



# Book Eat or Be Eaten

## Jungle Warfare for the Master Corporate Politician

Phil Porter  
FT Prentice Hall, 2000

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### Recommendation

As the book jacket states, "There are plenty of books out there that show you how to climb the corporate ladder by applying the good old-fashioned virtues of honesty, integrity, loyalty and hard work. This book isn't one of those." In fact, this manual isn't for the faint of heart. It contains some of the nastiest, dirtiest tricks around for getting ahead, including how to punish your subordinates, take your supervisor's job and spread vicious rumors. Although the battle imagery can be grating, what the author writes is (unfortunately) usually true. Those climbing the corporate ladder will benefit from his advice. Those already at the top apparently already know everything in this book. Still, it's entertaining and easy to read - perfect for lunchtime. *BooksInShort* recommends this book for corporate climbers willing to do what it takes.

### Take-Aways

- It isn't what you know; it's whom you know.
- Managing subordinates is the second most important thing in a master corporate politician's life. See the first line above for the most important thing.
- Perception is reality. Act important, and others will think you are important.
- Learn to say no.
- Use anger effectively. If you're mad - or just appear mad - people will do whatever it takes to make sure you calm down. Then, you'll get what you want.
- Remove adversaries kindly. Find them other jobs, so you can take their jobs.
- Do as you're told. (This tactic only works if your boss is an idiot. When his or her boss asks why you did something, say you were only "following directions.")
- Stall. If all else fails, form a committee to solve the problem.
- CYA: Cover your ass.
- Tell management what they want to hear.

# Summary

## Welcome to the Jungle

If you work for a big corporation (or even a small company), then you already know working isn't much different from war. Only the strong survive. Before getting into specific survival tactics, it's important to know the basics.

- It's whom you know.
- Don't use the same tactic over and over. Mix them up.
- Be social and network. Keep careful records.
- Develop and maintain a professional image. Image makes you powerful, not titles.

“There are no police courts in corporate politics, and no courts of appeal.”

Learn to tap dance - that is, master the art of improvising. If you don't know the answer, fake it. Make it up. For example: Your supervisor asks why the product is late. You apologize, say you've had problems with parts, and reassure your boss that you will make up the schedule unless you hit more snags. Throw in some numbers, which may or not be true. Your boss walks away satisfied. If you're late, repeat the cycle - or blame somebody else.

“I would rather have a loyal person who's mediocre in ability than a disloyal person who can walk on water.”

If you want to play the got'cha game, it works like this: First, you sniff out something bad about another manager's department, like a missed delivery on a critical part or a program that doesn't work and never did. Guard this information carefully. Don't talk to the responsible manager because if you do, she will be prepared to answer your got'cha when you reveal it in step three. Reveal the got'cha at a general-manager-level or higher meeting. This will give the general manager the impression that you're on top of things and the guy you're dropping the got'cha on is not. Watch him tap dance or die.

“One thing all the big shots have that most young managers don't is patience. Patience is the willingness to wait for what you want.”

As part of playing the game, tell jokes, which will get you attention and recognition. People will naturally gravitate toward you if you're funny. Hire smart. Even though most managers feel threatened by people who are smarter than they are, you know better. "Hire people who are more competent than you are, keep them well paid, and they'll push you to the top." Titles don't mean anything; don't be intimidated by them.

## Stalking Your Prey

Now you can move on to more difficult maneuvers. Master corporate politicians always seem to have things go their way. Many people call that luck, but it's really skill and hard work.

“Put together a 'tiger team' to fix a problem. Teams give the world the illusion that something is being done to fix a problem.”

Matrix positions - wherein you report to two or more bosses - are somewhat new to the corporate world. Although difficult to grasp at first, matrix positions can be quite good for getting what you want. Being in a matrix position, where you are usually responsible for functions not people, makes it easier to divide and conquer. If one boss is an idiot, hopefully the other is not. If they're both idiots, at least you can play them against each other.

“Authority is not a quality one person 'has,' in the sense that he has property or physical qualities. Authority refers to an interpersonal relation in which one person looks upon another as somebody superior to him.” [Erich Fromm]

Fight fire with fire. If your supervisor yells at you, yell back. Being screamed at provokes one of two responses: defending yourself or

cowering in fear. Defending yourself takes courage, but it shows you're willing to fight when necessary. However, if you made a mistake and the screams were warranted, accept the attack. Anger, whether real or imagined, is a useful tool. "A vice president I know became so angry one time he threw his briefcase at the wall and kicked the table. He didn't get his way, but he sure did get everyone's attention... Anger tends to make people pay attention and, in most instances, concede something."

“Hire people who are more competent than you are, keep them well paid, and they'll push you to the top.”

Ask for more than you need. The person you're dealing with will cut back on your request - and if you pad it, you will get what you originally wanted. This rule applies to all situations: budgets, vendor proposals, new jobs, etc. Pick and choose your battles. If you try to win the war in one battle, you will lose. Aim small and attack the enemy piece by piece.

## **Strategies for the Hunt**

To get what you want, learn to stall. Master corporate politicians stall all the time in a variety of different ways. Perhaps the most common response is to say, "I'll get back to you," and then don't follow up. When someone wants to "get together and talk," make an appointment as far in the future as possible and then break it. Claim a meeting conflict. You can safely do this at least twice before the person goes above you.

“Always ask for more than you want or expect to get.”

Agree and then do what you want. This only works if you are charming. Smile and be as nice as possible. By the time anyone figures it out, it will be too late. Don't overuse this tactic or you will lose credibility. If all else fails, divert attention. If you don't want to discuss something, don't. Choose another topic, preferably one that interests the other person.

## **Leaving a False Trail**

If you know you're going to fail, get the wolves off your scent first. Disassociate yourself from the failure. Assign someone else to the problem - preferably a matrix manager. Another strategy is fireproofing, which legally means "contributory negligence." Prioritize. If you can, ask for help from a higher-up. If your tasks are so awesome that you can't accomplish them alone, find out what tasks need to be done first and do those.

“If you want something, go right to the top. Why waste your time dealing with the subordinates?”

Hear what you want to, and tell them what they want to hear. The more people you get to agree with a decision, the less heat you're going to receive if it turns out bad. If you tell management something other than what they want to hear, they may not listen to you. Judge when it's easier to give them what they want, and when it's appropriate to tell the truth. Other stalling tactics include reorganizing, creating new systems, redoing the budgets or forecasts and working overtime. (Bosses love to see you work overtime).

## **Saving Your Hide**

Everybody fails sometimes. If you have never failed, you haven't taken any risks. Never admit that you've failed! Use the tactics below instead.

- Deny everything - What failure? I didn't fail.
- Tell the truth - If you can't deny it, 'fess up.
- Change topics or shift the focus to another department and blame them.
- Blame your employees - This will backfire with overuse, so use it sparingly.
- Blame procurement - Or data processing.
- Claim other priorities prevented you from focusing on the problem.

## **Keeping the Pack in Line**

Your people can be your greatest success or your biggest failure. As a manager, you must keep them in line. Be loyal to those who work for you. They may take your job someday, and they will remember how you treated them. Handle ambitious employees

appropriately. Some subordinates think they are ready for more challenge when they are not. Tell them why - tactfully. If it's your style, you can scream at employees who get out of control, but be prepared for them to scream back. A better way to control them is to use intimidation. If you make a threat, follow through on it if you want to be taken seriously.

"I act as if I were the stereotypical army officer. I scream, yell, and threaten because it's necessary."

Remember that one man's trash is another man's treasure. For whatever reason, some employees are deemed failures. Good people are hard to find. If you suspect that talent is waiting in the graveyard for a second chance, provide that chance. The employee will reward you with loyalty. Promote your people when they do well. Blow their horns as well as your own. In a way, you are tooting your own horn. When your subordinates look good, so do you.

## **Feasting**

How do you get the promotion you deserve? Ask for it or force management to give it you by becoming so technically adept that nobody else could possibly do the job. Find a job in the company that would force them to promote you (if they want to keep you). Or, find your boss another job and take that one. "There are several ways of getting a promotion, and none of them involves directly asking for it. They all require that you make your boss, and perhaps his boss, want to promote you. Directly asking for a raise puts your supervisor on the spot, and he will tap dance his way out of giving you one - unless he feels you deserve it."

"Only the risk takers ever make it to the top."

If you find another job within the company, either your boss will reorganize to give you more responsibility so you can stay, or she will lose you to another department. If another department wants you, this boosts your credibility with your current boss. But, be prepared to take the other job if necessary. Seek employment elsewhere if nothing is available internally.

"When you submit a budget, pad the hell out of it. Budgets are one of the ways management uses to beat the stuffing out of you."

Get praise in writing. Letters of recommendation in your file tell management that you did a good job, shows them that someone recognizes and appreciates your ability, and keeps you visible. When promotions become available, your name is in their minds. Finally, follow a rising star and be loyal. When she's promoted, you will be, too.

## **Dirty Tricks**

If you can stomach it, read this section. Do not use these survival tactics, but know they exist and may be used against you. These dirty tricks include writing nonexistent letters and blind copies, reprimanding and then commending, and starting rumors. Nonexistent letters are simply CYA (cover your ass) memos written after the fact. Don't claim you never got the memo, even if you didn't, because people will think you're making an excuse. The only way to fight this tactic is to guard your date-stamper zealously. Getting blind copies mean that the author of the letter or e-mail does not advertise its distribution. Blind copies may give you a short-term advantage, but sooner or later this tactic will come back to haunt you.

"Zapping your employees is easy. Your employees have no defense. They did screw up, and if you don't defend them, then no one else will."

"If you want to destroy a guy, unload your losers on him, then write them letters of commendation. He can't fire them when they have such glowing letters in their personnel files. He can't do anything other than find them another job. If you want to make an enemy for life or get even, use this tactic."

"Master Corporate Politicians' go to the manager who will agree with what they want and avoid the manager who will disagree with them."

If you want to destroy someone, start a rumor. It doesn't matter if it's true or not. (Most rumors aren't true). Effective rumors for destroying a man include saying he beats his wife, fools around or was in a mental institution. Effective rumors for destroying a woman include saying she has an illegitimate child or does drugs. Women have an advantage over men when it comes to rumors. They can

claim mistreatment (from sexual harassment to rape) more easily than a man. Even if it isn't true, just the idea is enough to get a man fired. "If you're a man, pray your female employees don't read this."

## Little Things Mean a Lot

In the end, the little things add up. In fact, lot of little things can make someone quit. If that's what you want, then micromanage. Don't give raises, make overtime permanently mandatory, cancel your subordinates' vacation plans, send him on road trips, take trips yourself to give him plenty of chances to screw up, or give him long-term assignments far away. Finally, if you really want to force someone to leave, conduct an internal audit. Employees who break protocol can be fired - and you will never need an excuse to conduct an internal audit because you're trying to weed out the bad.

## About the Author

**Phil Porter** has worked at some of the world's most competitive companies, including McDonnell Douglas, Northern Telecom, Flowers Industries and General Dynamics. His corporate career spans more than 30 years.

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