

Media Article



Vocational Guidance Services

Warfare in the workplace

There is an old saying that when two elephants fight it is the grass that suffers; and so it is with office warfare. My best advice would be to stand well away from any major office politics or in-house battles for supremacy. It is amazing how much work time can get lost from the petty personal power play and personality clashes most workplaces suffer from.

Much of this originates due to different work styles, mistrust, jealousy or communication breakdown. Before you know it the lines have been drawn and the battles begun! So how can you, as a by-stander, act the peacekeeping role, if need be?

The first tip would be to definitely try to 'nip it in the bud'; resolve the issue immediately otherwise a simple misunderstanding can be blown out of all proportion. So, although your natural instinct would be to shy away, you should try to talk to both parties involved to understand the problem and open up communication. Make it clear (and make sure) that you are a neutral party who simply wants to resolve what is not an acceptable state of affairs.

One of the greatest skills you will need in this scenario is to be an excellent listener, with the ability to put yourself into the other person's shoes. Often there are more than two sides to every story, and you had better be able to empathize and find a middle ground.

Even when you are one of the 'warring parties' remember the situation will affect both your jobs if left to get out of hand, so no matter what you think (i.e. it is not my fault – it is their fault) in reality it is your responsibility as well to seek a solution.

If you cannot get the two parties to communicate or compromise, you might need to alert the manager to the issue (without pointing fingers either way) so that they can get the team back on track. If the opposing parties do agree to meet and talk things through, then make sure that a resolution or 'action plan' is passed and followed up to ensure the issue does not raise its ugly head again.

Some office wars can start when wrongly blamed for something you have, or have not done. In this situation it is important to stay calm and explain logically how things stand from your point of view. Do not jump into the trap of adopting an aggressive or defensive stance, as this will just add fuel to fires. If need be, request an appointment with your manager and go prepared with lots of facts to prove your point. The more level headed and factual you come across in such situations will be picked upon as a positive pointer for your overall professionalism. The worst you can do is get all emotional; you'll regret it later.

In the long run, most office battles blow over and new topics of discussion take their place. What you have to remember, though, is that it is no use bearing grudges, and it is important to behave normally with all concerned in the future; letting by-gones be by-gones.

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