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6-2008

An office survival guide

M. THULASIDAS

Singapore Management University, manojt@smu.edu.sg

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Citation

THULASIDAS, M.. An office survival guide. (2008). *Today*. 1-1.

Available at: https://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/sis_research/6160

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AN OFFICE SURVIVAL GUIDE

MANOJ THULASIDAS

LET'S face it — people job-hop. They do it for a host of reasons, be it better job scope, nicer boss or, most frequently, fatter paycheck.

The grass is often greener on the other side. Really. Whether you are seduced by the green allure of the unknown or venturing into your first pasture, you often find yourself in a new corporate setting.

In the unforgiving, dog-eat-dog corporate jungle, you need to be sure of the welcome. More importantly, you need to prove yourself worthy of it. Fear not, I'm here to help you through it. And I will gladly accept all credit for your survival, if you care to make it public. But I regret that we (this newspaper, me, our family members, dogs, lawyers and so on) cannot be held responsible for any untoward consequence of applying my suggestions. Come on, you should know better than to base your career on a newspaper column!

This disclaimer brings me naturally to the first principle I wanted to present to you. Your best bet for corporate success is to take credit for all accidental successes around you. For instance, if you accidentally spilled coffee on your computer and it miraculously resulted in fixing the CD-Rom drive that hadn't stirred in the last quarter, present it as your innate curiosity and inherent problem-solving skills that prompted you to seek an unorthodox solution.

But resist all temptation to own up to your mistakes. Integrity is a great personality trait and it may improve your karma. But, take my word for it, it doesn't work miracles on your next bonus. Nor does it improve your chances of being the boss in the corner office.



If your coffee debacle, for instance, resulted in a computer that would never again see the light of day (which, you must concede, is a more likely outcome), your task is to assign blame for it. Did your colleague in the next cubicle snore, or sneeze, or burp? Could that have caused a resonant vibration on your desk? Was the cup poorly designed with a higher than normal centre of gravity? You see, a science degree comes in handy when assigning blame.

But seriously, your first task in surviving in a new corporate setting is to find quick wins, for the honeymoon will soon be over. In today's workplace, who you know is more important than

what you know. So, start networking — start with your boss who, presumably, is already impressed. He wouldn't have hired you otherwise, would he?

Once you reach the critical mass in networking, switch gears and give an impression that you are making a difference. I know a couple of colleagues who kept networking forever. Nice, gregarious folks, they are ex-colleagues now. All talk and no work is not going to get them far. Well, it may, but you can get farther by identifying avenues where you can make a difference. And by actually making a bit of that darned difference.

Concentrate on your core skills. Be

positive, and develop a can-do attitude. Find your place in the corporate big picture. What does the company do, how is your role important in it? At times, people may underestimate you. No offence, but I find that some expats are more guilty of underestimating us than fellow Singaporeans. Our alleged gracelessness may have something to do with it, but that is a topic for another day.

You can prove the doubters wrong through actions rather than words. If you are assigned a task that you consider below your level of expertise, don't fret, look at the silver lining. After all, it is something you can do in practically no time and with considerable success.

I have a couple of amazingly gifted friends at my workplace. I know that they find the tasks assigned to them ridiculously simple. But it only means that they can impress the heck out of everybody.

Corporate success is the end result of an all-out war. You have to use everything you have in your arsenal to succeed. All skills, however unrelated, can be roped in to help. Play golf? Invite the CEO for a friendly. Play chess? Present it as the underlying reason for your natural problem solving skills. Sing haunting melodies in Chinese? Organise a *karaoke* session.

Be known. Be recognised. Be appreciated. Be remembered. Be missed when you are gone. At the end of the day, what else is there in life?

The writer is a scientist from the European Organisation for Nuclear Research (CERN), who currently works as an Associate Director at Standard Chartered Bank, Singapore. His book, The Unreal Universe, available in local bookstores and at www.TheUnrealUniverse.com.