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APROPOS

by Tina Darmohray

apropos

I'll Scratch Your Back . . .

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Tina Darmohray, co-editor of *;login:*, is a computer security and networking consultant. She was a founding member of SAGE. She is currently a Director of USENIX.

<tmd@usenix.org>

A few years ago I wrote an article entitled "Ready, Set, No?" in which I outlined things that I thought a good manager does for – and doesn't do to – their employees. Apparently it struck a chord with many readers, since I continue to receive comments about it.

Initially, I was surprised at the response, but it just underscores that most of us want a few very similar things from our managers. We want our managers to set the tone for the work environment. They should provide leadership, but also mentoring and learning opportunities to let the employees know that they are valued today, and will be in the future as well. A savvy manager will figure out what matters most to each employee and, wherever possible, make things like work assignments, office arrangements, and face-time hours accommodate those preferences. Managers shouldn't set their employees up to fail with unrealistic workloads, deadlines, or expectations. And when politics, heavy workloads, or other office snafus inevitably rear their ugly head, managers who support their employees, run interference for them, or simply push back a little, will gain employees' undying loyalty and their willingness to go the extra mile – after all, "s/he did it for me."

What about the individual contributor? Are we all created equal? Or can our performance in the workplace vary, and if so, what makes a good worker? I asked a few friends of mine about this and found that, just like managers, there are soft skills that make individuals better to work with and land them consistently on the top of the heap among peers and managers alike.

Whenever the opportunity presents itself to make your boss or co-workers look good, do so! This has multiple payoffs. You'll be rewarded for your individual contribution, but you'll also be recognized for the part you play in giving credit to others. There is usually ample praise to go around, so make yourself look good by making others look good too.

If you want your technical prowess to really shine, share it with others! Those employees who inform others about newsworthy items, teach about and document what they're working on, and mentor peers are much more highly valued than those who don't. If you have a clue, don't keep it to yourself! Teaching and mentoring are forms of leadership and are often rewarded come advancement time.

If you see the wreck coming, telegraph the information ahead of time. No one likes to be the bearer of bad news, but if you feel your manager is going to be blindsided, it's better to give an in-private "heads-up" than let them be publicly caught off guard. No matter how bad the news, they'll appreciate hearing it and appreciate you for giving it.

There's more to most business decisions than simply technical input. Managers are tasked with considering a larger picture, such as risk assessment, profitability, and return on investment. Employees should provide their managers with all the technical information necessary for these big-picture decisions and be willing to entertain give-and-take discussions that involve non-technical considerations. Employees who demonstrate the ability to see the whole picture will be called upon more often for advice, and will ultimately be in a better position to have it adopted.

We expect a lot of our managers, but it's not a one-way street. Make your manager look good, share a clue, and get behind the big picture. The sooner you get on board with these soft skills, the sooner you'll become that all-around employee who has their manager's ear.