

## **From the coach's bench: On top of office politics**

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Tom, a highly intelligent legal expert, is vice-president of corporate affairs of a multibillion-dollar company with its worldwide headquarters in Hong Kong. He had a problem dealing with office politics with his overseas colleagues. He felt that they would leave him in the dark by withholding important information, make decisions without him, and even blame him for problems which he was not responsible for.

As usual, we conducted a personality assessment before our first coaching session. It was obvious that Tom was cerebral iV he is analytical and always tries to do what is right and what makes logical sense.

When I debriefed him on his assessment, he agreed. He also admitted that he thought that this might be the cause of some of the problems he was facing.

I asked Tom how he was handling it. He said that he tried different things, but none of them really worked. First, he tried to prove them wrong by stating the actual facts. When that did not work, he tried to ignore their malicious actions. As can be expected, this only worsened the situation. Finally, he tried to play the political games, but he was not good at it, so things only got worse.

He needed to understand why people acted the way they did. Their actions weren't out of spite, but served personal interests.

For example, one of his overseas colleagues who indirectly reported to him did not inform him about her upcoming visit to Hong Kong. She did this because she wanted to close a deal which he would have most likely opposed. So she went there hoping not to bump into him to conclude the business without his interference. This type of behaviour is unprofessional, but the important thing is to understand whether there are any underlying reasons to what was happening.

**From the coach's bench: On top of office politics**

In Tom's case, he needed to develop a better understanding of his colleagues' motives, and to try to discover ways of aligning them with his own expectations.

Tom needed to:

- Put to rest his anger about past events
- Rebuild trust between his colleagues and himself
- Have an open conversation about his colleagues' objectives and discuss how they could be aligned with his own
- Make clear to his colleagues what is and what is not acceptable to him

At first, Tom was unwilling to work on this relationship with his colleagues. He said: "I understand that better relationships would be useful, but even without that, people should do the right thing."

I responded: "Yes Tom they should be doing the right things, but apparently they aren't. I understand you want to see positive change, but do you believe it's going to happen by insisting that they should do the right thing?"

Another difficulty Tom faced was letting go of the hurtful events of the past. But what happened cannot be undone or changed, and if he would not let go, it would be hard to build more trust with his colleagues.

I also encouraged him to not only forgive, but to take this next step with his colleagues by making an apology. At first, he was outraged at the idea. But I reminded him: "Did you do everything perfectly right?"

"Well, I would not say that my behaviour was perfect, but the main problem lies

with them," he replied.

I explained: "Just apologise for your part, even if it's much smaller. You will see something magical happening."

Tom was still sceptical, but he was willing to give it a shot. The next time we met, I could tell from the look in his eyes that it had worked. He said it took quite an effort and he had to swallow his pride, but it really helped change the dynamics of his relationship with those he managed to talk to. The office politics did not disappear altogether, but he said he became their target less often.

----- **End of Article as published in SCMP** -----



Charlie Lang is an Executive Coach and Trainer who founded Progress-U Limited in 2002. His mission is to assist his clients in becoming excellent leaders for the benefit of all stakeholders. He is a passionate and professional Executive Coach, Mentor Coach, Trainer, Public Speaker and Author of over 100 articles related to leadership, change management and innovative sales.

End of 2004, he started authoring the book "The Groupness Factor" ( see <http://www.progressu.com.hk/Groupness-book.htm> ) which got published in August 2005. Charlie's articles got printed in publications like Human Resources, FZ Magazine, Banking Today, SCMP, Effective Executive and CareerTimes.

Charlie is a founding member and President (2007/08) of the Hong Kong International Coaching Community.