories.

Their achievements, their friendships with high-flyers and all their political power.

They understand that perceptions shape reality and that reputation translates well into actual power.

By spreading the word of their successes and their close relationships with high flyers, they increase their perceived political clout.

Be aware of that game and always discount what they say.

3. Show yourself a powerful player

Political animals respect power.
And they despise weakness.

Let them think you're weak only if that's strategic.
Don't start a race with them, but show strength, resolve and connections of your own.

4. Keep your connections for yourself

Political animals long to suck you dry of your juiciest connections.

Introduce them to friends and colleagues that they would meet anyhow so that you seem friendly and welcoming.
But keep your best connections for yourself.

5. Don't teach them (& don't fix their mistakes)

Werewolves are power seekers par excellence.

They will not be grateful you taught them.
They will only resent you had power over them.

Instead, **leverage their ignorance.**

Animals who focus on the political shortcut often fall short of deep knowledge and technicalities.

They often develop a superficial charm that hooks people in, but when the conversation gets deeper they give their shallowness away.
You want to make their shallowness as obvious as possible to the people with power.

Example: Letting the werewolf shame herself

The werewolf of the above example confused our debt financing with venture capital financing -something very different, and very basic-.

But I never corrected her.

When we were sitting at lunch with one of the incubators' investors and possible direct investor in our venture, she mixed up the two in front of him, and she looked like an idiot.

After such a blunder it's fair to assume that if that investor was going to put money in our company, he would have preferred me to advance.

6. Keep putting numbers on the board

Your renewed focus on people and politics must not take away from your results.

As a matter of fact, double down on results: they will be your biggest leverage when the chips fall.

And try to (secretly) nudge them towards delivering little.
The less the political animals deliver, the better off you are.

Pretend you're *not* working that hard. Pretend to be interested in politics like they are and talk little about, you know... Actual work.

7. Pitch them against your boss

Here's is another trap werewolves sometimes fall into.

If you have several layers above you, political animals can make the terrible mistake of going for the upper layers while forgetting the one right above them.

You must (secretly) encourage the werewolf to snub your boss.

Don't expose yourself too much, but hint that HR rumors have it that "your boss might not stay long".

Throw off comments that hint at your boss having little power. They don't have "balls" for this job and they're weak.

As they make more connections, political animals grow in hubris and feel superior to your boss. That's exactly what you want.

You want to encourage that idea by building them up and making your boss seem weaker.

That way, you set the two of them on a collision course.

Trust me, it's not so difficult and unlikely because werewolves despise their bosses.

8. Leverage the power triangle

If you keep focusing on your job, growing your knowledge and putting numbers on the board, the difference between you and the political animal will keep growing when it comes to work.

Now you got growing resentment between the werewolf and your boss while you are actually producing real work.
That's exactly the situation you want to be in.

Your boss, one of the few with internal knowledge of your and her work, will more and more be on your side, which the political animal will resent.

9. Deflect hatred towards your boss

Now you must be careful.

Your boss could explicitly say you're doing better.
He might even say you are "more senior", or the first in line for promotions.
Worst of all, he might compare the two of you.

Your boss might consciously or unconsciously try to make it you VS the werewolf.

Do NOT allow it to become a "you VS the political animal".
You want to keep it a "political animal VS boss".

Tell the werewolf you're not happy of the boss saying so because you're a team.
Say he's saying that to keep the heat off of himself and his pure performance. Hint that the boss is trying to pass the blame onto the werewolf.

You might hint the boss doesn't see the political animal's real value.
Maybe he's jealous?
More narcissistic political animals will buy that hook, line and sinker.

10. Deliver your last push

Your boss by now is thinking about firing werewolf.

If you did a good job and keeping a good relationship with your boss, it's possible he lets out some complaints about the werewolf.
It's also possible he will come asking you for feedback (this happened to me), and this is your chance of delivering a nice shove.

Don't overdo it: the more you do it, the less natural and honest you seem.

And if your boss is asking, chances are he doesn't need any big push but is just looking for confirmation.

Say instead something like this:

***Boss:** what do you think of the political animal?*

***You:** Look boss, I want to win and I am here to do a great job. That's my focus. I don't do much politics, I'm all about results.
Let's build a great team where we can focus on work.*

Boom.

Without saying anything you sold him on firing the political animal and positioned yourself as a team player who's there for the company.

Next promotion's on you 😊

How Effective is This Technique

It might sound complex, but it leverages the natural predisposition of sociopaths and the and natural power dynamics of the workplace.

And that's why it's simpler than it sounds and why it can be highly effective.

I have worked with two political animals and replayed this scenario with both of them (one I'd be willing to bet was a sociopath, the other one probably a non-sociopath, power-hungry political animal).

What If It's a High-Performing Sociopath?

Political animals who are great at both politics and results are a rarer breed.

But you will see these guys in much higher concentrations in top consultants such as McKinsey, Bain, and BCG.

When they're hired as external consultants they go after upper management like rabid dogs.

And of course, they are also knowledgeable enough not to mix up debt and venture financing.

They are also smart enough to deliver great work and sell it well, covering their gaps and embellishing their results. As a matter of fact, the N.1 non-written rule of consultants is to sound smarter and more knowledgeable than they actually are.

And that's exactly the N.1 weakness you should exploit.

They are so caught in their "I'm smart and knowledgeable" that they end up believing their own hype. And that often leads to an attitude of

superiority.
That makes your job easier.

Your task is to keep fueling that attitude. Like Greene wrote in [The 48 Laws of Power](#): look dumber than your mark.

Remember: **the easiest fight to win is the one where your opponent hasn't even risen his guard.**

One great option is to make your boss resent that air of superiority. And you position yourself as the more gregarious, self-effacing -but equally effective- guy.

Political Animals In Cahoots With Boss

The worst situation you can have is a political animal that is siding with your boss.

You gotta do something there or not only you won't move up any time soon, but your job is on the line.

Your number one priority here is not becoming the enemy. It's bad if they side one with each other, but if they side against you, then you're toast.

Your political colleague will not want you close to keep the boss for himself.

Don't try to get close to your colleague: their entrenched interest against you is too strong. You want to improve your relationship with the boss instead.

PRO tip: sit next to your boss

Pay attention to body language.

At meetings, don't sit with them on one side of the table and you on

the other.

Try to sit in between or next to your boss.

Show them for their pettiness

A (risky) move you can try is to shame them for their “too close for comfort” position.

If you can deliver a strong shameful punch, it's possible that your boss will feel guilty and will drop the political animal.

To do it, keep being a top professional and always friendly. And when the political animal tries to frame you, deliver your self-righteous punch.

Here is a great example from Sex and The City:

<https://youtu.be/8a1Yz6mia74>

After Miranda's delivery, the boss is likely to think that “he had been dragged in a petty, personal political warfare”.

It's possible he will distance himself from the political player and seek amends with Miranda.

Don't complain of political animals to your boss

Should you complain to your boss about political animals?

No, I recommend you wait for the last stages.

You better position yourself as the straight shooter who puts in great work. That gives you more leverage later on.

Early complaints instead can make you come across as a political player yourself, more motivated by power than by results.

And especially never complain to your boss if the political animal is trying to work your boss.

Bosses, just like most normal people, love employees pandering to them.

When you complain that your colleague is being political this is what your boss hears:

Is this MF telling me I don't deserve being pampered?

And maybe he doesn't deserve pampering, but you don't want to be the one reminding him.