

The Importance of Observation and Journaling

By

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Pay Attention

One critical thing, particularly for those starting their careers, is to absorb what is going on around you. Listen carefully and observe what is being said and, equally important, *what is not being said*. Pay attention to the clues and behavior of colleagues. Ask yourself questions such as:

- What am I learning?
- How am I growing?
- What are the dynamics of the situations at work?
- Who can be an ally?
- What are my colleagues' hidden agendas?
- Who is a gossip?
- Who can mentor me?
- Who should I avoid?
- What bosses are worth emulating?
- What bosses are poor leaders?
- Why?

Approach Colleagues with Caution and Curiosity

Approach your colleagues with curiosity, not judgment. Too often our brains are wired to make snap judgments about people and then move on. Train yourself to recognize when you are doing this and make a conscious effort to stop and find out more about the people around you. Ask them open-ended questions and appropriate follow-up questions. You never know what you might learn, which could prove valuable in your career. Also, you may discover allies and supporters among your colleagues.

Tip: Look into topics such as active listening and what messages body language sends. Knowing a few key techniques will go a long way in helping you have more beneficial conversations.

Keep Notes or a Work Journal

My next recommendation ties directly with what I have just written: namely, keep notes and/or a work journal on what you are learning about colleagues, your boss, and the behavior of work colleagues.

Keep your notes/work journal in a *private secure place* such as on your home computer. *Never enter any of your notes or journaling on any company media. NEVER.*

You may want to keep a written record in a private journal. You don't need to make entries every day after work. But I suggest you make an entry at least twice a week. After six months, you will see certain patterns emerge and be surprised at your insights about your work environment. These insights may lead to answers to the questions listed above, or they may reveal areas for you to focus on in your professional development. Knowing who you are and what works for you at work is an important lesson and what you learn from your journaling could help you plan your future.

Thanks to Liz Novak for her review and edits and Bev Kolz for her editing of this essay.

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CM-26- B -1/3/23- BK, LN-FF