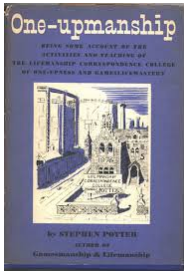


# Biz One-Upmanship 101

by Con Chapman

Stephen Potter, a British humorist who has undeservedly faded into obscurity, is the father of "one-upmanship," a strategem for besting an opponent--somewhat unfairly--without actually cheating.



One accomplishes this by throwing an opponent off his game without violating any rule. Thus, when playing pool, the accomplished one-upsmen doesn't cough or stand in the field of vision of an opponent who is lining up a shot, but corrects *others* in the room for talking too loud or disturbing the shooter.



*"Stop crumpling the carbon paper!"*

In these perilous times, when a layoff could strike you just as easily as the fellow in the next cubicle, it is important that you develop and maintain your office one-upmanship skills if you are to survive in the dog-eat-dog, piranha-filled tank that is today's office environment and pet store. After all, if one of you is going to end up sleeping in bus stations and diving into dumpsters for leftover moo goo gai pan, it might as well be him.



*"Nobody told you about your going-away party? My bad!"*

Here are some practical applications of one-upsmanship gathered over my white-collar career that spans 31 years, 7 months and 27 days, not that I'm counting or anything.

### *The Memo-to-File Guy*

**The Toxic Memo to the File.** This trick was pulled on me by a colleague in the 1980's, a young man with two middle names--I'll call him James A. K. Runnerson--that created a British effect that went well with his horn-rimmed glasses and bow tie.

"Say," he'd say as he sauntered into your office. "Do you remember the Rule in Dumpor's Case from law school?"

"Let me see," you'd say. "Was that in Contracts?"

"No, no--you're thinking of Twyne's Case. Dumpor's Case had something to do with pretermitted heirs, or estates in tail, or accretion of tidal lands."

"Sounds vaguely familiar, but I can't quite put my finger on it."



*Vaguely disturbing but irrelevant picture of backyard weightlifters.*

"Right, right," he'd say thoughtfully, rubbing his chin. "Just thought you might know. Thanks."

Two years later, after the guy left the firm and I was assigned to one of his cases, I was flipping through the file and came across the following:

TO: File

FROM: James A. K. Runnerson

RE: Rule in Dumpor's Case

Spoke to Chapman today regarding the Rule in Dumpor's Case, a critical principle in the law governing the assignability of real estate leases. He indicated that he knew nothing--absolutely nothing!--about it.



**The Worrisome Good Word.** Timing is critical for the successful use of this technique. You should ideally be headed out the door on your way to vacation, so that further conversation is cut off and your competitor is left to stew in his own foul juices while you're away. You stop in to the office, your bags packed, and on your way out, make a special point of saying farewell to your colleague. "Hey," you whisper confidentially as you're about to walk away, "I

don't care *what* the Board of Directors says--I think you're doing okay. See ya!"

The temptation, since you're headed off for fun in the sun, is to become too enthusiastic and say "you're doing great," but this approach isn't fair; by over-praising, you give someone a false sense of security that may cause them to pass up the buyout offer that is their last, best hope of avoiding a life on the streets.

*Sparsely-attended business ethics symposium.*

**Ethical Considerations.** Given the heightened sensitivity to schemes to defraud widows and orphans out of their life savings, it is essential that businesses operate in a transparent and ethical manner in all aspects of their operations. Say you and another Assistant Vice President are competing for the promotion to a single Second Vice President slot. You drop down to her office and, after chatting about kids and the weather, she needs to take a call. You excuse yourself and, just as you close her door, say in a stage whisper that can be heard all the way down to Human Resources, "WE COULD DO THAT, SHARLENE, BUT IT WOULDN'T BE ETHICAL."

*"Honey, somebody at your office sent this to me. Do you like it?"*

**The Nuclear Option.** If all else fails and you see your competitor "Jim" about to snag a big raise for closing the Farquahr Fastener deal, drop by your local Victoria's Secret outlet for final mark-downs on intimate apparel. Pick out something slinky and send it to the boss's wife with a card saying "I'll never forget our 'scavenger hunt' together at last summer's company picnic--Jim."

And for Jim? Change-of-address cards from the US Postal Service make a great going-away gift!

*Available in Kindle format on amazon.com as part of the collection "Take My Advice--I Wasn't Using it Anyway."*

