

# Sucking up to the boss may move you up and keep you healthy

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Savvy career minded individuals have known for some time that ingratiating oneself to the boss and others – perhaps more commonly known as 'sucking up' – can help move them up the corporate ladder more quickly. However, a recent study published in the *Journal of Management Studies* suggests that politically savvy professionals who use ingratiation as a career aid may also avoid the psychological distress that comes to others who are less cunning about their workplace behavior.

This new research shows that when politically savvy professionals use the coping skill of ingratiation, they may neutralize ostracism and other [psychological distress](#) that other less savvy individuals have to cope with in the workplace. Ostracized employees experience more job tension, emotional exhaustion and depressed mood at work.

Workplace ostracism—an adult form of bullying—is often described as an individual's belief that they are ignored or excluded by superiors or colleagues in the workplace. A 2005 survey of 262 full-time employees found that over a five-year period, 66% of respondents felt they were systematically ignored by colleagues, and 29% reported that other people intentionally left the area when they entered. Previous studies have shown that ostracism is an interpersonal stressor that can lead to psychological distress, and distress in the workplace is strongly linked to life distress, employee turnover, and poor physical health.

In the present study, researchers examined the relationship between workplace ostracism and employee psychological distress, with a focus

on moderating effects of ingratiation and political skill. The research team surveyed employees from two oil and gas companies in China, with 215 employees providing responses. "Our data confirmed that workplace ostracism was positively related to psychological distress," explains Ho Kwong Kwan one of the study's authors. "We found that ingratiation neutralized the relationship between workplace ostracism and psychological distress when used by employees with a high level of political skill, but exacerbated the association when ingratiation was used by employees with low political savvy."

While the path to success and health may appear to come from sucking up, the authors of the study have a better suggestion. They say that organizations should create a culture that discourages workplace ostracism by provide training to managers and [employees](#), which enhances self-esteem, encourages effective problem solving techniques, and promotes the development of political skills.

**More information:** "Coping with Workplace Ostracism: The Roles of Ingratiation and Political Skill in Employee Psychological Distress." Long-Zeng Wu, Frederick Hong-kit Yim, Ho Kwong Kwan, Xiaomeng Zhang. *Journal of Management Studies*; Published Online: June 8, 2011 ([DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-6486.2011.01017.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.2011.01017.x)).

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