



Unwritten Rules

What You Don't Know Can Hurt Your Career

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What are Unwritten Rules??

- ◆ **“Work hard, keep your mouth shut, and answer your mail.”**
 - ◆ Thomas J. Pendergast
- ◆ **“The first rule of holes: when you’re in one, stop digging.”**
 - ◆ Molly Ivins
- ◆ **“If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs, it’s just possible you haven’t grasped the situation.”**
 - ◆ Jean Kerr



About Catalyst

Dual mission:

- To enable professional women to achieve their maximum **potential**
- To help employers capitalize fully on the **talents of all** employees

Work to achieve through:

- ✓ Research
 - ✓ Advisory Services
 - ✓ Corporate Board Placement
 - ✓ Annual Catalyst Award
 - ✓ Books, Publications, and Speeches

Unwritten Rules in the Office





Context of the Study: Exploring the Unwritten Rules

- ◆ **Rules to Advancement: Realities**
 - ◆ Not conveyed as consistently as formalized work competencies
 - ◆ Not equally accessible to all employees.
 - ◆ Networking, mentoring
 - ◆ “Old” unwritten rules difficult to change, even when policies and procedures have



Catalyst Study Findings: Types of Unwritten Rules

- ◆ ***Behaviors and individual skills***
 - ◆ Build **relationships** (networks, mentors)
 - ◆ Make yourself and your work **visible**
 - ◆ **Communicate** effectively, ask for feedback
 - ◆ Play **politics**
 - ◆ Develop a career **plan**



Findings: Types of Unwritten Rules

Build relationships (networks, mentors)

“Building relationships is key . . . [connect] with people inside and outside the company, instead of just doing the work.”

Visibility

“Seek out more assignments and projects and be there for the company . . . become involved.”



Findings: Types of Unwritten Rules

Communicate well, ask for feedback

“Tell them what you are interested in doing next. Because if you don’t speak up, no one will know.”

Play politics

“Negotiate, learn how to play the game.”

Develop a career plan

“Build on a variety of experiences, including skills that you can transfer.”

Discussion: Making the Implicit, Explicit



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Writing the Rules...

- ◆ What three unwritten rules have had the greatest impact upon your career?
- ◆ How did these particular unwritten rules help or hinder your career?
- ◆ Do you believe that your gender had an impact on how these unwritten rules played out? If so, in what way?
- ◆ In light of your experience, what advice would you offer someone just beginning their career?



Findings: Learning Unwritten Rules

- ◆ **Learning Unwritten Rules**
 - ◆ Through informal **networks**, mentors
 - ◆ **Observing** others and how things get done
 - ◆ **Asking** for information and/or feedback
 - ◆ By **trial and error**, figuring out what works and what doesn't work



Findings: Learning the Unwritten Rules

Informal networks, mentors

“I had a couple of excellent mentors . . . They shared their observations of how I am perceived.”

Observation

“You can learn what to do and what not to do by looking at your boss and peers who get ahead.”

Ask

“Discuss the topic [of advancement], ask people if it’s the right way . . . Participate in coaching . . .”



What Leaders and Companies Can Do ?

- ◆ Programs and practices
 - ◆ *"Career development has become more formalized, [including] new competencies and skills that people need"*
- ◆ Organizational culture
 - ◆ *"[Promote] storytelling . . . Let employees know what the organization is about, and where you're going."*
- ◆ Individual leaders and employees
 - ◆ *"As a manager I try to be very transparent. If someone comes into my group I have a little speech . . . What to expect from me, what I expect from you."*



We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them."

◆ Albert Einstein