

BAMBIER

per's

DRESS
O THRILL



MADONNA

HOW TO SURVIVE BACKSTABBING

Getting stabbed in the back can happen to anyone—but as movie producer Lynda Obst knows, beating foes at their own game can be devilishly fun



I LEARNED the hard way decades ago that when someone stabs you in the back, reacting before you think can start a feud. In Hollywood, where one can easily be stabbed twice before lunch and possibly while driving and sleeping, feuding could turn into a full-time job.

I remember my first time being backstabbed vividly. I walked into my office and found a new colleague riffling through my files. Stunned, I asked what he was doing. "Nothing," he said and walked out. I looked all over the office for a script an agent had submitted for consideration at that morning's "read" meeting, at which both my colleague and I, as development execs, were due to present projects to the boss—but it was nowhere to be found. Fortunately I liked the idea enough that I knew the pitch by heart, so I figured it was no big deal.

In the meeting, File Cabinet Sneak spoke before me and immediately began hyping the script that he said he was "slipped" over the weekend. I sat there aghast as he pitched my script. I heard our boss say, "Good slip. Big idea. And no one else has it?" At this point I realized I would look like a shrew if I held up the meeting to defend myself. So I quietly hyperventilated—and said nothing.

However, over the years I've acquired an artillery of useful strategies for dealing with backstabbers. Here's what to do—and what not to do—when you're stabbed in the back. **WHAT NOT TO DO:** Do not act like you are in the Bolshoi Ballet and throw acid in the stabber's face. Do not leave any traceable scars. Do not obsess. Do not take steps that may lead to your arrest. Do not imagine you are in *Jerry Maguire* and make a big scene in the office, expecting your coworkers to cheer. They won't; they'll wonder if you're bipolar.

WHAT TO DO: Find another outlet for your fury. Take an exercise class, though not slow yoga—too much potential to obsess. Power yoga, cross-training, and Spinning are good; so is boxing—or any other sport that involves punching. You need to break a sweat and generate endorphins. Next, have a few drinks with your besties, and vent. Let it out; let it go. Post-hangover, move into the strategy- and perspective-building period.

I do this via a spycraft technique called "walking back the cat," in which you trace the sequence of events that led up to the stabbing.

Did you do something to cause this? Is this person gunning for your job/beau/BFF? Or is the stabber just a teeny little wiener aiming to bring you down? This is critical to distinguish, as you can't waste ammo on teeny little wieners.

Finally, decide what you're going to do about it. When you're back at work, strategic choices include the following: (1) Ice him. Stab him back with every stare. It says "Game on." This starts a feud. It's the most dangerous tactic, but if you're a Machiavellian fighter it can be fun. (2) If you're not the type of person who delights in open warfare, take a subder approach. Pretend you can't see him, as if he's not there. I call this a "Loretta," after the famously nearsighted Loretta Young. The Loretta tends to do one of two things: It puts you in a power position—by making believe you don't care, you confuse the stabber (and if you maintain it long enough, it can defuse a feud entirely because by then you really don't care about it). Or it can incite Stabber to additional acts of sabotage; nothing irritates a crazy person like being ignored. (3) Confront the stabber with kindness and confusion: Approach with a puzzled look and say, "Do you have any idea who could have sent me the wrong info? I know it wasn't you—help me sort it out?" But don't be undone by your own graciousness; you will never forget being stabbed in the back. Instead, take a tip from my mogul brother, who is a department head at a major talent agency. When asked what he does when he gets stabbed in the back, he answered sagely, "I take note." As the proverb says, If you stand by the river long enough, the body of your enemy will pass by. ■

Lynda Obst's memoir Sleepless in Hollywood is out now