

Beware of Workplace ‘Frenemies’

Watch your back—your office pal may be trying to destroy your career.

by Robert DiGiacomo, for Yahoo! HotJobs

If you’ve had a job, you know the type: a colleague who's friendly and helpful on the surface—but who's career poison.

These workplace “frenemies” come in many guises, so be alert to the dangers lurking beneath some warm or appealing demeanors. Many frenemies mean no harm, while others are bullies whose power plays must be checked, according to Donna Flagg, the author of “Surviving Dreaded Conversations: How to Talk Through Any Difficult Situation at Work.”

“Once they’re outed, they become more self-conscious of their behavior, and it's less likely they’ll do it again,” Flagg says.

To help you identify workplace frenemies, here’s a rundown of six common types—as well as solutions for dealing with them:

1. The Politician spends a lot of time trumpeting his or her accomplishments—and maybe some of yours—to superiors, according to Blaine Loomer, the author of “Corporate Bull****: A Survival Guide.” Make sure you don’t let his or her grandstanding upstage your contributions.

“The Politician will tell you one thing and tell the boss something else,” Loomer says. “They’re in the boss’s office every five minutes, declaring their indispensable worth.”

Solution: Keep your manager and colleagues in email chains, so your work is documented and the Politician can’t take all the credit. If people around you are blowing their own horns, you have to join the orchestra.

2. The Ambitious Ingenué is a direct report who professes nothing but admiration for your work—but beware. He or she may have a not-so-secret agenda: to take over your corner cubicle or climb even higher up the executive ladder.

Solution: The best way to keep an Ambitious Ingenué in check is to be an alert manager. Make sure that what’s being said to your face matches what's being said (and done) when you’re not around. If necessary, remind the employee that as a supervisor, you have power over a direct report's immediate destiny.

“You tell them, ‘I understand you're gunning for a higher-level job, but setting up a reputation that you're scheming or disingenuous or cutthroat is not the best way to go about doing it,’” Flagg says.

3. The Funeral Director lives for crises and accentuates the negative of every situation—and appeals to our own “inner Eeyore.” It's all too easy to join him or her in a self-perpetuating complaint-fest. And this negativity can be a career killer.

Solution: If you frequently find yourself in lengthy conversations about how terrible things are (and how they'll never change), resolve to focus on making positive changes instead. Challenge yourself and the Funeral Director to develop solutions for problems, rather than simply lamenting them, Loomer says.

4. The Idea Thief appropriates your great idea from a public brainstorming session or other meeting, and passes it off as his or her own.

Solution: After a long meeting, it's sometimes hard to remember who said what, so give the Idea Thief the benefit of the doubt: discuss whether there was a misunderstanding about who should get the credit.

“If the person acts snarky and immature, then you go to your supervisor, but you let the person know you're doing it,” Flagg says.

5. The Time Waster lurks by the proverbial water cooler (or parks in your cubicle), to chat about every possible topic—except the work at hand. And given the choice between analyzing profit-and-loss statements and talking about what's up on your favorite reality show, it's pretty easy to choose the latter.

Solution: Socializing with colleagues can be good for your career—in moderation. Allowing yourself a couple of five- or ten-minute chitchat breaks in a day is of course allowable. Beyond that, you must train yourself to say something like “I know we're both busy, so it's time to get back to work.”

6. The Wakeboarder uses charm to shift responsibilities to others, making them feel as if getting his or her work done should be their top priority.

Solution: When you feel as though you're being taken advantage of, make sure to communicate duties and deadlines clearly. If you have to take the problem to a manager, keep your comments focused on the work—don't make it personal.

“I like the idea of people working together, but that means teamwork—it's not you doing all the work for someone else,” Loomer says.