

Strengthening Your Political Savvy - Practical Action Steps

Based on Joel DeLuca's "Political Savvy - Styles & Strategies", here's a list of practical Action Steps you can take to strengthen your Political Savvy:

1. Understand the Organization

1. **Study the org chart** — identify Key Leaders. Gather the basic facts (length of tenure, political appointment vs. career, budget authority, span of control, etc.).
2. **Research Key Leaders on LinkedIn and online** — learn about their backgrounds, education, career paths, and other interests.
3. **Ask a senior mentor about the "power relationships" among senior leaders** — make a "power map" showing who influences whom, and why.
4. **Identify the informal leaders** — the people without big titles who others consistently turn to for advice, information, or a reality check.
5. **Find out where the real decisions get made.** Is it in the formal meeting, or in the conversations that happen before and after?
6. **Pay attention to who gets invited to which meetings** — inclusion patterns reveal a lot about who has real standing and influence.
7. **Learn the history.** Ask mentors and colleagues who've been around for a while. Before pushing a new idea, ask: *"Has this been tried before? What happened?"* etc.
8. **Notice which teams, Offices, etc. consistently get resources and visibility.** Follow that pattern to understand what the organization truly values.
9. **Identify the key "gatekeepers"** — the executive assistants, chiefs of staff, and coordinators who control access to senior leaders. Build respectful relationships with them.
10. **Get an Outside Perspective** - ask colleagues from outside your organization for a candid perspective of *"How is my organization viewed from the outside? What do others see as our strengths? Our weaknesses?"* etc.

2. Understand Your Style and Goals

1. **Consider whether your goals are big enough.** DeLuca's starting point for political savvy is caring about something bigger than yourself — *what is that for you right now?*
2. **Take the Political Style self-assessment and identify your current style** — then ask: *is this style serving me, or limiting my impact? What steps should I take?*

3. **Ask a trusted colleague how they would describe your political style.** Compare their answer to your self-assessment — notice any gaps.
 4. **Develop a “political strategy” for a key initiative.** Choose a specific initiative you care about: Who are your likely Allies? Adversaries? Fence-sitters? Who do you need to win over first? What senior leader(s) could be a Champion for this initiative? etc.
 5. **Learn from a recent situation where you felt frustrated by organizational politics.** *Which style were you operating from? Would a different style have served you better?*
 6. **Identify your default “block”** — do you tend toward the Moral Block (“this feels manipulative”) or the Rational Block (“the idea should speak for itself”)? Awareness is the first step to getting unstuck.
 7. **Write a one-page “case for change” for your current initiative** — as if you were pitching it to a skeptic. If you struggle to write it, your goal may not be clear enough yet.
 8. **Get feedback from your manager on how your current level of political engagement is perceived** — *too passive, too aggressive, or about right?*
 9. **Revisit your goals quarterly.** As priorities shift, your strategy needs to shift too — don't let a stale goal drive your political energy.
 10. **Learn from a Mentor.** Identify someone you (and/or others) can see is politically savvy. Ask them for input, advice, strategies, etc.
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3. Build Relationships

1. **Build specific relationships *outside* your team.** Make a list of 5 people outside your immediate team whose trust and support would matter most. Reach out to them.
2. **Look at your calendar for the last month.** Are your relationship-building interactions concentrated in one silo? If so, intentionally schedule time across boundaries.
3. **Identify one person with informal power** — someone without a big title but whom others consistently listen to. Reach out and ask them for advice / mentoring.
4. **Reach out to one “random” colleague each week.** Send a brief note to someone you haven't connected with in a while — offer to assist, share an article, or simply check in.
5. **Identify someone who currently seems indifferent or mildly opposed to your work.** Invite them to coffee with no agenda other than to understand their perspective better.
6. **Make it a point to meet new team members.** Offer your assistance, and follow up.
7. **When you meet someone for the first time, make it a point to follow up.** Within 48 hours, send a brief message, offer to assist, ask for assistance, etc.
8. **Volunteer for a cross-functional task force or working group** — even a small one. It expands your network and signals that you're invested in the broader mission.
9. **Make a point to *learn* about people's challenges** — not just as a tactic, but as a habit. People can tell the difference between sincere interest and political networking.

10. **Find small ways to help others (aka “5 minute favors”) - before you need to make a withdrawal.** Help someone with their project, make an introduction, or advocate for their idea in a meeting. Remember, offer your *strengths*.
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4. Use Your Network for Positive Action

1. **Identify a significant Mission-related initiative that you believe in, and really lean into it.** Identify others in your network who can assist and enroll them.
 2. **Identify a barrier or challenge that inhibits many in your organization, and take it on!** Speak with others and enroll them in helping to address the issue.
 3. **Make sure the right people know about what you’re accomplishing** — not by bragging, but by sharing a brief update or a thank-you that naturally highlights the win.
 4. **Practice “political alignment”** — be very clear on what others’ core interests are, and find out how you can assist them. Don’t be naive. This is how things get done.
 5. **Identify a “career champion”** — a senior person who believes in you and your work. Stay in regular contact and keep them informed so they can advocate for you when you’re not in the room.
 6. **Connect two people in your network who would benefit from knowing each other.** Being a connector builds your reputation and strengthens your web of relationships.
 7. **Tap into your network for help!** When you’re facing a difficult relationship or a stalled initiative, ask yourself: “Who in my network has a good relationship with this person?” Work through that trusted third party.
 8. **Ask two or three trusted colleagues to do a “hot wash” on your idea - especially “respected opponents” who think differently than you do.** Their input can sharpen your thinking and surface objections you hadn’t considered.
 9. **Find specific ways to make your boss look good.** Find out what their “care abouts” are, and support those — your success and their success are linked.
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5. Govern Your Own Behavior

1. **Strengthen your EQ & self-management.** *Practice* expressing emotion at the right time to the right people to the right extent. Share happiness, express frustration, share sorrow - at the right time with the right people to the right extent.
2. **Before speaking in a meeting, pause.** Take a breath and ask yourself: “*Is what I’m about to say going to move things forward? Am I adding value?*”

3. **Practice listening to understand, not to respond.** In your next one-on-one or team meeting, challenge yourself to ask two follow-up questions, and test what you're hearing, before offering your own perspective.
 4. **Pause before sending a pointed email or message.** Re-read it and ask: "*How would this look if it were forwarded to my boss, or shared in a meeting?*" If it wouldn't hold up, rewrite it (or delete it).
 5. **Be "realistically optimistic" and solutions-focused in group settings** — even when you're frustrated. Your emotional demeanor is being observed and is part of your political brand. Don't be "unrealistically optimistic", but don't be "realistically pessimistic" either.
 6. **If you disagree with a decision, find a tactful way to say so.** Say it once - clearly, and constructively. Then commit to the decision and move forward. Persistent grumbling is a reputation killer.
 7. **If someone comes to you with gossip or rumor, practice a simple redirect:** "I'm not sure I'm the right person for that conversation" or "Let's focus on what we can control."
 8. **Practice "Nothing About You Without You."** Catch yourself saying anything negative about someone. If you wouldn't say it to them, don't say it to anyone.
 9. **Actively avoid unnecessary drama and unproductive conflict.** If you're getting pulled into an interpersonal conflict or office drama, step out. Excuse yourself. Leave the meeting. Change the topic. Don't get sucked in.
 10. **Do a periodic "behavioral audit"** — ask a trusted peer or mentor: "Are there any habits or patterns in how I show up that might be working against me?" Be genuinely open to their input.
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6. Anticipate and Handle Dissenters

1. **Write down a list of "dissenters" (for a specific initiative, or in general).** For each one, ask yourself, "*Do I really know what their true concern is??*" Do they disagree with your idea? Or is it a personality conflict? Or a turf issue? Diagnose first, and *then* address the true issue.
2. **Meet with a dissenter (current or potential) early in the process.** A conversation at the idea stage is far easier than a confrontation at the decision stage.
3. **Go into every dissenter conversation with genuine curiosity, not a prepared rebuttal.** Ask: "*What concerns do you have about this?*" and then *actually listen*.
4. **Look for the legitimate concern inside the opposition.** Even the most difficult dissenter usually has a real worry worth taking seriously — address it and you may neutralize the resistance.
5. **Resist the urge to go around dissenters.** It almost always backfires. A person who feels bypassed becomes a much more energized opponent.

6. **Keep a dissenter informed and in the loop even if they're not fully on board.** Being excluded increases resistance; being included — even as a skeptic — often softens it over time.
7. **Identify whether a dissenter has power, or not.** If they do, is their power formal or informal?. An adversary with informal influence who talks to everyone is often more dangerous than a formal opponent — adjust your strategy accordingly.
8. **When a dissenter raises an objection publicly, respond with calm curiosity rather than defensiveness:** *"That's an important point — can you say more about what's driving that concern?"*
9. **Recognize that some dissenters could become your allies.** Once they feel genuinely heard, they might back off their resistance. Don't write them off as “adversaries” — a converted skeptic can become a critical spokesperson to others you need to win over.
10. **After an initiative concludes — win or lose — debrief the political landscape.** Who opposed it, why, and what could you have done differently earlier in the process?