

What Would Machiavelli Do? Tips for Job Success

Dill, Kathryn . Wall Street Journal , Eastern edition; New York, N.Y. [New York, N.Y]. 25 Oct 2021: A.11 .

[ProQuest document link](#)

FULL TEXT

People aiming for higher pay or a promotion may find winning career advice in a 500-year-old treatise that is often assigned reading for college freshmen.

That's the argument of a new book by Stacey Vanek Smith, whose "Machiavelli for Women: Defend Your Worth, Grow Your Ambition, and Win the Workplace" instructs readers on how to gain and hold power in a newly conquered land, or in this case, the modern office. Seeking new ideas for closing racial and gender pay gaps at work, Ms. Smith revisited "The Prince" and says she found Niccolo Machiavelli's advice – to observe what works and then do it – was freeing.

The Italian diplomat who navigated the political hierarchy of 16th-century Florence has surprisingly relevant insight for professional women – and men, too. "He took emotion and morality out of the situation and examined it like a chessboard," she said.

Not all of Machiavelli's moves apply. (Ms. Smith doesn't recommend, as Machiavelli did, you kill the family of a vanquished foe to avoid retaliation plots.) But many other strategies described in "The Prince" can be useful, she says.

In an interview, Ms. Smith explained ways workers can use Machiavelli's lessons to their advantage. Edited excerpts:

WSJ: What's an example of a time you would have applied Machiavelli's advice to your career?

A: I found out that a male colleague who had fewer years of experience and was producing about the same amount that I was was making significantly more money – like \$20,000 a year more – than I was. I went into my boss's office with no plan and started crying. It was the worst possible approach.

If I had been more Machiavellian, I would have thought, "How can I use this information?" I would've gone in with a plan and said, "Listen, I know how much my colleague's being paid. Obviously my pay needs to match that, given my years of experience." I would've seen it more as an opportunity than just a gut punch.

WSJ: People tend to associate Machiavelli with ruthlessness. You reject that dimension of his philosophy.

A: Machiavelli is definitely associated with evil, but as I was reading "The Prince," the thing that struck me was that it wasn't malicious. Ruthless, maybe. He just analyzed everything. "This is not a great reality. But if you're in it, what do you do?"

WSJ: Are there wrong ways to apply these principles?

A: Yes. The trickiest thing about writing the book was that some of the advice feels very outdated. One piece of advice [in the book] is to smile in a job interview if you're a woman, people will respond to you better. That of course doesn't mean you have to smile, it's a recommendation.

But there comes a point when your identity is starting to get a little compromised and I would tell people you just have to see what feels OK for you. One of the people I talked to for the book, Dr. Tina Opie, found that when you act in a way that's not authentic, you do take a hit. It does damage to you personally and emotionally.

WSJ: How assertive should you be when you're still a job candidate?

A: The way in which you are assertive is the key. Think about what your power is versus the company's power. Are there millions of people lined up to take your job? Do you have very rarefied skills? It always comes down to getting

as much data as possible. When you present data like that, it's seen as less assertive and more like, "I've done my homework."

There's a lot of research that shows that if you introduce new elements into a negotiation instead of having it be a face-off about one thing, it's much more likely to be successful. "I want \$75,000, but I want this title. I'd really love to work on this project. I'd really love to work from home on Fridays." It pulls negotiation out of the emotional zone and into a much more analytical, conversational, more Machiavellian place.

WSJ: The book focuses on women, but can men use this advice?

A: The workplace is not easy for anyone. A lot of men I have talked to have enormous amounts of anxiety around negotiating. It's applicable to anybody who struggles with asking for more for themselves.

WSJ: What's the most important message from the book for job seekers right now?

A: In the 15 years that I have been covering the economy, I don't think I've ever seen a period where workers had this much power. Companies are very eager to keep workers or hire them away. This could be a really important moment for people to ask for situations that will make them happy, in addition to money and title.

One of the things that's kept so many women on the sidelines is not being able to balance child care and work.

Now that the stigma around remote work is so much less, it's a perfect moment for people to ask for whatever will make the job they want possible.

Credit: By Kathryn Dill

DETAILS

Subject:	Nonfiction; Books; Career development planning
Business indexing term:	Subject: Career development planning; Industry: 61143 : Professional and Management Development Training
People:	Smith, Stacey Vanek
Classification:	61143: Professional and Management Development Training
Publication title:	Wall Street Journal, Eastern edition; New York, N.Y.
First page:	A.11
Publication year:	2021
Publication date:	Oct 25, 2021
Section:	PERSONAL JOURNAL
Publisher:	Dow Jones & Company Inc
Place of publication:	New York, N.Y.
Country of publication:	United States, New York, N.Y.
Publication subject:	Business And Economics--Banking And Finance
ISSN:	00999660

Source type:	Newspaper
Language of publication:	English
Document type:	Interview
ProQuest document ID:	2585255695
Document URL:	https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/what-would-machiavelli-do-tips-job-success/docview/2585255695/se-2?accountid=44910
Copyright:	Copyright 2021 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved.
Last updated:	2021-10-27
Database:	U.S. Major Dailies

Database copyright © 2021 ProQuest LLC. All rights reserved.

[Terms and Conditions](#) [Contact ProQuest](#)