

Gaining Influence in Your Career

January 17, 2018

In the wildly popular musical *Hamilton*, by [Lin-Manuel Miranda](#), one of the highlights is a number sung by Aaron Burr, titled “The Room Where It Happens.” In it, Burr bemoans the fact that Alexander Hamilton is more of a political insider than he is, having participated in a closed-door meeting with Thomas Jefferson and James Madison to move the capital city in exchange for the support of Hamilton’s financial system (the Compromise of 1790). This number resonates with the audience because of its public acknowledgment that private conversations and deals have always been a part of politics and commerce.

—

Why it is vital to get in the room where it happens?

We both have colleagues who are fond of saying, “I’m just not political,” used as both a self-compliment (“politics” being considered a negative) and a grudging observation that others are generally more aware of and effective at navigating organizational politics. To those colleagues, the “room where it happens” connotes shady deals made in a cigar-filled back room.

But the truth is that no organization makes all its decisions in public forums. There may be public discussion, but the final decision must be made by a smaller decision group or even an individual leader, after taking wide input into account. Based on human and financial resource constraints, only some of the many projects a university hopes to complete can be prioritized and funded. That is a reality. And it is equally a reality that being able to influence decision makers consistently and effectively is part of a professional’s role.