

What should you do when threatened by shameless, conniving co-workers? Cry? Hide? Quit? Gear up with action plans to outwit five common scumbags.



Survivor: Office Jungle

Panelists



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The Leadership Company specializes in engaging globally renowned and leading Singapore-based experts to help organizations or professionals achieve peak performance. Visit www.leadership.sg for details.



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Started in 1996, Asia Coaching Training's vision is 'Building People to Building Business'. Founder Andy leads a team of professionals to help companies in areas of business training, coaching and consulting. Visit www.asiatrainers.com for details.



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Adecco is a leading human resource solutions company in Singapore with 19 general staffing and specialist divisions. Services include temporary and contract staffing, permanent recruitment, leadership development and outplacement, as well as niche divisions such as Banking & Finance, Engineering & Technical, Information Technology, Medical & Science and the recruitment of Japanese-speaking talents. Visit www.adecco.com.sg for details.

Dealing with the... **Credit Grabber**

You've put in all the hard work necessary to make that project a success. However, your colleague – barely related to the project – jumped in at the last minute with minor tweaks and later claimed credit for the work done. How can you right this wrong and prevent it from happening again?

Andy:

I'll praise the Credit Grabber for helping me wrap up the project and communicating the success to the boss. I will also CC this (email) message to the boss so he'll know what is happening. Next, I will ask the Credit Grabber to help me with a more challenging project. If he agrees, fine. If he refuses, it shows that he is not interested in doing work, only in grabbing credit. I will make this known to my boss. In short, I will not hold any grudge against this Credit Grabber and it is up to the boss to decide what to do.

Jessica:

Ensure at all times that your colleagues and managers know about your involvement in the project. Attend all necessary meetings and check that your name is on important documents. It would be unusual for someone who has done very little to try and claim the glory – but what's important is that those who matter to your career are aware of the work that you've done and your contribution to the project's success. Finally, consider talking to the Credit Grabber and ask if he is aware of what he is doing. Remember, not everybody shares your high standards.

Sam:

The only way to manage a Credit Grabber is to pull up your socks and give them a run for their money. It is important for the do-er to be heard and stake claim on the work done. One strategy is to punish chronic Credit Grabbers by making them look dishonest. When they realize that they are dealing with someone who would not tolerate their 'tactics', they would often leave you alone and look for more gullible doers. A less confrontational method is to stop doing them any favors beyond the bare minimum and practice saying "no".



Dealing with the...

Great Pretender

Your colleague seems free enough to go for long tea breaks and often leaves the office early. When asked to share the workload, he whinges, gives a load of excuses on how busy he is and scoots. Given the looming deadline, you trudge on to complete the job. How do you deal with slackers who overload colleagues with their responsibilities, especially when the boss is only interested in the end result and not the process?

Andy:

I'll make sure that he'll be responsible for his work. I will never do it for him because doing so only makes him lazier.

Jessica:

It's advisable to act really quickly as these types of situations can drag on until it's too late. Hold a meeting with all colleagues involved in the project and assign duties with specific deadlines. Get confirmation there and then from them. If the person cannot deliver on what was agreed on at the meeting, it would be best to remove him from the project and replace him with someone who can deliver. The bigger question here though is why this person cannot deliver at this time. Does he really have too many projects going on or does he need help with time management?

Sam:

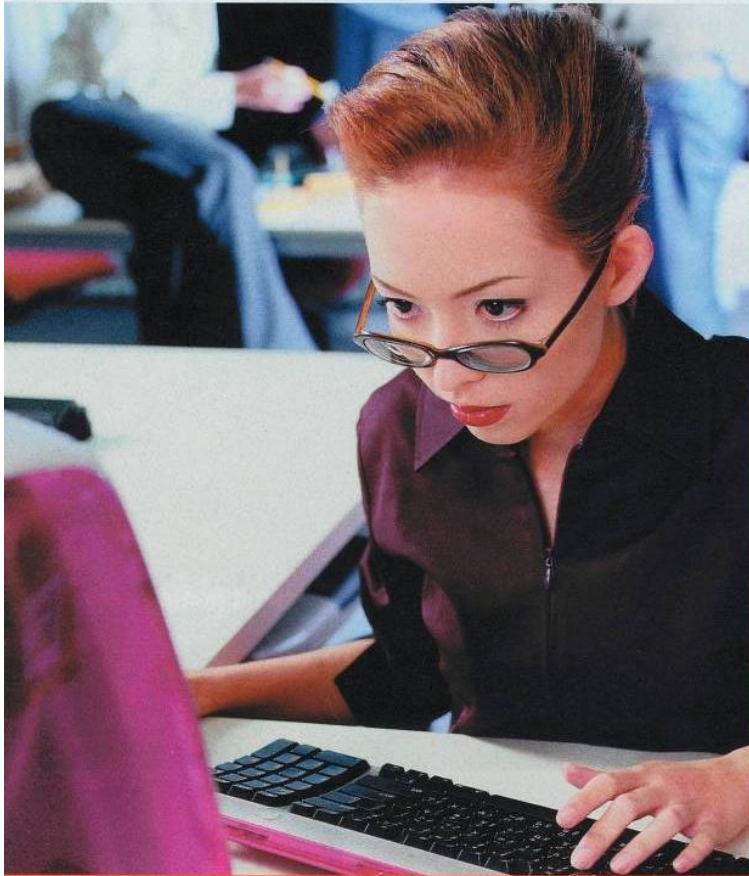
I believe that those who are efficient and effective deserve their time off, even if it is more than those who are less speedy or productive. So the focus here is on the individual's responsibilities and results delivered. Allocate specific and quantifiable tasks with clear time lines, and let him achieve them in whichever way works best. This creates a situation of 'no escape' and transparency. A point to note is that this requires a good manager or team leader to ensure appropriate task delegation and supervision of results. If you do not have a good manager or team leader, you can help your manager by being specific with your responsibilities, and hence the other's responsibilities as well.



Dealing with the...

Nightsoil Carrier

Your colleague would do anything for career advancement, including sucking up and running non-office-related errands for the boss, or sneaky actions like withholding information from co-workers, shifting blame and spreading rumors in order to channel high-profile assignments to him. What can you do to protect your reputation or prospects at your company?



Andy:

I will tell him in private to stop the rumors and blaming once and for all, failing which I will report his action to the boss.

Jessica:

This is certainly a difficult situation but ultimately, it is unlikely that the boss will promote a person based on the fact that they can run errands for him. A promotion is based on skills and abilities. Also, consider the fact that your colleague is unlikely to develop or learn new skills on the job while running errands. If you are working for a boss who is like this and with colleagues who accept this behavior, you may want to consider if this is the right company for you in the long term.

Sam:

It is not incorrect to be ambitious and want to achieve success in the office. To do so, it is important to be in the good books of those who matter. Of course, some of us take this 'good books' compulsion to unhealthy and sometimes, immoral levels. One of the first things to do is to let the culprit know about the effects of his actions. Giving the benefit of the doubt, it is possible that he may simply not be aware of it. Several sycophants are in fact weak and conscious of what people think of them. If he is not deterred into changing his ways, then it may be time to alert the boss. In extreme cases, one may have to go even higher or speak to someone with the power to address the issue and who cares about the damage to the team's productivity and morale. In the meantime, once identified and informed, he can have a taste of retribution by being ostracized.

Dealing with the...

The Sneaky Splitter

Instead of investing time and effort into communicating with subordinates, your superior prefers to divide-and-rule, sowing distrust and discontent among various departments/groups in order to consolidate his own power. How do you escape from the manipulation?

Andy:

The team should work even closer to make it more productive. Friendly competition is always there, and higher results from better teamwork will make the boss drop his divisive strategy.

Jessica:

Ensure that your work is clearly documented. For example, if you feel that underhanded tactics may be used after a meeting has taken place, you could be the one that produces minutes from the meeting which shows that all points agreed to have been clearly recorded. Another way to avoid this from becoming an issue is to establish and maintain open, good communication between different departments.

Sam:

We all hate to be manipulated, especially by someone we should trust. Weak leaders use this strategy to command respect and obedience from their subordinates. It is crucial to clear the misunderstandings and open communication channels with those whom the boss is trying to pit against you. When aligning with the opposing team mate/department, focus on what they can gain by working in tandem with you without being manipulated. Appeal to their self-interest, not for help. Agree on a common communication strategy with the boss. At the same time, the boss's 'efforts' cannot be directly undermined and he must not be made to look like a liar. An extreme step is to 'manage the manager' by speaking directly to the boss and perhaps even assuring him that such tactics are not needed to achieve results and can, in fact, be quite damaging to everybody including himself.



Dealing with the... Pet Man

Your boss plays favorites and promotes staff or assigns them high-profile projects based more on personal relationships or loyalty, instead of meritocracy. Short of quitting, what else can you do?

Andy:

The best response is to continue working hard and prove with results. Your time will come.

Jessica:

The 'wait and see' approach may work. Projects handled by colleagues who are not qualified will eventually fail and the boss will have to turn to others to deliver. Also, unless the boss is the actual overall CEO or managing director, then he too has Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to deliver. Hopefully at some point they will wise up and realize that they are operating ineffectively and unproductively. This may require digging your heels in for a short time.

Sam:

When you are not a natural 'pet' of the boss, the strategy is to research what the boss's needs or 'buttons' are. Often, even hard working people must make themselves liked by colleagues in power to get the job done or move up the career ladder. If this approach fails and if your work is up to standards, it may be time for extreme steps. Speak to another supervisor such as the boss's boss. Do not complain and ask him to mentor or guide you in this situation. If a company's culture simply cannot be changed, you should look for another job and not waste too much time 'politicking'.



Lost-in-the-Corporate-Jungle?

1. Stay positive and professional at all times. Focus on getting solid results - you will be rewarded.
2. Manage the boss well, know his expectations and always seek to exceed that.
3. Work harder on yourself so that you will have more skills than other people and can secure your own future.
4. Ensure important things - reports, outcomes of discussions or meetings - are clearly recorded and cannot be misused in any way.
5. If you have any hiring responsibility, filter out interview candidates that appear to have gotten involved in office politics. Are they rude or snide about their ex-manager or ex-colleagues?
6. Ensure that your senior management knows you and what you do. If this is not as easy as it seems, think how you can do it.
7. Be helpful. This is also an excellent way to build rapport and develop your working relationships with others.
8. It is paramount to know what is happening in the office and what is being spoken about. However, don't add to the gossip.
9. Envy creates silent enemies so it is wise to look all-too-human occasionally, like partaking in an occasional drink or two with the rest.
10. How you carry yourself often determines how you are treated. By appearing regal and confident, you will make yourself seem destined to wear the crown - including how you want to be treated by your colleagues. ■