

**Why Do They Call It
BUSINESS**

**If It's Mostly
POLITICS ?**

By: Mike Latimer

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Why Do They Call It Business If It's Mostly Politics?

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While the events and persons portrayed in these accounts are real, all of the names, places and unique similarities to actual events have been modified to preserve their confidentiality

Dedication

To my baby daughter Monica:

*Being an author is fun.
Being your father is fantastic.*

Acknowledgments

To my loving wife and partner Cindy
Whose remarkable way with words and animals helped make this book possible.

To Tom Moore
Whose interest and encouragement helped get this project going.

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To Justin Hayward, John Lodge,
Ray Thomas, Graeme Edge and Mike Pinder
*Whose creativity and innovative spirit
have been a constant source of inspiration
for me and millions of others*

And to SteveN and FrankieDan
For reasons they will understand

In Loving Memory

To my mother, Merrick Farrar Latimer

Her brother, the Rev. Charles Bidwell Farrar

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INTRODUCTION

"Why *do* they call it business if it's mostly politics?"

It only seems fair that we answer that question before moving on to the rest of the story.

But before we do, we'd better begin by defining our terms so we're all speaking the same language.

Business is what people conduct in a system of enterprise to acquire valuable assets,

and

Politics is what people practice in a system of government to accomplish various agendas.

These two unrelated areas apparently have nothing in common, right?

Well, not quite.

Somehow these two managed to meet one another, get together and form a relationship. The ostensible purpose of this relationship was to help each other get ahead in the world. Their togetherness eventually spawned an offspring.

The offspring ended up becoming an oxymoron, and was named "corporate politics."

Not surprisingly, it has turned out to be very unwanted offspring. Neither of its procreators seems willing to claim it as their own.

On the business side of the family, it is true that corporate politics is occasionally featured in management books and articles.

However, the mentions that it gets are mostly couched in connotations and indirect references to "cultural barriers" in "no-consequence" companies headed by "non-accountable" leaders. This level of representation does not constitute outright acceptance of corporate politics as a legitimate offspring of the business world.

On the political side, things aren't much different. Despite an uncanny resemblance to this side of the family, the world of politics steadfastly refuses to accept any responsibility for it. You certainly won't find any mention of it in the Lawmakers Home Journal or Politicians Quarterly. As far as the real politicians are concerned, this offspring isn't one they have to live with - so it's simply not their problem.

That is why it's called business even though it's mostly politics. It has taken the name of the parent that has full custody.

Unfortunately for some, the living arrangements have proven to be a bit dysfunctional at times. It's probably because corporate politics has become quite an imposition since its conception. Those who live on the business side of the house have been frustrated by its propensity to interfere in their affairs. Despite all of the advancements that the business world has made intellectually and technologically, it has been unable to block out this interference.

The only way it can ever hope to block out the interference is to pinpoint its source. But in the case of corporate politics, the source of the interference is too deeply embedded in the immovable forces of nature.

Human nature, that is.

No matter how the business world tries to distance itself from it, there is no escaping its influence. Human nature, teeming with all of its virtuous strengths and petty weaknesses, ultimately drives the behavior of business organizations everywhere. Behind all of the

triumphs and hardships that organizations experience, you can see its influence at work. It imbues each organization with its own unique personality, and brings along its own unique set of problems.

While it may be easier to blame the problems on a lack of strategy or management ability, it fails to acknowledge human nature as the epicenter of every behavior that occurs in organizations. Basic human behaviors are not automatically altered by a change in the environment. People always bring along their own unique way of looking at things when they move from the world outside of business to the one inside. They also bring along a variety of coping mechanisms, some of which are friendly and cooperative, and others which are not.

As the need to control the environment possesses some more than others, aggressive behavior ensues. Perceived threats in the environment cause people to react instinctively in ways that are often counterproductive to others elsewhere in the system. While all of this presumably takes place under the auspices of those in authority, most are powerless to prevent it from disrupting the organization.

Yet, in spite of all the evidence to the contrary, many businesspeople still choose to believe that the mere existence of a corporate charter will miraculously exorcise all non-conformist thoughts and behaviors from everyone who goes to work for an organization. In their way of thinking, when people share a common space and a common goal, they should gratuitously set aside any personal ideas or agendas that are contrary to those of the organization. However, when you strip away all of the pomp, circumstance and other trappings of corporate life, business is all about people with position and power over other people. In that regard, it is no different than government.

In government, people in authority are prone to behaviors that range anywhere from occasional indiscretions to extraordinary abuses of power. Yet many still cling to the notion that businesspeople should be immune to that sort of behavior. Such a notion ignores the basic

fact that human nature is as powerful a force in the world of business as it is in politics. It engenders impulsive feelings and behaviors that people act upon when confronted with difficult or undesirable situations. When push comes to shove, these instincts can quickly stifle the inner voices calling out for reason and rational judgment.

In the world of business, there is evidence of this every day.

- An individual's quest for control impedes an organization's plans to go public. Growth stops.
- An individual's will to survive undercuts an organization's succession plan. Leadership weakens.
- An individual's fear of change undermines an organization's attempt to restructure. Profitability suffers.

The evidence is very difficult to ignore when your career, or the career of someone close to you, is adversely affected by those who indulge that sort of behavior. While no amount of preparation can be guaranteed foolproof, those who take the time to understand the forces behind it are those in the best position to either deal with it, overcome it, or even benefit from it.

By the time you finish reading this book, you will gain that much-needed awareness of the forces behind corporate politics. You will better understand how political behavior affects you and everyone else in your organization. You'll learn how to predict the consequences of that behavior and deal with them effectively. Most importantly, you'll understand what it takes to coexist peacefully with the ever-present political forces in your organization, while keeping yourself firmly ensconced in solid business practices.

Relax and enjoy! And be sure to visit the Afterword section at the end of the book to learn how you can share your own experiences.

CHAPTER 1 - TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

CAN YOU DISTINGUISH THE POLITICAL ANIMALS FROM THE REST OF THE CORPORATE WILDLIFE?

In order to gauge your level of familiarity and general understanding of corporate politics, please answer the following multiple choice questions. Select the one whose behavior is best described.

Question #1

They strike suddenly and without warning, injecting their poison and waiting patiently for it to render their victim helpless.

Are they?

1. Anacondas
2. Koala Bears
3. Vipers
4. Corporate Politicians

Question #2

They sneak up on and quickly grab their prey, gradually coiling around them and squeezing harder and harder until the victim's effort to resist has been extinguished.

Are they?

1. Earthworms
2. Boa Constrictors
3. Eels
4. Corporate Politicians

Question #3

They pursue their prey relentlessly until it becomes completely worn down and totally vulnerable. They then inflict a series of small injuries on the prey until it is so weakened that it can be easily killed and dismembered.

Are they?

1. Wolves
2. Coyotes
3. MeerKats
4. Corporate Politicians

Question #4

They have an annoying tendency to assault their slower moving, more benign counterparts by attacking in large numbers and overpowering even the most giant of prey.

Are they?

1. Dolphins
2. Killer Whales
3. Red Snappers
4. Corporate Politicians

Question #5

They are the first to spot dead meat. Nothing can strip a carcass down to the bare bones any faster. The tell-tale circling of their kind is foolproof evidence that some poor beast has met its end.

Are they?

1. Pink Flamingos
2. African Ostriches
3. Egyptian Vultures
4. Corporate Politicians

Question #6

Although spineless, these remarkable creatures possess considerable intelligence. Taking advantage of their far-reaching tentacles and a lot of suckers, they draw their struggling prey ever closer to their voracious orifice.

Are they?

1. Red Lobsters
2. Giant Squid
3. Sea Anemones
4. Corporate Politicians

Answer Guide

If you answered #4 to all of the above questions, you are quite conversant with the topic of corporate politics.

If your answers were 3,2,1,2,2,3 then you need to turn off the Nature Channel and read this book as quickly as possible.

CHAPTER 2

WHEN WORLDS APART, COLLIDE

You've heard that politics and religion don't mix. Well unfortunately, the same is not true for politics and business. They do mix, and when they do, they make very strange bedfellows.

Corporate politics is the result of a head-on collision between two worlds that, in the purest sense, are at complete odds with each other. It is very rare to find a business organization that is purely business-oriented or purely political. The two worlds have been intertwined for so long that it's difficult to know where one starts and the other ends. To gain an understanding of how the combination of these two worlds can complicate the business careers of so many people, we must begin by examining them separately. Seeing them in their purest form will help us understand how they're supposed to function when they aren't hopelessly commingled.

Let's start with the business world.

In a world that is purely business, everything revolves around getting more and more results year after year. It is a very systematic process that is typically focused on the customer.

The business process usually involves:

1. Identifying opportunities to create value.
2. Setting specific goals and objectives (with deadlines).
3. Assigning responsibility for achieving those goals and objectives.
4. Measuring performance against those goals and objectives.
5. Rewarding those who achieve them and replacing those who don't.

In a world that is purely political, everything revolves around those who are in power. It's not about delivering more and better each year. It's about keeping things on an even keel. The process, which is highly systemic in nature, is focused on satisfying a constituency.

The political process generally involves:

1. Influencing public opinion.
2. Imposing checks and balances.
3. Legislating policies and programs that elevate the status quo.
4. Expanding the government's span of control at home.
5. Extending the government's sphere of influence abroad.

You can clearly see a world of opposites when you compare them this way:

	<u>World of Business</u>	<u>World of Politics</u>
The end goal is to increase	Value	Influence
By instituting	Goals & Objectives	Checks & Balances
And managing	Performance	Perceptions
To satisfy	Customers	Constituents
And get	Results	Returns

Apart from each other, these worlds are actually quite productive. When these two worlds intertwine, dysfunctional and destructive behavior can ensue.

So how did the two get mixed up with each other in the first place?

There is a great deal of history behind that. Elements from the public and private sector have been joined at the hip since the birth of the Industrial Age in America. The onset of two world wars, followed by the cold war, required a joint effort from both the public and private sectors in order to ensure the United States' survival as a nation. During this period, many of our country's major industrial and commercial enterprises adopted management structures and practices from the public sector. What was adopted was a very "command and control" oriented approach to business management. The corporate bureaucracy, with its extremely mechanical ensemble of departments and divisions, was the (step)child of this wartime marriage of the public and private sector.

Over the last twenty years or so, much of the collective energy expended in the business world has been aimed at trying to unravel the bureaucracy that still exists in a lot of companies. But this pulling apart of the bureaucracy has not managed to separate the political elements from the business elements in the private sector. These political elements have been afforded more than enough time to adapt themselves to the corporate world. It has now become quite a natural habitat for them. Today there is no such thing as an organization completely devoid of politics. Every organization shows some signs of it. The only real question is, "Is it the dominant life form?"

If politics happens to be the dominant life form, everyone in the organization must subordinate their behavior to the dominant species. Their only choice is to adapt or become extinct.

If politics is not the dominant life form, business-as-usual will rule the day.

Most organizations find themselves somewhere between these two extremes. In these organizations, the behavior is not altogether focused on business or politics. The business and political elements coexist and battle each other for supremacy. The behavior is not unlike what you'd witness in the animal kingdom. That's because in all but a few of the species of animals that work together to survive, life revolves around the pecking order. In their quest to control this pecking order, you find ordinary human beings exhibiting animal-like tendencies in their struggle to make some organization their eminent domain. It is this sort of animal-like behavior that defines the nature of the relationship between an organization's leaders and followers. It can either be hostile or harmonious. People can work with each other or against each other. The nature of this relationship also determines the nature of the politics involved. If the relationship is adversarial, then the politics will most likely be brutal.

This sort of interaction is germane to the animal kingdom. In this parallel world unfettered by the trappings of corporate life, the members of each animal group instinctively act out their aggressions or affections without concern for its effect on others. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, animals in the wild are rarely preoccupied about anything beyond their need to survive. Humans in the corporate world, on the other hand, have needs that extend all the way to the top of the hierarchy. Many feel compelled to satisfy those needs through a series of self-actualizing behaviors. Once you understand the rationale behind these compulsive behaviors, you can better understand the nature of the politics involved.

In the animal kingdom, four of the basic groups of animals that live and work together are known as Packs, Pods, Colonies and Clans. Each has its own variety of species. What makes these groups so unique is the way they interact amongst themselves. Except for a few basic similarities, each has their own fundamentally distinct code of

conduct that governs how the leaders and followers behave towards each other. These codes of conduct are not unlike the patterns of behavior that people exhibit in organizations. The similarities are so obvious that one can actually predict behavior once you know where the people in your organization fit within each group.

It is quite possible, even probable, that more than one group can exist in an organization at the same time. Sometimes, different people in different departments in different divisions of the same company can each exhibit one or more of these unique patterns of behavior. Having conditioned their followers to respond to their own particular code of conduct, these leaders effectively establish their own separate domains. Until you know where their boundaries are, and where the lines are drawn, you will find it nearly impossible to peacefully co-exist with them and successfully navigate (or circumnavigate) the labyrinth that they have laid before you.

Our foray into the mysterious world of corporate politics begins with a look at its more pugnacious variety - the Pack.

CHAPTER 3 - RUNNING WITH THE PACK

"We keep you alive to serve this ship. Row well...and live."

Jack Hawkins as Quintus Arius
from the movie Ben-Hur

Animals that live and work together in packs are subject to some of the strictest rules and rulemakers that you'll find anywhere in the animal kingdom.

Led by a dominant male and his mate, the higher-ups in the pecking order usually consist of the leader's offspring. Beyond this immediate entourage, everyone else is subordinate and considered inferior. It is an accepted practice for the dominant few to intimidate subordinates and prevent them from having relations to strengthen their numbers.

Everyone in the pack lives to take care of the higher-ups. In return, the pack members receive group benefits, namely the chance to feed on the prey that the pack manages to kill. For those choosing to act as "lone wolves", there are only rodents and other inauspicious prey to pursue. Therefore, they stay together to benefit from safety in numbers, even if it means catering to the needs of the dominant few.

In cases where a dominant member decides that a subordinate needs to be put in his place, he automatically bares his fangs, growls ferociously, and may even reach for the offender's scruff. The lesser creature must then show submission by quickly rolling over, exposing his vulnerable under-belly, whining, and then licking his superior's chops to make restitution. Further acts of defiance by an inferior can result in his, or her, being driven from the pack.

In the corporate world, you're part of a pack if you find yourself surrounded by oppressive leaders who exhibit this sort of behavior, and submissive followers who reluctantly endure it.

The pack mentality in a business organization takes on quite a few not-so-desirable characteristics. Among them are:

Leaders who treat followers as inferiors

Leaders who use intimidation to keep followers under control

Followers who are afraid of their leader(s).

Followers who grudgingly accept abuse from them.

If an organization finds itself in this state of nature, the battle for supremacy between the political and business people can be very hard on those caught in the crossfire. Unlike the other corporate landscapes we will traverse, this one is incredibly difficult to navigate, no matter who is in control. While intimidation can be used by both business and political types to suit their purpose, the specific applications are considerably different.

When business-minded people resort to intimidation, the needs of the business take precedence over those of the rank and file. Employees are expected to follow some incredibly hard and extremely fast rules of business:

Do and say nothing until you have the facts to back it up.

Solve problems immediately, not when you get around to them

Meet deadlines; Never move them.

Underpromise; Overperform

The career-limiting penalties for failure in this environment include a total and potentially irredeemable loss of credibility. The single most dreaded penalty is denial of future access to the upper echelons in the organization.

On the surface, it all seems incredibly unfair to those who have to cope with it. The question it begs is, Is there anyone who benefits from running at this fast and furious pace?

The answer is yes, and there are five groups to choose from.

- a) The leaders of the organization (executives)
- b) The followers in the organization (employees)
- c) The owners of the organization (shareholders)
- d) The stakeholders in the organization (lenders, vendors, etc.)
- e) The patrons of the organization (customers)

If the answer to the question is (c), (d) and (e), the people in group (a) are running the organization like a business. People often forget the importance of these three groups, whose resources make it possible for the organization to stay in business. When occasionally overbearing methods are used to run the business a little harder or a little faster, the people in category (b) have to take some comfort in the knowledge that their sacrifices ultimately benefit those who will sustain the life of their organization.

If the answer to the question is (a) and only (a), then you can safely assume that at some point in the history of the organization, the political forces managed to gain the upper hand and wield it for their own personal gain. If these political forces have a pack mentality, they will resort to any means necessary to protect their position in the power structure. The most frequently used tactic is a very sinister form of intimidation that strikes at those who make any attempt to think or act independently. It doesn't matter if the thought or action might benefit someone in group (b), (c), (d) or (e). If there is even the remotest possibility that it could potentially undermine the authority of the powers-that-be, it will summon as its main attraction a horrific display of power politics, followed by a not-so-entertaining...

SIDE-SHOW OF FORCE

When leaders in an organization shift their focus away from working the business towards the playing of politics, they tend to be easily angered by anything that resembles a loss of control over the people and property within their purview. Any threat, no matter how small or insignificant, automatically triggers a ballistic form of behavior aimed at pulverizing the target and paralyzing its ability to respond or undertake any further "threatening" actions in the future. In most cases, the issues are really quite trivial and almost totally unrelated to the real day-to-day business of the organization. Sometimes, something as simple as the agenda for a meeting or the cc's on a memo can provoke this kind of attack. By regularly demonstrating their lack of hesitation to launch a pre-emptive strike against anyone for any reason, they effectively divert people's attention away from attacking the real issues in the business. They keep everybody preoccupied with keeping the peace on side issues that have no real impact on the performance of the organization.

Many of the people who get sidetracked by these shows of force never figure out what knocked them off course. One minute they're engineering a major new product and the next minute they're relegated to mopping up loose ends on some low-budget project whose priority was never very high to begin with.

They're the ones who find themselves getting jerked around at the end of...

THE FEUD CHAIN

The people who inevitably get throttled in this situation are the ones who mistakenly believe that their survival in the organization is solely a function of their performance. They continue to act as though the business forces were in control. They go about their business of finding problems and trying to solve them overnight. They tend to ignore the fact that a politically-minded regime might be more interested in protecting the status quo. The minute a performance-oriented

organization person (p.o.o.p.) lands in their political punch-bowl, the party's over.

Take the case of Arthur. Arthur was a division controller who worked for a large real estate company. One day, Arthur found himself put in charge of tracking the performance of a major division of the company - the Relocation Services Division. The performance of this division had never been tracked by anyone. The business had traditionally been conducted on a best-efforts basis. The department head responsible for overseeing its activities suddenly became concerned about this second set of eyes peering into his sphere of influence.

Of course Arthur was delighted by this assignment. He saw it as a welcome vote of confidence that he needed to move up in the organization. He therefore took his new assignment to heart, confident that he could uncover the secrets to improved performance in the Relocation Division. He began by reviewing the costs associated with buying, holding and selling the homes of client company employees who were relocating. This was, after all, the largest and most expensive activity in the entire division. Arthur was sure he could find some way to improve this function and reduce its costs.

Unfortunately for Arthur, he didn't realize that the department head of the Relocation Division was the kind of person who had absolutely no tolerance for scavengers rummaging through his backyard. To him, it didn't matter that Arthur was collaborating with members of his own staff. He believed that Arthur was out to prove that his department hadn't been run as well as it should have been. For that, he needed to be taught a lesson and put in his place.

When the time came to present Arthur's performance report, Arthur's boss, the department head of the Relocation Division and his staff were there to review the findings. Arthur proudly presented his finding that the division's performance was being incorrectly stated due to the

manner in which the inventory of homes was being counted. According to him, the company was still incurring costs on inventory that had previously been recorded as sold.

What happened next resembled a sordid twist on a popular Disney film. In a manner reminiscent of Cruella de Ville, the head of the Relocation Division proceeded to turn loose a savage attack of

101 Damnations

His foray into the four letter world went so far as to double the X-rated vocabulary of everyone in the room.

Despite the merits of his arguments, Arthur was blown away by the winds of fury that he unexpectedly unleashed upon himself and his boss. In order to salvage the situation, Arthur's boss was forced to roll over on the issue. The defeat was chalked up to Arthur's apparent lack of diplomacy in dealing with higher ups in the organization. All that Arthur could do was beat an infamous retreat back to sanctuary - and obscurity.

Arthur's debacle sent a message to all of the other p.o.o.p.'s floating around the organization. The message, which dangled ominously from the heavy metal chain of command, read:

USURP, U PAY

In other words, if you ever get caught trying to pull a politician's platform out from under them, you will find yourself in one of two very awkward situations - either bent over, or on your knees. In these rather vulnerable positions, an experienced politician can make sure you live to regret it for a very long time.

Anyone brave enough to question the goings-on in a politico's business should first heed the following storm warning that will promptly enter their immediate forecast: