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How To Handle Favoritism In The Workplace: 10 Tips For Employees And Bosses To Build A Better Team

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It's never fun to think your boss is playing favorites (particularly when that favorite is NOT you), but we've got the expert opinion on how to handle the situation with dignity and class. Don't let someone else's performance get in the way of your career success! Here's how best to deal with favoritism in the workplace.

Favoritism in the office isn't a good thing, for anyone involved. It's harmful for the boss, the boss' pet and all the other employees in the office, and it creates an atmosphere that is no fun to work in.

We spoke with [Roy Cohen](#), career coach and author of [The Wall Street Professional's Survival Guide](#), about how employees and bosses alike can alleviate a feeling of favoritism at work and promote a cohesive, productive team spirit.

Roy agrees with us when we say that favoritism is no fun in the workplace. "It establishes a precedent that no matter how hard you work, it won't make a difference," Roy says. "If I'm thinking that my colleague has a special relationship with the boss, and they're getting treated better than me, they're getting better assignments or more money, and they don't have to work as hard, then I'm just going to be angry. When I'm angry as an employee, I lose morale; I'm less committed to the success of the organization. I'm less committed to your success as a manager."

Favoritism can lead not only to lower morale, but lower productivity and a higher turnover rate as employees get fed up with the office atmosphere. To get things back on track and make sure the entire team is working together, Roy's given us all the tips for employees and managers alike to help alleviate a feeling of favoritism in the workplace.



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1. Make sure you're not just jealous

Maybe you feel there's a bit of favoritism going on in the office around you. Before labeling someone else as the boss' pet, take a good, hard look at yourself. Is it really favoritism, or are you falling prey to a bit of envy? Is your coworker more qualified and harder working (and are you starting to feel the stress)?

"The fact is we are often willing to externalize or to blame when in fact," Roy says, "we have to take responsibility for what we may or may not be doing to promote our success. I always encourage folks first and foremost to think about what may be producing a situation before we point fingers."

"Figure out where in our own toolkit we need to address what may be a deficit in skills or attitude or experience. That's the very first step," Roy recommends.

If you really are jealous, figure out why! More likely than not, you can up your game, give it your all, and kick that jealousy to the curb.

2. Speak to the boss

If you're working as hard as you can and really do see a bit of favoritism going on, you may want to make a point to talk with your boss - but not to tattle or berate!

"I might speak to my boss if I felt like there was some favoritism going on and ask about my progress," Roy says, "what I would need to do to be viewed as more effective, as being able to contribute more, and pointing out some of the great stuff I've done. But never ever point fingers."

Your focus should first and foremost be on your career success and what you can do to be the best you can be. As Roy says, "The conversation should always be about you and what you can do to get ahead."



3. Get yourself a mentor.

Mentors are key in nearly every aspect of promoting your career, even when dealing with workplace favoritism! Try identifying a mentor in your office who can not only give you solid career advice, but also be your third party witness to what may or may not be favoritism.

"A mentor can serve as a sounding board and can also provide you with insight that is more objective," Roy says. "A mentor can also serve as an advocate, if you in fact are in a situation where there is some favoritism. So it allows you then to level the playing field."

Now you've got someone on your side to help build you up too!

4. Don't become complacent or smug.

If you think you may be the boss' fave employee (and are getting special treatment), don't let the extra attention go to your head!

"We live and work in a world where there's constant change," Roy reminds us, "and that change can happen in the blink of an eye. So know that the situation will not last forever. Your boss may change jobs. Your boss may fall out of favor with his/her manager, or you may be replaced by the new flavor of the day. Remember that boss' who have favorites are just as likely to replace their favorites. We have to be very careful that we don't get smug and lazy and presume that we are in a situation which is going to continue to exist forever."

Remember that you must always work hard to stay on top. Don't trust anyone but yourself to get you there!

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5. Manage your reputation.

While your boss may view you as a model employee, your coworkers may start to feel the envy, or even begin to seriously dislike you.

"If you are viewed as your boss' pet by everyone, they will start to see you as possibly less competent and assume that you only got this far because of your relationship with your boss," Roy warns. "Or that maybe you are your boss' favorite because you've done some things that they're not willing to do, and that's when it gets messy."

Uh oh, it is never a good time in your career to deal with nasty rumors! You may feel inclined to avoid anyone giving you the stink-eye in the office, but instead, buck up your courage and make nice with them. Pay attention to them and make small talk, so they can begin to see you as a genuine person: not just your boss' little pet.

"So what I always recommend to folks is, reach out to other folks, your peers, your other managers, so that you're able to redefine yourself not as an extension of your boss, but as an independent entity, and as a nice person," Roy says.

Also, make sure that you earn each and every bit of praise you're receiving. If someone criticizes you about being lauded by your boss, show them all your fabulous work that's earned it.

6. Share the love generously.

"What I would also do, if I were the boss' pet, I would express my gratitude to my boss, but I would also share generously in my success with others," Roy says.

If your boss praises you, be sure to point out all the other people in the office who helped make the project such a hit.

"You're demonstrating both to your peers and to your boss that you're not greedy," Roy continues. "What you're also doing is showing your peers that even if your boss is trying to treat you as the favorite, you're not allowing that to be the way you view the situation."

Again, this will help ensure that it's not just your boss who sees you as a valuable employee, but your peers as well.

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7. Point out the potential of others.

Being the boss' fave employee can have its downsides too! You are the only person in the office they trust to handle all those really tough jobs, even when others may be just as qualified. Take this time to not only spread the love, but spread the work.

"When a key project is being staffed," Roy suggests, "make sure that your boss is aware of everyone else's potential to contribute. When you're generous, you only enhance your reputation, you never damage it."

This gives your coworkers a chance to show their stuff too. They'll appreciate the chance to show how qualified they are, and you'll have a little load off your shoulders. It won't hurt your standing with the boss either!

"It enhances any feeling your boss may have, because then you're also helping your boss to see that there may be other people in the group who have the potential to contribute," Roy says.



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8. Get feedback from your team.

As a boss, it is especially important that you don't play favorites, and one of the best ways to make sure you have the right atmosphere in your office is to ask your team for a bit of feedback. This way, your employees will feel that they have a voice, not just your favorite.

However, you don't have to take every bit of advice to heart...Only you can be the judge of how best to run a successful office. "That doesn't mean you need to change," Roy adds. "It just means that these may be issues that have been identified by some of the people who work for you or with you, and recognizing that some of them may not be entitled to provide feedback but this is still how they feel."

"Sometimes, lazy people will be incredibly critical," Roy admits. "Feedback is good. We don't have to do anything about that feedback. The action of getting it may be sufficient to make people think you are at least committed to wanting to provide a fair working environment."

9. Mix things up.

It's never a bad thing to change up the routine a little bit! Try delegating work differently every once in a while.

"When it comes to how you work with folks, mix it up a little bit," Roy suggests. "If you always compliment the same employee or give that individual the best assignments, why don't you see how that employee does when the assignment isn't so good and give somebody else an opportunity to work on something that may be interesting."

"It will either further reinforce your belief that the weaker employee is really weak," Roy says, "or it will show that maybe the person that is your pet is not so good when the assignment isn't so interesting. It's very important information you can use in terms of developing the folks who work for you."

Who knows, maybe your fave employee isn't as well-rounded as you assumed, and you can now help them become an even greater asset to the company. In that case, you can play on your employees' strengths and build an even stronger team!



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10. Share your (and their) time equally.

"Sometimes, we may not even realize it, we don't share our time equally with individuals, for any of a variety of reasons," Roy says.

Maybe you're not too fond of one of your team members; perhaps they are annoying or just rub you the wrong way. Either way, you have to play nice for a strong and happy workspace!

"You've got to at least give the impression that you're listening and paying attention to people and participating with people in a way that makes them feel like they are being treated like equals with each other, not with you but among their peers," Roy says.

"If the person who is a favorite is a favorite for all of the right reasons (they work hard, harder than everyone else, they deserve to be treated in a way that recognizes their performance), then make sure that they're given the right opportunities with other people, so other people can recognize their talent too," Roy recommends.

As Roy says, "Once we step back and allow other people to do the heavy lifting, then we can't be accused of playing favorites," Roy says.

Still, it's all about building a strong team and a comfortable office, so as a boss, make sure you're doing all you can to help each and every employee feel equal and valuable.

How do you deal with favoritism in the office? Tweet us [@wewomenUSA!](#)

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