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NATIONAL SECURITY AGENCY
CENTRAL SECURITY SERVICE
FORT GEORGE G. MEADE, MARYLAND 20755-6000

FOIA Case: 77070B
28 August 2014

This is a final response to your Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request of 9 March 2014 for "A copy of each of the ASK ZELDA columns that appeared in the NSA SID Today internal newsletter between January 1, 2010 and the present." Since processing fees were minimal, no fees were assessed. A copy of your request is enclosed. Your request has been processed under the FOIA, and the documents you requested are enclosed. Four additional documents were located in a search for subsequent FOIA request, and those are also included as a courtesy. Certain information, however, has been deleted from the enclosures.

The names of NSA/CSS employees have been deleted from the enclosures. This information is exempt from disclosure pursuant to the third exemption of the FOIA, which provides for the withholding of information specifically protected from disclosure by statute. The specific statute applicable in this case is Section 6, Public Law 86-36 (50 U.S. Code 3605, formerly 50 U.S. Code 402 note).

The Initial Denial Authority for NSA information is the Associate Director for Policy and Records, David J. Sherman. Since these deletions may be construed as a partial denial of your request, you are hereby advised of this Agency's appeal procedures. Any person denied access to information may file an appeal to the NSA/CSS Freedom of Information Act Appeal Authority. The appeal must be postmarked no later than 60 calendar days from the date of the initial denial letter. The appeal shall be in writing addressed to the NSA/CSS FOIA Appeal Authority (DJ4), National Security Agency, 9800 Savage Road STE 6248, Fort George G. Meade, MD 20755-6248. The appeal shall reference the initial denial of access and shall contain, in sufficient detail and particularity, the grounds upon which the requester believes release of the information is

required. The NSA/CSS Appeal Authority will endeavor to respond to the appeal within 20 working days after receipt, absent any unusual circumstances.

For your information, these documents will be posted to NSA.gov in the near future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Pamela N. Phillips". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Pamela" being more prominent than the last name "Phillips".

PAMELA N. PHILLIPS
Chief
FOIA/PA Office

Encls:
a/s

(U) Ask Zelda: Decibels Driving Me Batty

FROM: 'Zelda,' Dispenser of Advice for SIGINTers on Workplace Issues

Run Date: 02/07/2011

(U) Editor's note: Today Zelda tackles the tricky problem of dealing with vociferous office mates. Her column is unclassified in its entirety.



Dear Readers,

Is too much sound causing you fury? I have received several inquiries for advice about noise issues: working in close quarters with a loud talker, not being able to concentrate, overhearing embarrassing conversations, and the like. Here's what I have to say (quietly!) about the subject.

Everyone knows it can get pretty noisy in the office, especially if you work on a watch floor, in an organization with low partitions or the open-space architecture, or if you have a customer-oriented mission and deal with frequent phone calls or walk-ins. Here are some tips for peaceful co-existence.

Policing Yourself

- When conversing with a co-worker, act as if you're telling her something in confidence. Walk over to her desk or scootch your chair close to hers, and speak in subdued tones (as opposed to yelling across the room or over your cubicle).
- *Sit down* when carrying on a conversation -- sometimes that's enough to prevent your voice from carrying over the partition. You may even want to organize your workstation so that you're facing a wall when you're on the phone, to dampen the sound.
- For social discussions -- rehashing the football game, eating lunch with friends -- take that outside the office, if possible. The cafeteria or even the hallway provides a good place to have non-work-related chats without bothering office mates who are trying to concentrate.
- Be aware of your voice level on the phone -- especially when talking to someone on a cell phone (voices tend to rise due to poor signal quality) or to your gastroenterologist (*no one* wants to hear those details -- especially while they're eating lunch!).
- Above all, if you're holding a potentially sensitive discussion (such as a counseling session) with someone, hold it in a private office with the door closed or check to make sure no one else is around before you begin.

Policing Others

As people get excited or enthusiastic about a subject, the volume frequently increases. Some have voices that can be heard far and wide, even when they are speaking softly. They don't mean to be disruptive, so please be kind when approaching them.

- Try to ignore it for the short term. Keep a pair of ear plugs or head phones handy to slip on when the decibels rise. Often the conversation will be over quickly and you can resume your concentration.
- If the disruption continues, walk over to the person or group and **nicely** say something like, "You probably don't realize it but your voices carry." Often that's enough for them to sheepishly take it down a notch, apologize, and/or take the discussion elsewhere. If they apologize, be gracious. After all, you could be the next offender.
- If you are part of a discussion and notice it's getting loud, try lowering your voice significantly. We often unconsciously mimic the people we're interacting with, and this trick might encourage others in the conversation to lower theirs, as well. Alternatively, you could simply point out the rising noise level to the group and suggest either moving the discussion or toning it down.
- If workplace noise is a recurring problem that you have tried unsuccessfully to fix, enlist your supervisor's help. Perhaps your organization could set some rules for dealing with the noise, such as designating a private area for conversations of three or more people.
- If everyone in your organization has a good attitude about it, you could have a codeword or signal for when someone accidentally turns up the volume. A good-natured reminder to "use your indoor voice" or a silly paper "**cone of silence**" placed on someone's desk can get the message across in a fun way.
- When you hear the beginning of a sensitive conversation, let the speakers know immediately before it gets embarrassing for both you and them. You could clear your throat or shuffle some papers if they don't realize you're on the other side of the partition.
- Share your spaces with someone who has a booming voice? Bring up the subject in a respectful way. Let him know its affect on you: "I'm finding it hard to concentrate because your voice is very distinctive, and even though you're not intentionally talking loud, I hear everything you say." Ask him to help you come up with a solution to your mutual problem.

Use humor, tolerance, and tact, but take action before your frustration level reaches the boiling point and you blow your top like an annoyingly shrill teakettle.

Edda

(U) Ask Zelda: The Negative Supervisor

FROM: 'Zelda,' Dispenser of Advice for SIGINTers on Workplace Issues

Run Date: 04/04/2011

(U) Editor's note: The below column is entirely unclassified.



Dear Zelda,

My supervisor has a controlling personality and is condescending to the employees, but he shows a different side to management. Management believes he is just wonderful and wonders why people leave the organization, but doesn't seem to make the connection (i.e., that it's the supervisor). My supervisor continually puts me down and criticizes my work, but gives me just enough recommended training or guidance to make management believe he is doing his part. He's constantly negative, informs me I am incapable of performing the position and persistently suggests I find another position elsewhere. There is a wealth of knowledge to tap and learn from where I currently reside, I want to stay and persevere despite my Supervisor's negativity. Please help!

Signed,
frustrated and lost

Dear Frustrated,

You poor thing! It's commendable that you want to stay and persevere, despite all the opposition. My first suggestion to you is to get a mentor. A mentor -- a more senior person who is not in your chain of command -- will make a good sounding board and advisor for you on how to navigate the shark-infested waters of your current office. Meeting regularly with your mentor, you will be able to get more specific and ongoing advice than you will from this column. (See **SID's Mentoring website** to find upcoming mentoring activities if you don't already have a mentor.)

Meanwhile, let your supervisor know that you like the organization and want to do a good job. I know it's hard, but try not to take the criticism personally. Use it as an opportunity to improve, and ask for clarification so you can do the job right the next time. Most supervisors who see an employee is truly trying to hone his skills will be only too happy to guide him in the right direction.

Often valuable and constructive feedback comes in a distasteful form. For instance, I had a high school English teacher who was very mean to me (or so I thought). He constantly picked on me -- putting me on the spot when no one else raised their hand and marking up my papers (he seemed extra tough on me when grading our assignments). I was miserable. But by the end of the year, I was a much better writer and critical reader *because* he was so hard on me. To this day, I still remember what I learned in his class. If you can separate the message from the way it's delivered, you will be able to use constructive criticism to your advantage. Of course, this is difficult to do when someone's words are making you feel bad about yourself.

Make sure you fully explore and assimilate the training/guidance your boss does give you -- otherwise

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his belief that you are unteachable will be reinforced. Has he created an Individual Development Plan (IDP) and/or held career development discussions with you? If not, ask for such a meeting to map out what training you should have and to document your developmental needs and progress.

As for management's skewed opinion of your boss, unless they conduct exit interviews with those leaving the organization, there may not be much that you can do about correcting their impressions of him. Understand that mission results usually get upper management's attention more than how those results are obtained; so as long as your organization is productive, they may not care whose feelings get stomped on in the process.

Above all, keep a positive attitude and understand that some people just have a negative personality (see my previous column on **Dealing With a Downer**). Hopefully, as you become more proficient your boss will feel less of a need to be controlling.

Best of luck to you. It's hard enough dealing with one boss, but it sounds like you have two to deal with: Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde! Learn all you can from the people around you, seek guidance from a mentor, and by the time you are ready to move on to another position - working for just one boss - you'll be all the better for it.

Edits

(U) "Ask Zelda!": "Double Commuters" Attacked by Bear

FROM: "Zelda," Dispenser of Advice on Workplace Issues

Run Date: 04/05/2012

(U//FOUO) Editor's intro: This month's Zelda column isn't really about parking -- it's about how to respond when people are not polite. However, since the subject of parking is raised, I wanted to mention that updated advice on parking from I&L was published on *SIDtoday* recently (see it [here](#)). It recommends that **Big 4** employees park in the NBP316 garage if the airplane, Colony 7, and Bravo lots are full... (The below letter was written before this updated guidance was posted.) Now back to our column, which is unclassified in its entirety:



Dear Zelda,

This morning around 0930 while waiting with a number of other people for the shuttle in front of R&E a woman walking into the building addressed the group saying "I hope somebody parks in front of your driveway so you can't get into your house." We were all too dumbfounded to respond.

I normally work at the Big 4 complex, as do at least 3 of other people in the group. We had been lamenting the fact that we couldn't find parking in front of our buildings or in the airplane lot, or in the museum lot or in the Bravo lot, and how that added 30 to 40 minutes more to our commute AFTER we arrived on base. I don't think that this lady heard much of our conversation, but somehow the idea of people who didn't work at R&E parking there offended her deeply. How is one supposed to respond to such naked aggression at work? It's not like we wanted to drive around parking lots for 20+ minutes only to have to board a shuttle to get to work.

Signed,
Hoofing it to Headquarters

Dear Unhappy Hooper,

WHAT??!! I am appalled. This woman was obviously raised by bears. The parking situation sure brings out the worst in people. But I think you and the other "double commuters" responded correctly -- by not saying anything at all.

Naked aggression like that will not be calmed by defending yourself with an explanation of your exhaustive parking search. And if you "turn the other cheek" and wish the person a nice day, it will come off sounding sarcastic. Things will certainly escalate if you throw back a zinger, although it may make you and the others who were verbally attacked by her feel better. I'll bet that not even apologizing would make a difference. So there you have it. Silence is the only option.

One thing you can do is **manage your response**. Stay calm and don't let this stranger push your buttons. She may have behaved like a boor, but you don't have to stoop to her level.

If this had been someone you knew, or if she had stopped and expected a response, you might have

tried something like this. Say, "I'm sorry you're so upset.[1] I'm upset, too.[2]" Then briefly explain your search through various lots before finally parking in "hers." [3] Close by saying, "I hope something changes soon. This is frustrating **for all of us** who come in later than [fill in the time].[4]"

This will serve several purposes:

1. acknowledge her feelings,
2. establish rapport ("we're in this together"),
3. tell your side, and
4. reinforce rapport (without promising any action on your part).

Sadly, there seems to be an epidemic of people behaving badly nowadays. Even the cute little birds in our **video games** exhibit angry and aggressive behavior! Things have gotten so bad that NSA is launching a *Civility Matters* campaign this spring.* (Apparently people aren't learning good manners as a child anymore.) Look for coming announcements and events to learn what you can do to foster an atmosphere of courtesy and respect in the workplace. Ultimately, it's preferable to prevent aggressive behavior rather than figure out how to respond to it.

I only hope NSA's campaign is more successful than the "Choose Civility" project in Howard County, Maryland -- the goal of which is to position the county as a model of civility and to enhance respect, empathy, consideration and tolerance. I believe their campaign has been moderately effective; wherever you go in Howard County you can see green and white "Choose Civility" bumper stickers on the backs of minivans... right after they cut you off in traffic.

Zelda

(U) Notes:

* (~~U//FOUO~~) Editor's comment: An Agency-all about the civility campaign came out after Zelda penned the above, but before this column was posted. You can find it **here**.

(~~U//FOUO~~) Do you have thoughts on this topic? Post them on the **related Tapioca Pebble**.

(U) Standard disclaimer: "Zelda's" views are her own and do not represent the official views of the Associate Directorate for Corporate Leadership, Human Resources, SID, or any other NSA organization.

(U) "Ask Zelda!": Zelda Tackles a Tackler

FROM: "Zelda," Dispenser of Advice on Workplace Issues

Run Date: 07/02/2012

(U) The below article is unclassified in its entirety.



Dear Zelda,

What is the correct hallway etiquette and how do we teach it to the people who work here? Just yesterday I was walking down the hallway in OPS1 and was approached by the "pack." Stretched five across, the end person literally ran into me and knocked me into the wall. Since no apology ensued, I guess they didn't notice the 200 lb. woman they shoved out of the way. Almost as bad are the folks who block 1/2 to 3/4 of the hallway or a hall intersection doorway to discuss what they did over the weekend. Obviously the strategically placed seating is not working. Perhaps we can require

a class on common courtesy?

-- the Invisible Woman

Dear Invisible,

A required class on common courtesy would be a timely addition to NSA's "Civility Matters" campaign; but with the amount of mandatory training already levied on the workforce, I doubt it will come to pass.

I have noticed an increase in what I think of as "lane hijacking" -- whether it's taking up more than one's share of a hallway, blocking an entrance, or (my personal pet peeve) invading my space on a sidewalk or bike path. In the case of speeding bikers cutting into the oncoming pedestrian lane, this can even be quite dangerous! And usually it's due to groups of people so engrossed in socializing that they are seemingly unaware of their surroundings and don't realize they're about to plow into someone.

The Rules

For the record, the rules of hallway/sidewalk/bike path usage are the same as the rules of the road in the U.S.: **keep to the right** and **stay on your half** of the thoroughfare. If the hall is clear, it's fine to walk several across; but when someone is coming in the other direction, please drop back behind your companion(s) to allow the others to pass. Imagine a line down the middle of the hall/sidewalk, and keep to your side.

There is no excuse for running into someone and knocking them into the wall or off the sidewalk into the road... and **especially** for not apologizing, even if you were an offensive tackle in high school.

When carrying on a conversation with friends or colleagues while walking somewhere, be aware of your surroundings. If you are "over the line," step behind the others in your group well before you come abreast of the oncoming foot traffic. Get out of doorways or bottleneck positions if you must

congregate to discuss something. As the Invisible Woman pointed out, we have lovely new IKEA-style furniture in many of the common areas, just waiting for groups to plop down and have a discussion.

The Fix

Feeling invisible? Tired of being pushed around? You may be tempted to give lane hijackers a hip check into the bushes. Maybe if they're staring up at you from a hydrangea, they'll notice you. But then you'd be guilty of uncivil behavior, yourself.

Instead, you could try becoming visible to them by engaging the person about to run you down in conversation. Consider asking him the time or some other simple question to get him to notice you're there... or just call "heads up!"

My personal solution when I see an offensive line coming toward me is to simply stop in my tracks and brace myself. I have found that if I stand still, "the pack" manages to avoid me. I believe this has something to do with the fact that if you are moving, they expect **you** to get out of **their** way; but if you are stationary, like a tree, they know they have to go around you. Or, as in basketball, if someone is standing still and you plow into him, YOU are at fault. Now, if we could just get hall monitors at work to call a foul and assign a penalty...

Parting Thought

I hope one of these tips helps you shed your cloak of invisibility; otherwise, you could always single-handedly revive the 1980's trend of wearing massive shoulder pads, in an effort to protect yourself from tacklers.

Zelda

*Note to Pee-turbed: Regarding the NSA fragrance policy, you might try directing your question to **Disability Affairs**. (Zelda does not interpret policy.) Perhaps D64 can work with I&L to fix the issue you mentioned.*

(U) Ask Zelda!: Reining in a Chatterbox

FROM: "Zelda," Dispenser of Advice on Workplace Issues

Run Date: 03/05/2013

(U) The following article is unclassified in its entirety:



Dear Zelda,

I have a co-worker who loves to talk and talk and talk. He dominates meetings and has to speak his mind at every turn. Many people have tried to get our co-worker to be less verbose, but we're an hour into a meeting and he's still talking. How can we kindly and politely get our co-worker to [SHUT UP!] and let other people contribute?

-- Tired of listening

Dear Tired Listener,

Ah, yes. I know the type. You may not be able to change your verbose co-worker, but you can prevent him from dominating meetings. The solution is **meeting management**.

The way this works is to have a very structured meeting and a meeting leader. The leader would send out a detailed agenda prior to the meeting, with times assigned for each portion. Here's one example:

Introductions (Sally, all) - 3 minutes
Description of issue (Sally) - 2 minutes
Possible courses of action (all) - 15 minutes
Vote on course to pursue (Sally) - 1 minute
Assignment of actions (Bill) - 2 minutes
Final thoughts/comments (all) - 5 minutes
Set-up of next meeting (Bill) - 1 minute

If Sally is running the meeting, she would state the purpose and any ground rules during the introduction portion. One ground rule might be a 2-minutes-per-person limit when soliciting input from the group. Or that any snacks brought into the room--especially those of the chocolate variety--be shared with the group. (Sally and I think alike.)

Another option is to have a moderator whose sole job is to make sure the meeting runs smoothly. This person would not contribute to the discussion but would keep track of time and agenda, make sure others are contributing equally (and that no one is monopolizing the conversation), and ensure the discussion stays on track.

When Chatty Charlie begins to run on, the meeting leader/moderator should cut him off at the time limit. If he is repeating himself or getting off topic, someone can cut in before that and summarize, then move things along. Something like this: "Charlie, I think you've stated your point about inviting one of the Ravens as a guest speaker. Let's see if anyone has any other ideas for improving our meetings." Or this: "Charlie, you've given us several good ideas already. How about if we hear from Laura and Pete?"

Formulas for good meeting management vary, but the key to solving your problem is structure and

policing. One other option would be to dispense with a meeting and send out or request information electronically.

So decide on a course of action and enlist the other tired listeners' help in sticking to it to rein in your chatterbox. Oops--my 2 minutes are up. Over to you!

Edits

(U) Workplace Dilemma? Ask Zelda! -- Today's Situation: Dealing With a 'Downer'

FROM: 'Zelda,' Dispenser of Advice on SIGINT Management Issues

Run Date: 10/01/2010

(U) Editor's note: The text of this article is UNCLASSIFIED in its entirety.



Dear Zelda,

I have a co-worker who is a non-stop complainer. He is a total downer for everyone that he has contact with. His kvetching begins first thing in the morning with: "what's so good about this morning, blah blah blah" and thankfully ends when he goes home for the day. Most of us deal with him by just **avoiding** him. However, lately management has been sending him along with us on trips downtown, to conferences, seminars, etc. Do you have any advice as to how we can get him to shut up and stop ruining everybody

else's mood, especially when we're on our way to important meetings downtown? Also, any tips on bringing this to management's attention **tactfully** to advise them that he is **not** the best person to represent our mission when we interact with our counterparts downtown?

Signed,

Pollyanna

Dear Polly,

I know just how you feel. I have a very sensitive negativity detector myself, and the type of person you describe can be very draining - not to mention irritating. Let me share a few tips I have discovered over the years to deal with this personality type, and then I will address how to approach management on the subject.

Be a Clown

Sometimes a good-natured teasing will do the trick. Prepare a funny quip about getting up on the wrong side of the bed to dispel the gloomy attitude. Often downers don't realize how they're coming across to others and all it takes is someone to point it out.

Because negative people tend to generalize, it can occasionally help to ask a lot of questions and get them to be specific; even combining this with humor. For example, "You say *nothing* ever works right? Are you *sure*? Because this car seems to be running OK... And my watch is working fine...and your mouth seems to be working reeeeeeally well.... What exactly *isn't* working?"

The Straightforward Approach

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Nicely tell your kvetching colleague that his constant whining is wearing you down, and ask him to stop. You can mention that you are trying to stay in a positive frame of mind in preparation for the meeting you're attending, and to please refrain from complaining around you. (Note: Although this will occasionally work, I have found it is not usually the most effective method for dealing with a chronic grumbler.)

Embrace The Dark Side (Really, I'm serious!)

If you can, find some value in his negativity. I have noticed that, very often, these Donny Downers don't think of themselves as being negative; they believe they are being "realistic." When they think no one is paying attention to their warnings of impending doom, they keep repeating them - louder and louder - until they get through. You can short circuit this by acknowledging what they're saying. For example, "That's a good point, Donny. Thanks for making us aware of that." Sometimes they just need validation. The trick here is to be genuine. Really pay attention and ask clarifying questions. Who knows? After being shunned by his office mates for so long, the attention may even shock him into silence!

The only thing to watch out for with this approach is that, encouraged by your interest, he doesn't go on and on. Listen for a while and then cut him short, if necessary. Don't let him dwell or get stuck in negativity mode. You might add, "And how do you propose we get around that obstacle?" By forcing him to come up with something positive every time he expresses a negative, he may skip right to the solution in the future - or at least stop carrying on about the all problems.

Set Some Rules

If you can't avoid or ignore this person because you are trapped in a car with him, steer clear of subjects that set him off. Likewise, warn your co-workers about "off-limits" topics that could potentially unleash a rant from Donny. Try to steer the conversation toward subjects that he likes (golf? dogs?). You and your co-workers might also want to agree on rules for riding together to these seminars and meetings. Perhaps certain topics are taboo (politics? the promotion system?) if he tends to complain about one thing in particular; or charge a "fine" for every negative comment (as some people do for swearing in the office); or set a time limit on how much each person can talk, if he tends to monopolize the conversation. If all that doesn't solve the problem, I hear duct tape works really well! [wink]

As for bringing it to management's attention tactfully, I find it hard to believe that your management doesn't already know he is like this. You say that they have been sending him along on trips downtown - they probably just want him and his downer 'tude out of the office! But if you really think they're unaware, speak to your supervisor about it. Don't come across as complaining about his personality, but describe his behavior, citing specific examples, and express your concern over the impact you think it is having on interactions with partner or customer organizations.

For you managers out there who supervise a "Donny," it is important for you to proactively address the issue - even if no one in the office has come to complain about him. This personality type -- and I mean a chronic complainer, not someone who's having an occasional bad day -- is toxic to the workplace. He's bad for morale and productivity...but that's a topic for a whole 'nuther column.

So, Polly, I hope that, by using a combination of the above techniques plus some timely management intervention, you will be able to enjoy pleasant trips to conferences, seminars, and meetings with your formerly gloomy co-worker and not have to resort to blasting ELO's "Don't Bring Me Down" from the tape deck of your government vehicle for the entire trip!

Exhibit

P.S. I'd like to take this opportunity to wish a Happy Boss' Day (16 October) to all you supervisors out there!

(U) Ask Zelda: Employee Uses Co-workers as Entourage

FROM: "Zelda," Dispenser of Advice for SIGINTers on Workplace Issues

Run Date: 10/06/2011

(U) The below article is unclassified in its entirety. The question has been edited for brevity.



Hi Zelda,

I work with an employee with a disability who asks co-workers to do errands for him outside of work, even if it inconveniences them: take him to work on their day off, take him to the commissary because he doesn't want to go to the grocery store, asks "what are you doing this weekend" followed by "Good I need you to do X or take me to X."

At first people were willing to give him a hand, helping him with easy requests (such as Internet searches for stores in his area), but then it became apparent that he could do these things himself when he indicated he had redone their work (to find stores with better discounts).

Many employees feel that he is using them, and I have to agree. There are others in the office with similar disabilities, and although they may need help from time to time, for the most part they are self sufficient and don't ask you to give up family time to assist them with personal errands. We've learned in EEO classes that most people with disabilities want to be independent, and I see our other disabled employees doing as well as our non-disabled employees -- or even better -- when it comes to job performance, but this particular person seems to be exploiting his disability. How do we tell him that we are not servants to wait on him hand and foot?

- Not anybody's slave

Dear Slave,

All I can say is **O.M.G.**

I applaud you and your officemates for being willing to help out your colleagues with disabilities, but am shocked that "Bruiser the User" is exploiting his co-workers in this way! Even the most sympathetic person would feel taken advantage of and unappreciated after what you've described [the original letter went into more detail]. You are not his personal assistants.

Some good advice in your situation comes from two of our wise First Ladies - Eleanor Roosevelt and Nancy Reagan. To misquote the former, "no one can take advantage of you without your consent."* You have the ability to put an end to the abuse. All you have to do is follow Nancy's guidance and **just say no.**

It's time to put your foot down. As Bruiser's co-worker, you are not obligated to chauffeur him around on your day off. Or pick up his Cheerios, his dry cleaning, or his mother when she comes to town.

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Simply say, "I'm sorry but I have other plans." If you're going to the commissary anyway and can get him a specific/special item or two, that's great; but it's time to set some boundaries.

Now, you don't have to cut him off entirely. You can still be kind and courteous...even helpful; but decide what you are and aren't willing to do. Maybe you'd be OK running a few errands for him if he paid for the gas. Perhaps you wouldn't feel too put out if he limited his requests to one per month. Is there a favor he can do for you in return so the relationship isn't so one-sided? Feel free to put stipulations on your consent to help so you don't feel used.

If you decide you've had enough, that's OK, too. There are resources Bruiser can turn to for help. He's probably already aware of the Agency's office of Disability Affairs (**D64**). Suggest he contact them or other local organizations** that can put him in touch with volunteer and support groups. There are also errand services (sometimes called "concierges") in the area that act as personal assistants, which are easily found via a web search. (Sounds like you might be motivated enough to research that for him!)

Don't let this one demanding employee discourage you from helping out a friend in need. As you noted, most employees with disabilities want to be independent and treated the same as those without disabilities - which means not abusing the friendship of their colleagues.

Eddu

* Eleanor's actual quote: "No one can make you feel inferior without your consent."

** www.disabilityresources.org/MARYLAND.html is a helpful site for finding assistance.

(U) "Ask Zelda!": Phone Hog Grills Callers, Spills Beans

FROM: "Zelda," Dispenser of Advice on Workplace Issues

Run Date: 09/07/2012

[Note: the question has been edited for space considerations.]

Dear Zelda,



(U) This question concerns phone etiquette in the office. While our management has designated one individual to answer all incoming non-secure phone calls, that person can't always perform the task because another co-worker seems to be in a race to beat her to it. Phone phreak always asks who is calling after the caller asks for "so and so." This person is not the office secretary, nor my personal secretary, nor the designated "phone call screener." I do not want a co-worker asking callers who they are (it is often personal and private -- a doctor, an attorney, etc.) nor to tell the unidentified caller where the person being called is and what they are doing (such as, "she stepped out to lunch about 2 hours ago"). While I

have expressed my concern to my supervisor, nothing has changed. I've even brought this up with phone phreak, but the grilling of callers continues.

(U) Are there any established phone etiquette rules that we can share with phone phreaks who ask too many questions of callers when they have no need to know and it is not their job?

Signed, Phrustrated by Phone Phreak

Dear Phrustrated,

(U//~~FOUO~~) I don't know about your phone phreak, but I was hired during the era when we were taught to answer the telephone with just the last four digits of the phone number. My insurance agent used to joke that my name was "3-2-4-2" and even called me that in person. We were given specific instruction to NOT reveal anything about the person who was being called. (If they were on leave you were not allowed to say so, just that they weren't available.) And if they had moved to another office, you were not allowed to give out the new phone number.

(U//~~FOUO~~) There is an **NSA policy*** that deals with how to answer the non-secure phone. It basically reiterates what I said above. Your management should review this policy with the office employees, stressing security practices. Here are my guidelines for "black phone" etiquette:

1. Answer the telephone by stating the phone number, so the caller can verify what number she has reached. You can add, "Zelda speaking, may I help you?" after that. ** Note: anyone answering the phone should **not** be in the vicinity of classified conversation when picking up the non-secure line. This is why it's often best that the office manager, sitting apart from the technical work area, be the one to field outside calls. If there is classified work going on around you, it's wise to say "Phone's up!" before answering, to alert others in the area of a non-secure call.
2. When the caller tells you for whom she's calling, say "Just a moment, please" and put her on hold while you get the employee. If the employee is not at his desk, tell the caller, "Jerry is not available. Would you like to leave a message?" If the caller volunteers the information ("Yes, I'm Jerry's podiatrist. Tell him the lab test came back positive for toenail fungus.") that's one thing; but don't try to pry personal information out of her ("Are you his lawyer? How is that nasty divorce going,

anyway?"). Any legit professional will not reveal patient/client-privileged information to an unauthorized recipient.

3. If the employee no longer works there, you can

A) suggest the caller try him at an alternate number if she has a home or cell phone number for the employee -- but do not give one out;

B) volunteer to take down the caller's information and get a message to the employee -- and then email him or call him on the secure line to deliver the message; or

C) if the person has been gone from the office a long time, say there is no one by that name currently at this number.

4. Do not volunteer information about the employee unless you personally know the person on the other end of the line and that it's OK with the employee to do so.

(U) As for your nosy co-worker, I'm sure she's just trying to be helpful. Perhaps her job was answering the phone in a past position and it's a reflex. I hope, for the sake of your sanity, that your management agrees to implement something like the above guidelines, since your appeals to the phreak have not resulted in less grilling of the callers. It's not just a privacy preference, it's a security issue. If all else fails, here's one last sneaky resort: turn the ringer on her phone off. 😊

(U//FOUO) For the last several years, all the offices I've worked in (at NSAW) have had private lines for each employee. Perhaps this is coming soon to your organization?***

Zelda

(U) Notes:

* (U//FOUO) See sections 15 - 18 on page 4 (Procedures). Contractors should consult item 6 on page 3 of **Policy 6-4**.

** (U//FOUO) First name only is fine for civilians, but the policy says military must use their rank and contractors must identify themselves as such.

*** (U//FOUO) A note to "Phrustrated by Phone Phreak": Please contact the SIGINT Interface for Mission Infrastructure for further info on that question. They can be reached at "DL SMI_IT."

(U) Standard disclaimer: Zelda's views are her own and do not represent the official views of the Associate Directorate for Corporate Leadership, Human Resources, SID, or any other NSA organization.

(U) Looking for some of the older "Ask Zelda" columns? They are filed away in the archives under the "**Ask Zelda! 2010**" and "**Ask Zelda! 2011**" series. Also, if you'd like to submit a question of your own to Zelda, just use the "comments/suggestions about this article" button below to send it in.

(U) Ask Zelda!: Calming a Choleric Co-worker

FROM: "Zelda," Dispenser of Advice on Workplace Issues

Run Date: 05/03/2013

(U) The following article is unclassified in its entirety.



I'm sure a few people have worked with (or are currently working with) employees who have such a short temper that they must resort to foul language, slamming things (e.g., keyboard, mouse, book) when they get emails or phone calls that spin them up. This is not only distracting, but is downright unprofessional. At worse, it could lead to damage of equipment or personal injury. What is the most appropriate way to tackle this without escalating the situation, BUT to be mindful that something might need to be done if they keep it

up?

-- Fed Up with the Fuming

Dear Fed Up,

Anyone who works with a tantrum-throwing hothead has my sympathies. For me, that kind of behavior constitutes a hostile work environment. The area supervisor should deal with it immediately; but it appears from your note that they haven't, since you wish to remedy the situation without bringing it to the boss.

Phase I - Awareness

I prefer to start with some light humor or good-natured concern. Something like "Hey, take it easy, I might have to report you to the **ASPCA** for cruelty to your mouse" or "Sounds like you got some bad news. I hope everything's okay..." Calling attention to his behavior in a non-confrontational way may be enough to get him to stop by reminding him that his outburst was noticed by others. If that's not sufficient, proceed to Phase II.

Phase II - The Polite Request

If it continues, ask the "riled child" to stop the behavior. Suggest that he take a walk around the building to cool off or find a more appropriate outlet for his anger. Come right out and say that his behavior is offensive or that the noise is preventing you from getting your work done. If this is a habitual thing, you could even politely recommend that he consult **EAS** for help dealing with the issue and how much it's upsetting him.

Phase III - No More Mr. Nice Guy

If the previous two phases get no results, here's where you draw the line. I would now bring the

problem to the supervisor's attention.

If you are still reluctant to escalate it, you can tell your short-tempered colleague--in a more serious tone--that you've tried to discuss this nicely, but failed to see any change in his behavior. Reiterate that his actions are inappropriate for the office and that he needs to stop the behavior (be specific) immediately. You can either imply or state outright the "or else" of escalating it to management.

Your challenge will be to stay calm if he starts to rage. Don't escalate to his level. Your relationship with him should determine what specific approach you take. (If he's a friend, you can probably get away with being more frank.)

It's laudable that you are willing to take on this challenge--I'm sure your other co-workers will be very grateful if you can manage to tame the roaring lion in your office.

Edits

(U) Ask Zelda!: Hijacked Distribution List

FROM: "Zelda," Dispenser of Advice on Workplace Issues

Run Date: 06/03/2013

(U) The below article is unclassified in its entirety.



Dear Zelda,

I'd like your advice on proper e-mail etiquette as it relates to distribution lists (DL). Several years ago, I created an e-mail DL for a group of people across the NSA enterprise who have a specific work role. My intention behind creating this DL was to be able to disseminate information specific to the interests of the individuals in this work role. Unfortunately, in recent months, e-mails containing information not germane to the interests of the individuals in this work role have been sent to the DL. I have stepped in to emphasize the goals of this DL and have politely requested that topics that do not apply to the specific work role in question not be sent to this DL. However, it appears that my words are not being fully heeded. What other recourses do I have in order to keep my DL focused on the purposes it was created for?

Signed, Disconcerted Distribution List Owner

Dear D.Lo,

Ah, yes. How frustrating it is when you create something good and envision it evolving in a certain way, only to see it "corrupted" and turned into something you never meant it to be. Going down the wrong path, covered in tattoos and piercings, hanging out with the wrong crowd, changing its major from finance to video game design*... What's a parent--er, list owner--to do?

Fortunately, a distribution list is easier to get back on track than a wayward child. Here are some suggestions.

- You can work with **ITSC** to create a restricted list that only certain people can send messages to. If others in this work role have something of interest for the group, they will need to send it to one of these key people to forward to the entire distro. However, this solution will not allow back-and-forth interaction between the members of that distro, if you want to encourage discussion of a specific topic.
- If you do want everyone to be able to respond, one other thing you can do as a continual reminder is to create a new signature block for yourself that reinforces the correct use of the alias, and use it whenever you post to this distribution list. This would not be a *signature* block, per se, but a way to include a standard phrase or paragraph in emails without re-typing it each time. You can insert this message either at the top or bottom of each email you send to the alias.
- If the inappropriate content you mentioned is being circulated by someone replying (via reply-all) to a legitimate message, make sure to put the DL address in the Bcc line of the email when you send stuff out. That way, any inappropriate replies will go to the original poster (you) alone.

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- Although harsh, you can always remove the "repeat offenders" from the list. They will still be able to post, but won't receive any emails (unless people reply-all to their posts).
- As a last resort, you can decommission the list and create a new one; but don't tell anyone what it's called. Always put your DL address in the Bcc line. This will require people to send you any information to disseminate to the group. As a result, you may become known as the bountiful dispenser of useful information. 😊

Eddis

(U) Notes:

* (U) Not that there's anything wrong with tattoos and/or piercings... And I mean no disrespect to anyone with a degree in video game design. In fact, most employers today would probably prefer that to the "traditional" subject I majored in!

(U) Ask Zelda!: The Young and the Restless

FROM: "Zelda," Dispenser of Advice on Workplace Issues

Run Date: 08/05/2013

(U) The below article is unclassified in its entirety.



Dear Zelda,

(U) I'm new to the agency and I'm also a young employee (in my late 20s). I have noticed that the older managers/supervisors think that we don't have the skills/knowledge/potential to run this agency in the near future. I heard them saying that. They tend to stereotype/discriminate without knowing our intelligence and fresh knowledge.

What can we do to make them think differently?

Thanks, Younger Skills

Dear Younger Skills,

If a U.S. citizen can be President of our country at age 35,* I can't see any official reason why someone couldn't also run the Agency at that age--as long as you've been in the intelligence business (in particular at NSA) for several years to gain a wide range of experience.

Now, I'm going to assume that by "run this agency" you are referring to the broader definition of being in a senior leadership position, and not the restricted interpretation of being the DIRNSA. If the latter, you would have to be a U.S. military General (O-9), and achieving that rank is not realistic by age 35 (unless you have had a career like some Hollywood action heroes).

Why do they think this way?

I believe that the older managers are referring to attributes beyond intelligence and state-of-the-art knowledge. In fact, I have heard many comment on how bright our new, younger employees are. There is no doubt in my mind that they believe our technical future is in good hands.

When they say you're not ready to lead the Agency, my guess is that what they're referring to falls more into the area of judgment and maturity or wisdom--EQ versus IQ.** Many of these comments probably have their root in generational variation and stem from differences in style.

What can you do to change their minds?

Your challenge will be to show the older managers and supervisors that you have the qualifications they see as necessary, and thereby gain their respect. Much of what I'm about to say is based on generalizations, and not every younger employee behaves this way; but like it or not, perception is reality.

- **Broaden your knowledge.** Some older employees may have concerns that the younger NSAers do not have the breadth of experience needed to run the Agency. Show them otherwise by gaining a broad-based foundation for your career here. Include at least one tour outside NSA.
- **Listen more than you speak.** At a young age, you don't know what you don't know. You have seen a small slice of the world (or NSA or the IC) and have formed generalized opinions... and you are not shy about sharing them. These opinions may sound very naïve and uninformed to others who have been around the block several times and have a much wider perspective.
- **Dress the part.** Many younger employees, especially the technical ones, tend to dress less formally. This may send an unconscious message to the older generation that they are less serious about the job. Consider wearing attire that oozes professionalism to help them take you more seriously. ***
- **Watch what you share on social media.** Generation Y employees typically have a different communication style than Boomers--they let it all hang out on social media in what may be interpreted as not-very-discreet displays of their own ignorance. At a time when media leaks are causing our leadership a lot of extra work to clean up, a lack of discretion can be seen as a very dangerous thing. Before you hit "Send," think: will this email/post come back to haunt me when I'm up for a senior-level position in a few years? If in doubt, don't share it in print.
- **Learn the business side of NSA** in addition to the mission side--or vice versa.
- **Become politically savvy.** The Agency is a political place. So is the DoD and IC. It takes a while to understand the politics and even longer to figure out how to play the game. The most successful senior leaders do this well.
- **Ask questions** of your elders; show that you're willing to learn. Don't ignore our organizational history. Your great idea for revolutionizing SIGINT may have been tried in the past--learn why it didn't work at that time so you can improve upon it before you present it again.
- **Shadow some senior leaders.** Let your supervisor know you are interested in being a future leader and would appreciate any mentoring or advice on how to best position yourself for that. Many organizations (like **SID**) have succession-planning efforts. The goal of these efforts is specifically to groom the younger generation to lead the Agency.
- **Be patient.** In "the olden days," employees understood they had to pay their dues. Now that it's less common for a worker to stay with the same employer for decades than it was back then, many younger employees seem impatient to older employees: expecting to be promoted immediately or put in charge after only a short time here. While you are doing all the right things above, you might have to accept the fact that you'll need to wait a while.

Older managers, in turn, need to appreciate their younger employees' contributions and see beyond differences in style. They should listen to your ideas and take the time to discuss them or explain why something wouldn't work rather than dismiss it out of hand. Like it or not, the younger employees are our future leaders. Now is the time to start grooming the twenty-somethings.

Edits

Notes:

* Minimum age set by the Constitution. The youngest elected president we have had is JFK, who was 43. Conversely, Ronald Reagan was nearly 70 when he first became President. Most of our Presidents initially took office in their 50s. Clearly, Americans tend to prefer maturity for positions of national importance.

** Emotional Intelligence or Emotional Quotient (EQ) is the ability to accurately perceive your own and others' emotions, understand the signals that emotions send about relationships, and manage your own and others' emotions. Research has shown that EQ, and not IQ (intelligence quotient), determines a person's ability to be effective in life and is a stronger predictor of success.

*** I'd like to give a shout-out to Security's special agents who are, on the whole, a particularly natty bunch. Thank you for classing up the workplace. 😊

(U) Ask Zelda!: Underwater Battleground

FROM: "Zelda," Dispenser of Advice on Workplace Issues

Run Date: 10/07/2013

(U) The article below is unclassified.



Dear Zelda,

I volunteered to do a major task on our project that no one else on the team wanted to do, but that our branch chief and deputy branch chief felt to be important. We have a project lead but he/she doesn't want this feature in our project. The task is a time-consuming labor-intensive effort that will take months to complete. Our management has committed itself to the time that is likely to be involved.

I've been off to a great start on the task, but it seems as though my project lead (not the management) wants to do anything possible to derail my efforts, such as diverting my effort to other tasks, adding additional duties, and the latest attempt has been to attempt to increase the requirements of my task to about 10 times the size. I'm thinking that this is a good time for me to retire! What do you think?

--Torpedoed for being too successful

Dear Torpedoed,

Never fear--you may have been torpedoed, but you are not sunk.

Kudos on your initiative and the great start! You have one major thing going for you--your management is behind you.

If you don't already, make sure you understand why your management feels this task is so important to include in the project. This will help you defend your work in your discussions with the project lead (PL) and also serve as justification for getting resources you need to complete the task.

Now, the best way to deal with a subversive sub is to force it to the surface, where you can see what you're dealing with.

Call the PL on her attitude. Tell her you're getting the sense that she doesn't want you to do this task and ask her why not. Hear her out and take your cue from what she says. Remind her that this task is very important to your bosses. Only by shining a light on her subversive behavior and bringing it out into the open can you address it.

It may turn out that just the opposite of your impression is true. She may be glad you're working on this nasty task and, seeing how quickly you've been able to make progress, is giving you other duties she didn't think were possible to accomplish.

If the problem persists, ask for your boss' help in prioritizing all the tasks you've been given. Be sure he knows about the additional duties (requirement creep) you've gotten from the PL. He can put it all

in perspective for you and possibly talk to the PL about assigning some parts to another team member. Although the PL may direct the project, you ultimately answer to the branch chief, not her.

It may help to get all the players (you, PL, branch chiefs) in the same room to make sure everyone agrees on the direction of the project. You don't want to become a pawn in the middle of a power struggle between them. Or to keep up the naval analogy, a powerboat between two battleships.

Wishing you smooth sailing on your project from here on out,

-Zelda

(U) Ask Zelda!: Avoiding Lock-Up

FROM: "Zelda," Dispenser of Advice on Workplace Issues

Run Date: 12/04/2013

(U) The article below is unclassified. Also, the question has been edited for brevity.



Dear Zelda,

Locking up the office is technically everyone's responsibility, but three of us who tend to stay later are being taken advantage of.

Some newer branch members have been here for at least seven months and have been taught how to lock up the office. There are also notices posted throughout the office detailing what needs to be secured before leaving. However, they regularly leave their personal flippers unlocked, so the last person has to manually transfer the contents into a common-area flipper. We have continually reminded

them to lock their flippers--verbally and with notes--the following morning, but they resist this duty by either leaving early or simply leaving the office unlocked!

These members refuse to lock up the office because, according to them, it "prevents them from leaving on time." They don't appear have a problem, however, making one of the three of us regularly spend 45 minutes manually transferring their flipper contents into a common-area flipper. Talking to management has not helped, as they avoid confrontation at ALL COSTS, preferring only to send an office-wide e-mail politely reminding everyone that we have to lock up the office.

I have run out of options, and this inconsiderate behavior is wearing on my patience. Please help, Zelda!

Sincerely,
Locked Out

Dear Locked Out,

I am outraged on your behalf! That is very rude. I must admit, my first reaction next time this happens would be to transfer the offender's flipper contents to a remote empty flipper and not tell them which one. ;^)

If your management's polite email doesn't do the trick, start with your organization's Security Advisor. This is one of your co-workers who has this responsibility as an additional duty. If your organization doesn't have one, contact your Staff Security Officer (SSO). You can look up both these people **HERE**. Your Security Advisor, and definitely your SSO, can have a lot more influence with your management than one annoyed late-shift person. They can also institute some procedural changes.

Some practices your office might want to institute if it doesn't already have them:

- Magnetic OPEN/CLOSED signs for flippers, desk drawers, and anything else that contains classified information.

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- A sign-out sheet by the door that all employees must initial before leaving, certifying that their area has been secured. At the bottom of the sheet would be a space for the very last person to initial, certifying the common areas.
- "AREA SECURE" table tents for each person's desk.

Are you a lock-up avoider? Set a calendar reminder for yourself to start closing things up 5 minutes before your departure time. That way this important security measure won't prevent you--and your late shift co-workers--from leaving on time.

Edki

(U) Supervisory Woes? Ask Zelda! -- Today's Column: 'No Fun To Be Caught in the Middle'

FROM: 'Zelda,' Dispenser of Advice for SID Supervisors

Run Date: 07/09/2010



Dear Zelda,

(U) I'm a civilian supervisor of military personnel, and I work for a military supervisor who also happens to be my employees' military supervisor. One of my military employees is being heavily tasked directly by my supervisor, often without my involvement, and my employee is asking me to work a transfer to get them out of the situation. The employee is being pulled in different directions with regard to priorities, and is stressed out and looking to flee.

(U) How should I handle this?

Signed,
Militarily challenged

Dear Challenged,

(U) It's no fun to be the cheese in a military panino* -- that is, squeezed between an enlisted person and his Commanding Officer (CO). In fact, it's enough to cause a meltdown!

(U) NSA's multicultural workforce can be challenging for a supervisor, with separate rules for dealing with military, civilian, and contractor employees. As the Agency has moved to a 50-50 military/civilian mix, this challenge has only grown -- especially for civilians at field sites, where **the percentage of military personnel may be much higher**.

(U) First of all, let me clarify that "Ask Zelda" is an informal advice column, and does not claim to present the "party line." Not knowing the specifics of your situation, such as the types of things this person is being tasked to do, the requirements of the position he is filling for you, the rank of the military supervisor, your grade, the branch of service in question, etc., my advice will be somewhat generic. There are formal resources you should be aware of to help you with this issue:

- the Senior Enlisted Leader for your organization,
- The NSA/CSS course "**LEAD 2044: Supervising Military Personnel**," and
- **D7P** -- the Office of Military Personnel;

...and I hope you avail yourself of them. That said, here are my suggestions.

(U) The key, as usual, is to communicate. You need to meet with the military supervisor (whom I will refer to as "Major Payne") as soon as possible to work this out. Keep in mind that you each have a job to accomplish and that you share a resource -- whether you like it or not -- and splitting it (him) down the middle is not an option!

(U) Approach MAJ Payne very respectfully with the attitude of "we have an issue we need to resolve," rather than "you are causing a problem." Present the situation in business terms, such as impact on mission and processes, and the confusion his direct tasking is causing. He is probably not even aware

there is a problem, since it's unlikely your employee would push back when his CO gives him an order. Mention that you cannot properly manage your human resources if he is tasking them outside of and not through you. Being a military officer, he should understand the importance of chain of command, and within the NSA workplace you are the link between Payne and your employee (whom I will call "Private Hell"). Ask Payne (nicely) to limit his requests of PVT Hell; solicit his ideas for improving the situation, and see if you can help him find other means of getting his tasks accomplished besides redirecting your employee.

(U) If this extraneous tasking is related to your organization's mission, ask MAJ Payne to task you, and you can then assign the appropriate person to it. If he is contradicting your mission tasking, you need to better understand his priorities so that you can correctly manage the work of your organization. Better yet, you could suggest that the two of you work out a priority system together.

(U) If outside military tasks are being levied on Hell that are to be completed during the workday, you must also be kept in the loop. Not only does this take resources away from your mission, but you are responsible for this employee during work hours. Now, be aware that in order to get ahead in his military career, the Private will need to participate in some service activities; however, this does not mean that you have to release him for every event that comes along. Work out a plan with the Major for how many hours a month -- and when -- Hell can be excused to work on or participate in service functions. This will vary, depending on the work center. For example, if the employee is standing watch, you would allow fewer absences and outside tasks than you would in a more relaxed workplace or one with a large staff that can fill in for one another. And if the outside demands are too great, know that you have the right to ask for an additional or replacement worker.

(U) Lastly, don't forget to reassure Private Hell. Let him know that you are taking action to correct the situation. Following your meeting with MAJ Payne, tell him what was agreed upon. If applicable, you might take this opportunity to praise his performance, since the reason he is being tasked so heavily is probably because both his supervisors find him competent and their "go to" person to get the job done.

(U) I wish I could say there was a simple, definitive policy in a case like this, but the truth is you are expected to work it out between the two of you. You must share. With some flexibility and understanding on both sides, your military panino will be filled with a nicely chilled tuna salad, rather than a melted cheesy mess.

Zelda

(U) Notes:

* (U) A type of Italian sandwich, usually toasted by being pressed in a grill.

(U) *Do you have a question of your own for Zelda? Use the "comments/suggestions about this article" link (below right) to submit your question; we'll make sure it gets to Zelda.*

(U) **Disclaimer:** "Zelda's" views are her own, and do not represent the official views of the Associate Directorate for Corporate Leadership, Human Resources, or any other NSA organization.

(U) Thorny Supervisory Problem? Ask Zelda! -- Today's Dilemma: 'The Odoriferous Officemate'

FROM: 'Zelda,' Dispenser of Advice for SID Supervisors

Run Date: 08/06/2010

(U) Editor's note: The entire text below is UNCLASSIFIED.



Dear Zelda,

How do I deal with an employee whose personal hygiene needs improvement, without embarrassing both of us?

Signed, Gasping for Air

Dear Gasping,

Hoo-boy, you readers sure ask some tough questions! As you are well aware, sometimes it really stinks to be a supervisor, and this is one of them (sorry, I couldn't resist).

While it might be tempting to ignore an awkward situation like the one you've described, you should take action before someone less diplomatic says something that hurts the employee's feelings and embarrasses her. But don't sweat it -- all it takes is a little tact and compassion.

I'm sure you've already thought of all the easy ways out:

- an anonymous note
- leaving a can of deodorant on her desk
- bringing in a large container of potpourri and placing it outside her cubicle
- relocating her to a private office
- "accidentally" spritzing her with cologne or air freshener
- beginning an office discussion about everyone's favorite brand of soap and its effectiveness
- making a joke of it ("Gee, you must have parked at the Colony Seven today because you smell like you've just walked a mile in the hot sun.")

While these may work, I am going to recommend the direct approach. Have an informal chat with the person and keep it low-key. Here are some guidelines:

- Find a private location for the discussion.
- Don't beat around the bush or try to drop hints. Be honest and kind. State your observation simply, and be as specific as possible. For example, "I've noticed the smell of [fill in the blank] and am concerned that it might interfere with your interactions with customers/co-workers."
- Adopt a neutral, non-judging attitude. The issue could be caused by a number of things, and you shouldn't speculate or assume. You are there to be helpful and bring something important to her attention. You could even say something like, "If it were me, I'd want to know."

- Be sympathetic to her response and be prepared to give advice, if asked. Example: the employee tells you she has an hour commute in a car with no air conditioning and doesn't know what she can do about smelling sweaty. You could remind her that there are locker rooms in many NSA buildings where people can take showers, and suggest that she bring a change of clothing to work. But also realize that the employee is under no obligation to tell you the cause, only to correct the problem. It may be very personal (a medical condition, being evicted and living in her car), and while you should appear open and willing to help ("Is there anything I can do?"), you shouldn't pry.
- If the person gets defensive, remain calm and understanding. Focus on the impact to the work.
- Follow up to make sure corrective action has been taken. Allow time for the change and give feedback -- whether positive or negative.

You might also want to speak to the person's good qualities. Tell her she is a valued employee and you hate to see this getting in the way of her effectiveness at work.

I won't promise that it will be easy, but with the right approach neither of you should be too embarrassed. So do everyone a favor and clear the air where your malodorous subordinate is concerned. Your whole office will breathe a lot easier for it.

Edits

(U) Ask Zelda: The Disappearing Boss

FROM: 'Zelda,' Dispenser of Advice for SIGINTers

Run Date: 03/17/2011

(U) Editor's intro: The below "Ask Zelda" advice column is entirely unclassified:



Dear Zelda,

[My] supervisor/Org Chief is frequently MIA. I work in a small organization, so folks easily see who is doing what. Our supervisor is a 15 and I am a 15. He does not follow any of the PMM procedures for time away from work. We never know if he is coming in or not. He frequently leaves work in the middle of the day to run routine errands. I overheard him tell a co-worker "This place is last on my list of priorities." Other 15s have talked with him about the appearance of an "I don't care" attitude and it has not changed his behavior. Our next level up management is new -- do they notice? How do I/we bring this to their attention in a politically correct manner?

-- Signed, Headless in Headquarters

Dear Headless,

Sometimes an MIA supervisor is not such a bad thing.... ask anyone who works for a micro-manager! But all kidding aside, this is a tough situation. It's hard enough for a manager to deal with an AWOL subordinate, but it's especially hard in the reverse.

Take care how you approach this since the blow back on you might be bad. If your supervisor learns that you've been complaining about him to his boss, your work life could become quite unpleasant. It's also possible that the MIA supervisor, whom I will refer to as Waldo, has permission from his boss to be away from the workplace. (An employee must inform the supervisor of his whereabouts, but a supervisor doesn't necessarily have to tell his workers -- although it's a good idea.)

You mention that Waldo works for a new boss -- let's call her Alice. Often when a new boss comes in, she will meet with members of her workforce to get to know them. If Alice meets with you privately and either asks directly or seems open to hearing about problems in the workplace, you have an opportunity to bring up the issue at that time. I would only do this if I had Alice's assurance that she would not reveal to Waldo where she learned about his frequent absences and I-don't-care attitude (see the aforementioned "blow back" warning).

Is there a situation where you needed Waldo and he wasn't around to make an important management decision? If so, it would be logical for you to go to the next manager in the chain -- Alice. If Alice gets enough visits from you and the other members of Waldo's staff, she might catch on that Waldo isn't around very much. To give Alice some credit, she may catch onto Waldo's habits all by herself if she is worth her salt as a manager.

Another recourse for you is the Office of the Inspector General. The IG is responsible for investigating waste, fraud and abuse, and has a **hotline** where you can report such cases (either anonymously or

not).

One last tip: be sure your own attitude and attendance practices are above reproach; Alice may be looking for a replacement supervisor for your team in the near future!

Edla

(U) Ask Zelda: Peeved by Purloined Pop

FROM: "Zelda," Dispenser of Advice on Workplace Issues

Run Date: 12/07/2011

(U) The article below is unclassified in its entirety.



Dear Zelda,

I work in an office with a shared fridge. I often bring in sodas and keep one in the fridge at a time, but recently my sodas have been disappearing. The first time, I thought it could be an honest mistake (they may not have noticed my mark on the can), but it's happened several times now, and the cans are marked. I hate to think that someone at work would intentionally steal someone else's food, but it's getting equally difficult to imagine that someone here isn't suspicious that their personal soda supply keeps magically restocking. What should I do?

Signed,
Thirsty

Dear Thirsty,

It appears there is someone thirstier than you in the office! Most of us have experienced this at one time or another -- if not missing a soda, perhaps a frozen entree or leftover lasagna. To give the parched pilferer the benefit of the doubt, perhaps his/her last office had a benefactor who kept the employees stocked with sodas out of the goodness of his heart. But even the most naïve (or dense) person should catch on eventually.

Since you aren't allowed to set up a nanny cam in the office, here are a few things you can try.

- **Make a more noticeable mark on your soda can.** A small, discreet mark can be overlooked. Put a sticky note with your name and "DON'T TOUCH" on the top, which they have to see when they open the can. Or splash "TERRY'S SODA" across the cans in big pink letters with some tempera paint before bringing them in to work. The innocent can't miss it and the guilty can be easily spied with your soda in their possession. If you don't have any paint handy, tape a brightly-colored piece of paper with your name on it around the can.
- **Put a sign on the fridge** alerting the guilty party that items in the fridge belong to the individuals who brought them in and are not up for grabs. You might use humor: "This is not a magic ice chest that replenishes itself. Bring in your own sodas."
- **Switch to a different flavor of soda** until you find one that the pilferer doesn't like.
- **Don't put your sodas in the communal fridge.** Keep your soda stash at your desk and buy

a large cup of ice at the cafeteria each morning to cool your drink.

If you've tried a few of these suggestions and your sodas are still being stolen, then declare war! Shake up your soda real well before you put the can in the fridge (labeled with your name and a warning). Do some recon (checking the fridge at different times of day) and shake the can each time you're in there. Then sit back and wait for someone to yell when they open it.

Zelda

Editor's note: As promised in **last month's "epithet" column**, Zelda has selected a **winning caption**. In fact, Zelda has selected several winners. Here's what she decided:

Best caption to illustrate the article:

"Who approved THAT project name?"

Zelda's favorite (but it wouldn't fit in the thought bubble):

"Deborah's coarse language has made me feel uncomfortable and disenfranchised as a mission partner. I hope I have the courage required to talk to her or my supervisor about this and have my concerns addressed."
(This one made Zelda howl!)



Honorable Mention:

"No excrement, Sherlock! So what's your bright idea?"

Best off-topic caption:

"OMG, fashion faux pas! That shirt does not go with those pants. Who dressed you this morning?"

Most ironic:

"I wish she'd clean up her %\$#@* language."

(U) "Ask Zelda!": Not Speaking the Same Language

FROM: "Zelda," Dispenser of Advice on Workplace Issues

Run Date: 06/01/2012

(U) The below article is unclassified in its entirety.



Dear Zelda,

Two members of my team speak native Spanish and are very close friends both inside and outside of the office. All throughout the day, they tend to speak Spanish to each other. Many of the conversations seem to be personal in nature. This makes me -- along with other members of the team -- a bit uncomfortable, especially when we hear our names mentioned. While we do appreciate cultural diversity, is there any leg to stand on when English should be spoken as a first language within the office? Are

there specific rules that isolate personal vs. professional conversations?

Signed,
One team. Divided

Dear Divided,

What an interesting issue! I can understand that your two team members (whom I'll refer to as Tía and María) probably feel very comfortable speaking in their native tongue all day, but it's a little rude to exclude the others.

I checked, and there is no ban on speaking in a foreign language at work. If there were, it would violate Title VII of the **Civil Rights Act of 1964**. However, the rules for personal vs. professional conversations are the same for Tía and María as they are for any employees: personal chit-chat should not interfere with getting their work done. If it is, you have a right to ask them to get back to work (assuming you are their supervisor).

Perhaps they are saying nice things about you. Try smiling and saying "gracias!" every time you hear your name mentioned. Even if they are saying "Joe is a real turkey," if you smile and thank them it will sufficiently unnerve them and they will probably stop talking about you -- at least in your presence. If you really want to freak them out (or maybe delight them), learn a few words in Spanish and memorize one useful sentence to say really well. It wouldn't hurt to learn more about their culture and language. You might be interested to note that supervisors at our Canadian counterpart are **required** to learn French if they supervise French-speaking employees (see **previous SIDtoday article**).

The real issue is whether their talking is disturbing others around them or affecting their productivity, not what language it is in. It sounds like the talking is disturbing others, so you/their supervisor should point that out and ask them to minimize or save their personal conversations for non-work hours. You could also mention, as an aside, that it's rather impolite to exclude others when they are obviously talking about them and mentioning their names. They may not realize their personal chit-

chat is viewed as offensive.

Buena suerte!*

Edhi

* "good luck" in Spanish

(U) Ask Zelda!: Stalled in the Ladies Room

FROM: "Zelda," Dispenser of Advice on Workplace Issues

Run Date: 02/07/2014

(U) The below column is unclassified in its entirety.



Zelda, I am disabled and use a walker and, when I can, a cane. I have to use the handicapped stall in the ladies' room. More and more I have run into the situation that the stall is occupied by someone who is changing clothes or who does not appear to have a disability. (I realize that all disabilities are not visible. However, when someone exits at full tilt in uber high heels, it begs the question.) It is painful for me to have to wait what seems to be an interminable amount of time. I sometimes hear an "I'm sorry," but most often, the stall usurper breezes by as if nothing is wrong. Any suggestions?

Signed,
Didn't You Momma Teach You Better?

Dear "Yo' Momma,"

I have a feeling my response is not exactly what you're looking for, but I will take this opportunity to expound on the subject, because... well, that's what I do!

I must caveat this advice by saying I am speaking only as Zelda. I do not know what the Americans with Disabilities Act, Disability Affairs organization, General Counsel, or even bathroom manufacturers have to say about the rules for stall usage in this situation.

My Understanding/View of Things

Whenever possible, the handicap-accessible stall should be kept free for people with wheelchairs, walkers, etc. who need handrails or more room to maneuver. If there are empty standard stalls, people without special needs should fill those first. However, if all the stalls are full except for the handicap (HC) one, **there is no need for them to wait for a standard one to become free**--they may use the HC stall.

Sometimes people without disabilities also need a larger stall: mothers with a child in a stroller or a traveler with a suitcase or laptop she doesn't want to leave unattended in the outer portion of a public restroom, for example. This group could include people changing clothes--especially when the regular stalls are tiny and have an automatic flush sensor that is set off by the slightest movement. Are these people entitled to use the HC stall?

I believe they are. The HC stalls are there to assist a certain population, but are not restricted to that population the way HC parking spots are.

Patience and Courtesy

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Sometimes, especially in the ladies room, there is a line for the stalls. Unfortunately, the HC stall is not your personal toilet; you have to share, and you may have to wait.

Lest you think I'm unsympathetic, I want to remind those non-disabled bathroom-goers to keep the HC stall free, whenever possible; and if you must use it, try to be quick. It is never OK to hang out in the HC stall reading a newspaper or treating it like your cubicle-away-from-cubicle. If you emerge from one to find a disabled person waiting, it's always nice to thank them for their patience or apologize for tying it up. And if there is a line for a stall, it would be polite to allow the disabled person to "jump the line" the next time the HC stall becomes free.

I would also urge "Yo' Momma," if there is a line, to explain your situation and ask anyone in front of you if it would be OK for you to go ahead of them when the HC stall opens up. I'm sure most people would be very supportive of your needs, and it might not occur to them to offer.

Things aren't always what they seem

Regarding the able-bodied stall usurper, it's possible that all the standard stalls were in use when she entered the restroom, and that the other stalls emptied before you got there--making it seem as if she had a choice and chose the larger stall when she didn't need it.

I understand that it can be painful for a disabled person to have to wait for a stall to open up; but perhaps no more painful than waiting for a free stall when you've drunk a venti cappuccino and then sat through an hour-long staff meeting!

Eddis

(U) "Ask Zelda!": Message in a Bottle

FROM: "Zelda," Dispenser of Advice for SIGINTers on Workplace Issues

Run Date: 08/03/2011

(U) The text of this article is unclassified in its entirety.



Dear Zelda,

My work location is away from the main part of my team and manager. I work well independently and I appreciate the confidence my manager gives me by not micro managing.

It can be difficult, however, to be kept in the loop on day to day operations. Also not getting face time with the rest of my team on a regular basis can be difficult for interpersonal relations.

Do you have any suggestions for people that are off on our little island on how this can be addressed by the team and or manager?

Sincerely,
Castaway

Dear Castaway,

They say no man is an island, but it sounds like you are --- at least while you're at work. With office space at a premium these days, not only individuals but whole teams may find themselves physically cut off from the rest of the organization. In such cases, you should be extra diligent about communicating -- *more* than you think is necessary.

What the manager can do:

- Visit your people. Travel to their locations occasionally to meet with them. Is there an extra desk at the "outpost" location? Perhaps you could work one day a week (or even half a day) from this beachhead workstation. Not only will it show them you're making an effort to keep them in the loop, it will allow you "eyes on" to observe how they are performing their jobs.
- Hold a meeting once a week (or once a month) in which the whole team attends. Save important discussions about strategic direction for this meeting, if possible, and perhaps vary the location if you have employees in more than one building.

What the team can do:

- Let technology help you. If you don't already, use an organizational alias to send out information, rather than spreading the word verbally. That will ensure that people in other locations and on leave will receive the updates. Use a shared directory for your files, if practical, so all team members have access to joint projects.

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- Publish a Weekly Activity Report, where each team member submits the highlights of what they worked on that week; then circulate it among the team members. This works well to stimulate discussion -- even between people who sit next to each other but may not know what their neighbor is doing.
- Socialize! Out of sight can be out of mind, so plan an office happy hour once in a while. It will be more difficult to forget about the castaway team member if you strengthen those interpersonal relationships.

What you can do:

- Ultimately, you, as the castaway, may have to make the bulk of the effort to stay in touch. Attend office functions (holiday parties, farewell luncheons) and use these opportunities to network with your co-workers -- in an unclassified way, of course. Although being on a private island may seem like paradise at first, the isolation and steady diet of coconuts can get old!
- Even if your organization doesn't adopt the Weekly Activity Report suggestion, you can send a summary of your own activities to the team -- or at a minimum, to your boss. If they see something interesting, they may contact you for more information. Be aware that, while it's great that your boss doesn't micromanage you, you want to make sure he knows all the good work you are doing so he can keep you in mind for recognition (awards and such).
- Visit your teammates. Attend meetings in person occasionally, even if it's not required.
- Pick up the phone. While email is a great way to communicate with a group of people all at once, if you have something to tell one person, why not call them? A live voice is an effective way to remind someone there's a human on the other end of the communication.

I'm sure there are plenty other people in your situation who've figured out creative ways to keep the lines of communication open, and I encourage them to add their thoughts and suggestions using Tapioca (link below). Don't let this poor castaway become best friends with a volleyball!

Edith

P.S. Thanks to all who sent in questions in response to the special call. I look forward to addressing them in the months to come.

(U) "Ask Zelda!": Co-worker Full of Hot Air

FROM: "Zelda," Dispenser of Advice on Workplace Issues

Run Date: 02/15/2012

(U) Note: The entire column below is unclassified.



Hey Zelda,

What do I do about an employee who sits close by and runs a space heater all day? I sit by the window (presumably a cooler place) and I'm just fine... or I should say was just fine. Now I'm hot, this is wasting energy, I believe it violates Agency policy and the person has a could-not-care-less attitude about others. Management ignores it... What to do?

-- Sweating it out in SID

Dear Sweaty,

What an excellent topic! I have experienced this at all times of year, not just in winter. It's hard to share communal work spaces when everyone wants to customize their environment to their liking. I sympathize with your plight.

You are correct -- according to ME6 guidance¹, personally-owned space heaters are not allowed in Agency spaces. There are a few circumstances under which an employee may be issued a space heater², but employees may not bring their own heaters into the building.

You might want to draw your supervisor's attention to the document "Safety Program for General Appliances" (see footnote 1), which outlines responsibilities for both employees and supervisors. The bottom line is that employees are not to use an appliance without permission from their supervisor; and the supervisor must receive approval from the Power, Space and Cooling Triage Team before the item is plugged in.

If your co-worker has a legitimate health reason to be issued an Agency-approved space heater, then there's not much you can do. This problem, as well as the solution, is age old -- ask any married couple where one likes to sleep with the window open and the other is bundled under the covers. Both sides need to compromise.

Here are a few suggestions for you and your thermally-challenged co-worker.

When you're hot

- If there is an empty desk, farther away from the heater, request a move.
- Wear layers in the office -- a jacket or sweater that you can remove when things heat up.
- Drink cold beverages instead of coffee, tea, or soup.

When you're not

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- Are you cold all the time? Wear warmer fabrics or layers to hold in the heat. Men -- add a pullover sweater ("jumper," for you integrees) or sweater vest (no, they're not just for Glee Club geeks) over your dress shirt and tie. Ladies -- tights instead of pantyhose, boots instead of pumps, turtlenecks instead of V-necks, and longer skirts will help keep you warm. You don't have to sacrifice fashion. Invest in a pretty pashmina. Keep a wrap or sweater on the back of your chair to throw over your shoulders or legs when you feel the chill.
- If you run a space heater, aim the hot air away from your co-workers, focused on your cubicle or corner and not blowing into communal areas. If possible, rearrange your work space so there is a barrier (white board? coat rack? boxes?) containing the heat around you, rather than letting it escape into the rest of the room (as long as this does not create a fire hazard).
- Switch to hot tea instead of iced tea or soda. It will warm your hands as well as your insides.
- Get up and move around. Take a break once an hour with a short walk (around the room or down the hall) to get the blood pumping.
- Be considerate and energy conscious. Turn off the heater when you leave your desk to go to lunch, a meeting, etc.

If you are using an unauthorized space heater, understand the ramifications of your actions. Not only are you using up extra energy (space heaters are much less efficient than the Agency's HVAC system), but you could be throwing the room's thermostat out of whack -- causing the air conditioning to kick in! Be a good neighbor - it's just as uncomfortable to be hot as to be cold. Keep in mind that the ambient temperature has been selected by the facilities staff because it has been deemed optimal for a number of reasons.

One last word to Sweaty: if it turns out your co-worker has an approved space heater, is her birthday coming up? Chip in with others to give her a "Snuggie." ☺ And no, please don't get your own fan and blow her hot air back at her. That won't help our power, space and cooling problem.

You **do** have the ability to regulate your own temperature to a certain degree, whether you adjust your clothing or build a wall of boxes insulating you from your cold colleague. With any luck, your office will be due for a reorg shortly, and you'll be sitting next to someone else.

Warmly,*

Edits

* pun intended

(U) Footnotes:

1. New guidelines addressing this issue can be found on the Environmental Safety & Health Solutions web site. Type "**go me6**" and click on "A" in the alphabet section. The document is under Appliance Safety.

2. If your work center's temperature is outside of the acceptable range for office space (approx. 70-74 degrees Fahrenheit), a space heater may be issued to you by the Facilities staff until the problem can be fixed. All other requests should go to the Disability Affairs office. [end of column]

Run Date: 06/15/2010



(U) SIDtoday editor's note: Today we debut a brand new column: "Ask Zelda!" If you, as a supervisor, encounter a tricky problem and don't know what to do, see whether Zelda can offer a solution! Here's a little background about our columnist:

"Zelda" is the pen name for a manager who has spent most of her 29 years at NSA in SID (and its predecessor orgs), supplemented by several years in career development (ADET). Her managerial experience includes approximately 20 years as a first-line and mid-level Agency supervisor, as well as supervisory positions in the entertainment and food service industries. Zelda develops and teaches leadership training as part of the National Cryptologic School's Adjunct Faculty, and enjoys bossing people around outside of work, too.

Today's question (the entire text below is unclassified):

Dear Zelda,

Now that the warm weather is here, some of the newer Agency employees in my office are dressing in ways that are less than professional. How do I, as their supervisor, get them to stop dressing like they're going to the beach when NSA doesn't have a formal dress code?

Signed,
Prudish Prudence

Dear Prudence,

Oy! Once the thermometer hits 80 degrees, it can look like Ocean City West around here. Somehow, shorts and flip-flops don't exactly convey the image of a fierce SIGINT warrior.

You are right to be concerned, and I applaud your initiative as the supervisor to take corrective action. Not only is beach attire unprofessional in the workplace, but in certain cases it can be downright distracting to co-workers (if you get my drift).

The main thing to remember when counseling the offending employees is that they probably don't know any better. For some, this may be their first real job after graduating high school or college. Your approach should be to educate, not to discipline (unless you have already "educated" them more than once and there has been no change in behavior). Hold a private counseling session as soon as possible where you explain that, while NSA has no formal dress code, they are expected to present themselves in a professional manner -- and that includes their attire. You may also want to take the opportunity to advise them on "dressing for success" so that they are taken seriously in their new career. In fact, it might be a good idea to have this talk with **all** new Agency employees, informing them of the standard level of office dress before it becomes an issue.

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You, as the supervisor, are in a position to set guidelines for what is appropriate in your work center. Both the physical location and type of work being done will help you determine what these should be. If safety is a concern (like when operating dangerous equipment), impress upon them the importance of wearing steel-toed boots or long-sleeved shirts, even if they make one hot in the summer. What may be acceptable for employees working on the roof, in an overheated machine room, or crawling under floor tiles is probably not appropriate for desk job workers in an air-conditioned office. Do your employees fill a customer liaison role or one where they represent the organization to others? That may require a more formal level of dress than solitary workers who rarely interact with others.

On the other hand, you must balance your demands with the employee's physical comfort and the desire to express one's individuality. Remember that embracing diversity extends to the wardrobe, too!

So, Prudence, to summarize my advice:)

- Decide what is appropriate for your work center -- and try to be inclusive.
- Inform your employees what the office dress code is and why (I find people are more likely to comply with rules if they understand the reasons behind them).
- Ask them for specific behavioral changes (ex.: they are welcome to wear sandals at work, but please refrain from wearing rubber shower thongs in the office).
- Answer any questions and address their concerns.
- Thank them for their cooperation.
- Enforce the rules equitably among your people.

As with most things, communication is the key to a happy and productive workplace. With a little proactive discussion on your part, your staff can look professional during the summer months. So the next time one of your employees looks like they work at the National Snorkeling Academy instead of the National Security Agency, try these tips and let me know how it turns out.

Edda

(U) 'Situation' in the Office? Ask Zelda! Today's Dilemma: How Can I Get My Boss to 'Ask Before You Task'?

FROM: 'Zelda,' Dispenser of Advice for SID Supervisors

Run Date: 08/30/2010

(U) Editor's note: The entire text below is UNCLASSIFIED.



Dear Zelda,

I am considered an expert in my field, yet my supervisor, who knows little about it, keeps giving me instructions that make no sense. How can I get him to ask me for input beforehand, so he'll stop making ignorant decisions?

Signed, Techie Knows Best

Dear Readers,

This week I'd like to address a few questions I've gotten (like the above) with a similar theme: managing up.

Whether you are currently a supervisor or not, learning how to manage your boss is a very useful skill to have. "Managing up" essentially means getting things done through people higher up the chain. It involves proactively creating a strong, effective, and mutually beneficial relationship with your supervisor. While many are passive about their relationship with their boss, letting the higher-up set the tone for the relationship, the most successful employees **take an active part in setting that tone and building the partnership**. The first thing you need to do is gain your boss' trust and confidence; here's how.

1. Get to know your boss' style. Observe how he prefers to operate and adjust your interactions with him accordingly (even if it's not *your* preferred method of operating). Is he technical or not; introverted or extroverted; detail- or big picture-oriented? Does he primarily use logic or feelings when making decisions? Note his preferred way of communicating: face to face? in writing? Does he like frequent or sporadic interaction with his subordinates? If you can't figure out the answers to these questions by observing him in action, then by all means, ask him!

Example: **Closed door policy** Are you frustrated because you never get any face time with your manager? Every time you go in to talk to him, he seems busy and can't afford you more than two minutes? Rather than dropping by his desk whenever you think of something he should know (and thus interrupting his train of thought), ask "would you like me to send you a weekly update?" and save it up for a short email detailing items of interest. This stands a better chance of getting his attention. Keep your visits short and infrequent. If he finds your input valuable, he'll ask you back more often.

2. Understand what your boss needs/wants from you. Find out what his expectations are and tell him yours. Ask what, specifically, you can do to help him.

3. Keep your boss informed. Give him advanced warning about problems. Anticipate what he might

need or want to know, but don't overwhelm him with minutiae. Actively market yourself or your organization to higher ups by letting them know what you're working on, your successes, challenges you are facing, and strengths or capabilities you possess that can be of use to them.

4. **Be dependable.** Deliver results. Helping your boss be successful will help you be successful.

Now that you've earned your boss' trust, you are in a better position to influence how issues related to your area of expertise are handled. Remember: take the initiative and work within his comfort zone. If, like "Techie" above, your boss is uninformed about the issues, clue him in! Encourage his questions and keep him informed of new developments in your area. (Don't wait to be asked.) Not only will it give him a better basis to make managerial decisions, but it will foster a dialog with you that might have him consulting you before making unwise pronouncements.

Moreover, by promoting a dialog where you both explain your positions, you may learn that there were more factors involved in his "ignorant" decision than you realized. When informed of an ill-advised decision, you could nicely and diplomatically point out some "concerns" you have over taking this route, but don't expect that your boss will immediately reverse his decision when confronted with your brilliant insights and opinions (although he may). Be prepared to make the best of it -- and lose the attitude. Think (and say), "this could work if we..."

You should regularly engage with your supervisor to explain opportunities for the organization in your area of expertise, list and discuss the pros and cons, identify solutions and alternatives, and recommend a way ahead. In this way you will become a partner in the decision-making process. Managing up is about collaboration and interdependence. Be supportive, not antagonistic, and you may be pleasantly surprised at how things start going your way.

As an alternative, you could be the voice of sanity "howling in the wilderness;" but that will only leave you feeling chilled and sore in the throat.

Edda

Note: There are lots of good books on the subject that can elaborate on how to identify and use influencing or relationship-building techniques. If you are having problems with a higher up, I highly recommend that you get one.

(U) Zelda Column: Private Chit-Chat Goes Public

FROM: 'Zelda,' Dispenser of Advice for SIGINTers on Workplace Issues

Run Date: 01/07/2011



(U) Editor's note: The below article is unclassified in its entirety.

Dear Zelda,

Some coworkers and I have been exchanging messages that we, up until recently, believed to be private. In these messages, we said some embarrassing things about mutual acquaintances, including comparing one female coworker of ours to Teflon and another pair of upper-level managers as "Batman and Robin." Unfortunately, these messages weren't private after all: someone posted them onto NSANet! :(Now everyone hates me and my coworkers. What can we do to make people like us again?

-- Secret No Longer in SID

Dear Secret No Longer,

Who among us hasn't done something like this? It's mortifying when it happens, but once it's out there, the damage is done. At least you can be thankful that you didn't say anything really egregious or grounds for an EEO complaint. In time, people will forget about it and move on. But meanwhile, here's what you can do.

Apologize to the people you bad-mouthed if you know (or are reasonably certain) they have seen the postings. Make it a prompt and sincere apology, and don't make excuses for your bad behavior (such as blaming the person who posted it). Be humble. Grovel, if necessary. And might I also suggest you do not do this via e-mail? Call or talk to them in person. If all else fails, bring them a grande caramel macchiato. (I'd forgive you!)

If they haven't seen the messages and you can pull them back to spare their feelings, do so immediately. And take this as a lesson to not send electronically anything you wouldn't want to get back to the person being talked about.

Shame on the person who posted your exchanges! It was not only rude to the originators, but probably served to hurt the subjects' feelings. Who would do such a thing?

A word to the wise: for those of you prone to e-mail gaffes with similar results, such as accidentally Replying to All, you might consider removing the Reply All button from your Outlook toolbar. You will still be able to get to that feature (under Actions), but it will be harder to find and you won't hit it by accident.

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In conclusion, the best way to make people like you is to not say unflattering things about them in the first place -- and **never** put them in writing. That would be a good new year's resolution for us all.

Wishing you good judgment and smooth SIGINT sailing in 2011,

Eddie

(U) How Do You Stop the Epithet Epidemic in Your Office? Ask Zelda!

FROM: "Zelda," Dispenser of Workplace Advice for SIGINTers

Run Date: 11/04/2011



(U) This week's column responds to a couple of questions that were submitted by readers regarding respect in the workplace - and in particular, the use of profanity. Those writing in were disturbed not only by foul language, but by political, racial, sexual and religious conversations that they felt should not be taking place in the office. Zelda's answer below is unclassified in its entirety.

Dear Ears Burning,

Similar to a more relaxed dress code over the years (see **previous column**), personal behavior at the Agency seems to have suffered from a lack of professionalism. Perhaps they are related. I believe that when people come to work dressed professionally, their mindset and vocabulary usually follow suit (no pun intended).

It can be very distressing to hear "intelligence professionals" speaking in ways that are neither intelligent *nor* professional. I know some military employees make the excuse that this type of language is acceptable at their other assignments (like on a ship), so they are in the habit of speaking this way and can't help it. Others "drop the F-bomb" and then say, "pardon my French." Both are equally inexcusable. These people are able to curb their cursing when they step into a church or their grandmother's house - they can certainly watch their language while at work.



How to get them to comply

You should try to solve this at the lowest level possible. That means talking to the offender(s) and letting them know that this behavior is disturbing to you. Ask them to stop. Keep in mind they might need to be reminded a few times, as it's tough to break bad habits. You might even agree on a "swear-word look" or gesture* to help remind co-workers who slip. Some workplaces have benefitted from instituting a "curse jar" where offenders have to deposit a dollar every time they say a forbidden word. Give the jar to charity when it gets full or use the contents to hold an ice cream social for the office.

If the offenders are unwilling to clean up their language, your next course would be to go to the workplace supervisor. It is his job to maintain a non-threatening work environment for all employees. Please know that there are Agency policies that support your request, and **the penalties** can be quite severe. Your management is in a position to enforce these.

Supervisors, curb this practice in your work center, even if none of your employees complain. Chances are someone is bothered by it but is just too shy to speak up, and you never know when the big boss or an important customer will drop by unannounced. Besides, it's just plain wrong! Become familiar with the regulations on the subject.** For example, did you know that the use of abusive, offensive, or unprofessional language, gestures or conduct is punishable by a letter of reprimand or a 30-day suspension ... *for the first offense*? And **removal from the Agency** for the third offense?! YIKES!!

Breaking the habit

If you are trying to curb your own foul mouth, one technique is to wear a rubber band around your wrist and snap it (ouch!) every time you catch yourself saying something you shouldn't. Think of acceptable words to substitute for the offending ones. You can have fun with this and use silly replacement words ("Excrement! I missed the deadline again!") to wean yourself off of them. But most of all, be aware of what you are saying and who can hear you. This also goes for those religious, political, racial, or sexual conversations at work. Even if you're sure your interlocutor doesn't mind, there might be someone over the partition who thinks the details of last night's "hook-up" are TMI....and the high school work study in your office did not come to the Agency to learn those new vocabulary words.

So save your potty mouth for the ball field and your political discussions for Facebook. The office is a place of business, and if you expect to be taken seriously you'll need to talk like a professional. Show some respect for yourself and your co-workers -- clean up your lingo and *shut the front door* where inappropriate conversations are concerned.

Zelda

* A tilt of the head accompanied by a raised eyebrow, covering your ears, or holding your nose to indicate "your language stinks" are just a few ways to convey your dissatisfaction with the language being used.

**** PMM Chapter 366** governs Personal Conduct

(U) Have you ever been in this situation? What is the man in the picture below thinking? Post your thoughts on this topic and/or a funny quip for the man's thought bubble on the **SIDtoday Blog**, and Zelda will announce the winner of the best caption in her next column.



Standard disclaimer: "Zelda's" views are her own and do not represent the official views of the Associate Directorate for Corporate Leadership, Human Resources, SID, or any other NSA organization

(U) "Ask Zelda!": Guilty Until Proven Innocent?

FROM: "Zelda," Dispenser of Advice on Workplace Issues

Run Date: 11/08/2012

(U) The below article is unclassified in its entirety.

Note: The following question has been edited for brevity.



Dear Zelda,

How do I exonerate myself from an "anonymous mailbag" incident?

A few months ago, a co-worker was really steamed about how things were going in our branch/division and wrote a livid message to our office's "anonymous mailbag," but showed a few of us the draft beforehand. I suggested that the wording was overly strong, as it referred to our managers as "abysmal" and "idiotic." The co-worker sent it anyway. Co-worker receives praise and recognition from the office, despite the mail or because co-worker didn't come up on the list of suspects who wrote the message. In the meantime, the chill I'm feeling is pretty severe! I'm known to be a direct person, so possibly it was assumed that if anyone would write a message like that, I would; but I didn't, and I advised against it.

Because I agreed to look at the draft in confidence, I don't want to dime out my co-worker. What recourse do I have to officially establish that I have not used this mailbag? If I have something to say to anyone, I'll do it under my own name, and it won't involve using the words "abysmal" or "idiotic."

Help!!!!

And BTW, to me the situation I'm in is a good argument against "anonymous mailbags." Let people put their own names to criticisms they want to make of others. Otherwise, you end up with people like me who are wondering if we're getting unjustly blamed.

-- Innocent Bystander

Dear Bystander,

You make a good case against anonymous mailbags, but a lot of people won't give feedback at all if they know it will be attributed to them. I believe scathing comments such as your co-worker's are the exception and not the rule in such mailbags.

Nevertheless, there is something you can do about the situation. Speak to the person(s) who is freezing you out. In private say, "I've notice you . . . [describe the treatment you're receiving]. Have I done something to offend you?"

If they mention "your" note, you have the opening to set the record straight. You can state what you did above -- that you have never used the mailbag and that if you had something to say to someone, you would tell them directly 'cause that's how you roll.

If they don't bring up the note, at least you've made an attempt to clear the air. Maybe there is another reason for the cold shoulder. When they insist nothing is wrong, you could say something like, "I hope if you did have a problem with me, that you would talk to me directly about it. I would do the same for you." That plants the seeds of innocence in their mind (i.e., you would talk to them directly and not use an anonymous mailbag) if the cause is the note, and encourages them to broach the subject if it's something else.

Other "Anonymous Mailbag" Thoughts

While it is tempting to be completely uncensored when using anonymous feedback mechanisms, please understand that it can be counterproductive. A rude, accusatory, or overly severe comment can turn the recipient off to your suggestion for improvement. Try to make your comment constructive and free from emotional coloring. You are more likely to have it considered and initiate change that way.

Likewise, if you receive hostile feedback through an anonymous mailbag, it's easy to discount and ignore it, especially if it pushes your "hot" buttons. Instead, try to look past the way it is worded to see if there's a kernel of truth that requires action. Often important feedback is not couched in the most pleasant terms. While many people will accept gentle criticism from a friend, it takes a truly enlightened person to acknowledge that an adversary's nasty comment might have some merit and to do something about it.

Edda

(U) Ask Zelda!: Retired in Place

FROM: "Zelda," Dispenser of Advice on Workplace Issues

Run Date: 11/05/2013

(U) The column below is unclassified.



Dear Zelda,

There is an employee on my team, let's call him Jerry, who is eligible for retirement, but chooses not to retire for financial reasons. He is well-intentioned and personable, but he does not understand or follow directions very well. Everyone on the team has helped to think of tasks for him that we think he cannot possibly mess up, but often we end up having to redo them anyway. He knows he's being given tasks that aren't central to the office, and it's taking a toll on his

mood and motivation, but if we give him more important tasks, someone else will have to do them too. On the one hand, I feel bad the he is having trouble, but on the other, how long must we string him along if he can't actually do the work? If he were to retire, we could fill the billet with someone who would actually contribute. I feel heartless for even saying that, though. Should we keep trying to find menial tasks he can handle, or maintain a charade of giving him meaningful tasks that are assigned to someone else too, or what?

--Heartless Harry

Dear Harry,

It's unclear to me whether or not you are Jerry's supervisor, but I will answer your letter under the assumption that you are.

I can understand that you and others on the team are trying to go easy on Jerry, but that is not helpful. Jerry should be treated no differently than any other employee who isn't pulling his weight. He should be given tasks commensurate with his grade and work role, and then held accountable for them.

You should coach him on how to do things, and counsel him when he does them incorrectly. When he makes a mistake, explain his error and have **him** redo the work--not another employee. If he needs additional training, make sure he gets it. His ACE score should accurately reflect his performance. Following your attempts to train, coach, and correct him, if he still performs sub-par, you should put him on a **Documented Plan for Improved Performance**.

If you think your office is not a good fit for his talents, encourage him to find a job that is. There may be other areas of the Agency where he can contribute meaningfully. It is a disservice to your team and to Jerry to let this situation continue the way it is. Has it occurred to you that maybe he is putting in only a half-hearted effort because he is being given menial work to do? He probably feels as frustrated with the situation as the rest of you.

I know this will sound harsh, but in the future when you get the urge to coddle one of your employees, please go boil an egg instead.

Zelda

Approved for Release by NSA on
08-26-2014, FOIA Case # 77070

(U) Ask Zelda!: Awful to Always Await an Award

FROM: "Zelda," Dispenser of Advice on Workplace Issues

Run Date: 01/03/2014

(U) The below article is unclassified in its entirety.



Dear Zelda,
I am having an issue with the way recognition is being handled in my office. Is it ever OK to contact your management and request that you be considered for an award?

Signed, Unappreciated

Dear Unappreciated,

My personal opinion is no. That said, there are ways you can subtly hint at it, but you have to use finesse.

The wrong way to do it

I know of someone who wrote himself up for a cash award, submitted the form to his boss and said "sign here." He thought he was doing his boss a favor by saving him the time and trouble. His boss thought otherwise.

The right way to do it

During your semi-annual performance discussion, bring up the subject of awards. Say that you've noticed other people getting awards and were wondering what you could do to position yourself to be eligible for one. See what she says.

Keep in mind that, in most cases, it's not enough just to do your job well. Awards are typically given for special performance that goes above and beyond one's regular job duties. You might volunteer to take on an additional responsibility--a special project, participation on an inter-office committee, etc.

A better way to do it

Why not look around for a way you can improve a process or reduce operating costs in your organization? It's much better to have your actions speak for you, rather than you asking to be recognized.

Bottom line: yes, you can request to be considered for an award, but be careful how you do it or you will not only be unappreciated, you may be unemployed.

Zelda

Approved for Release by NSA on
08-26-2014, FOIA Case # 77070

(U) Zelda Column: Is Gossip Getting Your Goat?

FROM: 'Zelda,' Dispenser of Advice for SIGINTers on Workplace Issues

Run Date: 11/05/2010

(U) Editor's comment: In this month's column, Zelda weighs in on wagging tongues in the workplace... The below column is unclassified in its entirety.



Dear Zelda,

Do men gossip and backbite in their workspace among each other? I notice women tend to do so. How do you try to convince people this can be counterproductive to teamwork?

-- Sensitive in SID

Dear Sensitive,

Do men gossip? You better believe they do! One of the biggest gossips I know is a man. Although women tend to get that label more often (perhaps because we communicate more frequently), gossiping and backbiting are not limited to the female of the species. But you are right about one thing -- it is counter-productive to teamwork and can erode morale.

I think the most effective way to deal with a gossip is at the grassroots level. If no one in the office will listen to her (or his) gossip, the backbiter will have no audience. Next time you find yourself immersed in one of these slander sessions, say something along the lines of "I'm not comfortable talking about Jim behind his back" and walk away. With any luck, others will take the hint and follow you.

If you supervise a Gossip Girl, hold a counseling session and let her know it is unacceptable workplace behavior. Explain the harmful effects of gossip and backbiting, and tell her that if she has an issue with Jim she should approach him directly, rather than griping about him behind his back. If the behavior continues, begin the disciplinary process. And most of all, set the example by not engaging in gossip yourself.

Now, a certain amount of rumor-mongering in the workplace is unavoidable; it's just human nature. Rumors, per se, are not necessarily bad; after all, "RUMINT" is often how people get their first tip-off that organizational change is about to occur. But malicious gossip or backbiting is never appropriate at work, and the supervisor should take action if office gossip interferes with productivity, hurts people's feelings or reputations, erodes morale, or damages interpersonal relationships (teamwork).

If gossip is rampant in your organization, examine the causes: not enough work to keep people busy? management not sharing information? a problem employee not being dealt with by the supervisor? Sometimes gossip is a symptom of a bigger problem.

So keep an ear out for malicious or excessive gossip, and take action to curtail it. Supervisors --

model good communication practices so that gossip becomes unnecessary in your organization. Let's leave the grapevine to the vintners.

Edith

(U) An Interview with Zelda

FROM: SIDtoday

Run Date: 05/05/2011

(U) With the first anniversary of the "Ask Zelda" column looming on the horizon (in June), we decided to interview Zelda herself. We thought her readers might be interested in learning more about the advice-giver...

(U) SIDtoday: Zelda, your advice column "Ask Zelda" has been the most successful non-technical series in the history of SIDtoday. A lot of people have questioned whether Zelda is a real person or a team of people, and why she uses a pen name.



(U) Zelda: Well, as you can see, I'm a real person. 😊 In the **first issue** you published my "credentials," and that description was accurate; but the picture that runs with the column [above] looks nothing like me. As for Zelda being a team of people, I do occasionally consult with another person for a "sanity check," but I am the sole author of the column.

(U) The decision to use a pen name came about for several reasons. The idea for the column was proposed by the SIDtoday editor, who was looking for a venue where SID supervisors could write in to ask advice. Since SIDtoday is like an online newspaper, we decided to follow the tradition of newspaper write-in advice columnists (such as Dear Abby and Miss Manners) and give me a nom de plume. I like it because using a pen name creates a persona who's more memorable and accessible than "Ask Mary Smith, Chief of S456." Plus it creates a certain mystique about Zelda... she's bigger than life. It also prevents me from getting inundated with hate mail and requests for advice outside of the column. [Ed. note: Some people have asked for Zelda's direct help with a personal problem but didn't want it published in SIDtoday.]

(U) ST: You said it was an advice column for supervisors...

(U) Z: Yes -- that was the original plan. But non-supervisory employees began writing in asking questions and requesting someone like Zelda help them with their issues, too.

(U) ST: So you branched out to answer anything work related?

(U) Z: [laughs] More or less! I don't give technical or romantic advice, however.

(U) ST: What has been the reaction to Zelda?

(U) Z: I'm very pleased-- and surprised -- that it has been overwhelmingly positive. Each month it is among the top 5 most widely read articles, and I want to thank my loyal followers for that. I'm thinking of making little rubber bracelets that say WWZD ("What Would Zelda Do?") to give out at Front Line Leader classes. Or maybe t-shirts that say "Be a FOZ" ("Friend of Zelda"). 😊

(U) ST: But it hasn't all been positive...

(U//FOUO) Z: Heavens, no. There have been a few people who didn't appreciate Zelda's sense of

humor, and at first some of the other NSA organizations (like HR and ADCL) were uncomfortable with an unknown person in SID dispensing advice in their areas of expertise. But we made it clear that this was just Zelda's opinion and not an official answer. Strict policy questions can and should be addressed by these other organizations, but Zelda fills a void for people who are seeking advice. She acts as a wise friend or senior co-worker -- which isn't the same thing as asking for a policy interpretation. And many areas of interpersonal relations can't be addressed by policy. I don't believe there's a policy on how to deal with an obnoxious or smelly coworker, for example. Besides, I think people would rather read something with a bit of a personality (Zelda has been called "cheeky" -- even opinionated) as opposed to a bland, whitewashed party line that reads like a policy manual and has been approved by a chain of managers to scrub it of anything that might offend. Zelda is not afraid to offend -- although that's not her intent.

(U) ST: Some readers are probably wondering if the questions are really sent in by your readers, or if you make them up.

(U) Z: They were all from readers except for the very first one -- I had to "prime the pump" since no one knew about Zelda to ask questions before the first article came out. Also, in December I turned the tables on the workforce and asked them to give advice on a situation of my choosing.

(U) ST: How do you decide which questions to answer?

(U) Z: I try to address a variety of topics, so if you write in about a specific problem and I just answered a similar question, yours probably won't get published.... at least not for a while. Also, some questions are more appropriate for the policy expert in that area to answer. In that case, SIDtoday forwards the question (with the asker's permission) to that POC.

(U) ST: What issues do you see people concerned about most?

(U) Z: How to deal with their supervisor is a big one. I devoted a whole article to "managing up" because several readers had asked similar questions along those lines.

(U) ST: Is there an underlying theme or philosophy that ties all your advice together?

(U) Z: Hmmm, if I had to pick something, I might say "common sense." Also, be nice to people and assume noble intent.

(U) ST: What one piece of advice do you have for SID managers?

(U) Z: Throughout my career I've seen too many micro-managers. It's probably inevitable -- we hire people for their technical skills, and then when they get to a certain level they find they need to go into management to keep getting promoted. However, they still have a secret hankering to do the technical work. Managers need to be open minded: just because the organization has always done something a certain way doesn't mean it's the only -- or even best -- way to do it. My advice to SID managers is to **take care of your people and let your people take care of the mission.**

(U) ST: One last question: will the readers ever find out who Zelda really is?

(U) Z: I don't know... Probably when the column wraps-up, whenever that may be. Doing it too soon might be disappointing -- like unmasking the Lone Ranger! 😊

(U) Ask Zelda: It's the 'P' Word

FROM: 'Zelda,' Dispenser of Advice for SIGINTers on Workplace Issues

Run Date: 06/03/2011

(U) The entire text below is unclassified.



Dear Zelda,

What would your recommendation be to a pay grade 4 when supervisors won't push for your promotion? I do an excellent job and members of the office recognize this fact. Two reasons I've received in the past [for not being promoted] are that they didn't know my job well enough and that it's been too soon since my last promotion. On the **Pebble** people discuss leaving the job [one isn't happy in], but no vacancies are advertised for my grade level.

Signed,

Forever Four

Dear "Four-ever,"

I'll bet a lot of readers out there can sympathize with your plight. At this time of year, there's more than a few people wondering, "What am I, chopped liver?" They may not all be a grade 4, but many people wish their supervisor would push harder for their promotion.

My advice to you -- and all others in your situation -- falls into two categories.

Change the Things You Can

The obvious first step is to make sure your management understands what you do. Explain your job to them and maybe send your supervisor a weekly activity report throughout the year with bullets summarizing your activities. She may not realize the extent of your duties, and you shouldn't wait until your Promotion Review Package to educate her. Volunteer for extra assignments to gain experience outside your specific area, provide an opportunity to shine, and show you are a team player.

Get a sanity check from some people whose judgment you trust. Is there something obvious preventing you from being promoted? Do you need better visibility within the organization? Is an unsavory personality trait or behavior holding you back? Objective, impartial observers might be able to help you identify things to work on in the coming year to make yourself more promotable.

If you've been in your current job for a long time, consider a detail to try out a different career field. Make a list of all the things you are good at (organizing things, dealing with people, oral communications) and think about what other positions utilize these skills. This may or may not lead to a permanent job change. Sometimes a detail to develop some new skills and broaden your experience is all it takes to push you over the top for promotion.

If you want to switch jobs but none are advertised at your grade level, put feelers out to everyone you

know for vacancies. Some positions may be open but not advertised. Investigate career development (aka intern) programs, keeping in mind your strengths and interests. Look at vacancy ads for jobs at the **next** grade level, and show evidence that you can operate at that higher grade. (This is a more important determiner of promotion readiness than time in grade.) Reading vacancy ads for the skills and knowledge expected at the next level will also give you a good target to aim for.

Accept the Things You Can't Change

Understand that it's difficult for a manager to justify promoting the same person over and over, even if they are a relatively low grade. There are probably other deserving people in the organization, and promotions are very scarce -- with less than 18% of the eligible workforce getting promoted.

Meanwhile, accept the praise from your colleagues and allow that to satisfy your thirst for recognition. Have you gotten a cash or time-off award? Promotion is not the only way to reward excellent performance. And if you like your job, let that be its own reward. There are people out there making more money who hate what they're doing. In the long run, who do you think is worse off?

Consider this: you may be doing a great job, but the job itself may not support a higher grade. Some work roles max out at a particular level, and to continue to get promoted you would need to switch to a different field. Check the Work Role Finder (**go work roles**) to learn more about the competencies, training and performance expected at each level of your work role.

Last of all, be patient. Promotions are infrequent so focus on gaining new skills and continual learning. The feedback you were given about it being "too soon since your last promotion" could mean that you haven't gained any new skills since you've been at this grade. You have a whole career ahead of you, and years to rise up through the ranks. It takes time to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary for the next level. Diversify, ask for feedback on ways to improve, and do what you love.

Before you climb on top of your desk, beat your chest, and yell, "Show me the money!" do some hard thinking about how ambitious you are. Decide whether A) you like your job and the field you're in and can be content with that - even if it means being promoted at a slower pace, or B) want to advance quickly at all costs. Let the answer to that determine what course of action you'll take. And remember, it could be worse - you could be stuck at the "terrible twos"!

Best of luck to you in your career.

Edda

(U) "Ask Zelda!": Tormented by Twisted English

FROM: "Zelda," Dispenser of Advice on Workplace Issues

Run Date: 01/06/2012

(U) The article below is unclassified in its entirety.



Dear Zelda,

Hardly a day passes in which I don't receive an email, usually one that's widely distributed and from a more senior member of our community, using the pronoun "myself" incorrectly. It's my own pet peeve, but I imagine our 5-Eyes partners questioning our reliability when they see our seniors making this basic mistake. Furthermore, my boss regularly misuses a relatively common word. It hangs in the air when we talk with customers and I squirm when I see their confusion. Is there an appropriate way to correct him?

Signed,
Wincing

My dear LexiConstable,

Misusing words is one of my pet peeves, too. I find it even more annoying when the person misusing them is doing so in an effort to impress others with his intelligence! Fortunately, this is an easy problem for the Vocabulary Police to rectify.

Improper use of "myself," along with the erroneous "I" instead of "me" ("between you and I..." or "Send your timesheets to Sally and I by noon") are all too common in the workplace. It's part of a bigger problem of people trying to sound hyper formal and in so doing, speaking incorrectly. So let me set the record straight: *myself* is a reflexive pronoun, meaning that the subject of the sentence is doing the action to him- or herself. You can easily remember this because "reflexive" has the same root as "reflection" -- when you look in a mirror **you** can see **yourself**. Here are some examples:

- I can feed myself.
- [You should] Listen to yourself!
- He poked himself in the eye.

It is therefore incorrect to have someone else do something to you and use the reflexive pronoun as the object of the verb (ex., "Give the book to Jane or myself," or "Please reply to myself or Hal by COB.") Use "me" instead.

As for the other issue of confusing *I* and *me*, *I* is used for the subject of a sentence, and *me* for the object. Without going into detail about prepositions and the like, you can often tell whether to use *I* or *me* by simply eliminating the other person in the equation. (You wouldn't say "Send your timesheets to I by noon," would you?)

Now, regarding your boss' **malapropism** in meetings with customers, unless he is very dense, you can probably clue him in by simply using the word correctly a few times in his presence. If he cocks his head and looks confused, it's an indication he may be catching on to the discrepancy in usage, and you might have an opening to discuss it. Gently.

If your subtle attempts to enlighten him pass by as unheeded as your hints for a promotion, try the direct approach. Pull him aside the next time it happens and say that you noticed some customers were confused when he mentioned [the word]. Tell him there are probably regional variations in usage (to allow him to save face), but that the most common usage you're aware of is [correct definition], or that it sounded like he really meant [other word]. The important thing is to do this in private and without the least hint of superiority in your attitude. He may be embarrassed, so you might want to be ready with a self-effacing anecdote of your own ("No matter how many times I look it up, I can never remember the difference between *affect* and *effect*") or a quip about how the last thing the two of you want is for the customers to be any **more** confused than the highly-technical discussion already made them.

Last of all, if you are uncomfortable with the direct approach, you could always resort to leaving a dictionary open on his desk with one of those sticky arrows, used to show people where to sign, pointing to the word in question.

One caveat: before correcting your boss, make sure you're right. Take a minute to look up the word and verify that his usage is, indeed, incorrect. There are few things more embarrassing than correcting someone when **you're** the one who's wrong -- especially when that someone is your boss.

Eddis

(U) "Ask Zelda!": Exterminating a Pack Rat

FROM: "Zelda," Dispenser of Advice on Workplace Issues

Run Date: 03/05/2012

(U) Note: The entire column below is unclassified.



Dear Zelda, I have a co-worker who has more than 30 boxes that are very old and are lining our office just collecting dust. Some contractors even have boxes by their feet under their desks. Management chooses to ignore these eye-sores and dust collectors even though I have brought it to their attention. What can we do??

-- Claustrophobic from Clutter

Dear Claustrophobic,

Not only are the boxes eyesores, they are health hazards -- especially if they are blocking or narrowing passageways -- for

- people with dust allergies,
- those with mobility issues,
- potential for tripping,
- in case of a medical emergency (stretcher needs to fit through the aisle),
- during an evacuation, and
- it adds to the "fire load" (fuel), in the event of a fire.

First, contact your OSH rep.* She can help you get some traction with management by officially declaring the situation hazardous.

Once management has directed the owner to get rid of the boxes, you might consider offering to help.

While you can't call professional "clutter busters" to come in and ruthlessly take charge like they do on TV, you **can** help your co-worker sort through the stored materials and archive records that need to be kept.

Personal items that are not being used every day should be brought home. NSAW is experiencing a space crunch and we don't have room to store people's personal effects (such as holiday decorations, no-longer-displayed knickknacks, or several changes of clothes/shoes).

If the items are work related, often an impartial person has an easier time deciding what to keep and what to throw away than the owner. Help Patty Pack Rat go through her things, determine which need to be archived,** and burn bag the rest.

Don't be surprised if you, Patty, and the rest of the office experience a surge in productivity after the purge. (A "Purge Surge"??)*** **Feng Shui** principles state that clutter causes stagnation in the room's energy... and you might even find an extra contractor or two under the rubble!

Feldts

(U) Notes:

* (U) Type "**go oshrep**" in your browser and click on the link "Who is My OSHRep?" at the bottom of the page

** (U) See the **Records Management website** for what needs to be archived.

*** (U) Editor's note: If you aren't familiar with the reference, see **this article**.

(U) "Ask Zelda!": Short-Timers Are Short-Circuiting the Fun

FROM: "Zelda," Dispenser of Advice on Workplace Issues

Run Date: 05/02/2012

(U) The entire column below is unclassified.

Dear Zelda,



I happen to work with a number of older employees who are within a year or two of retirement. I have been employed for a few years and enjoy my job and have a lot on my plate to keep current and competitive, excited about NSA's mission and my future career and PCS assignments. These near-retired co-workers, kind and personable and knowledgeable as they are, complain a lot about the changes going on at NSA and often gripe about the number of years/months/weeks/days/hours or miles-to-commute yet before they can retire. I don't know how many times they have had their "figures run." I usually ignore them, but it does tend to "poison" the atmosphere and drain the enthusiasm of those around them. I can only imagine it does them no good, either, because it likely makes the time left drag on for them even more slowly.

I have tried including them in some of the intriguing things I'm learning, and that works for a while. Soon the complaining starts again. Do they just need to vent or what advice can you give those of us surrounded by employees just counting the days to retirement? And what advice could you give them, to help them endure to the end in better mental health?

-- Love my job

Dear Job-lover,

I'm glad the Agency has employees like you who care deeply about the mission and want to make a career here. Please accept my personal thanks for your positive attitude and attempts to include the **"Matures"** and **"Boomers"** in your office in your enthusiasm for this work! I hope they all read your letter so they can see how their short-timer attitude is affecting the newer employees.

You ask several good questions:

Do they just need to vent?

Yes and no. Part of it is venting, and that's just human nature; but part is actually enthusiasm for this new stage of life. Don't you remember when you couldn't wait to finish school and get out into the "real world" to start working? It's the same for them. They are looking forward to their next adventure: retirement, and all that it brings.

What advice can you give those of us surrounded by employees just counting the days?

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08-26-2014, FOIA Case # 77070

It sounds like you have found a way to stop the complaining, at least temporarily. Here are some additional suggestions:

- Participate in their retirement countdown to show you share in their excitement over this milestone in their career. A simple ritual such as turning over a daily calendar page each morning might be all it takes to acknowledge the impending date, and then everyone can get back to work.
- Be aware that they might feel like technology or the times have passed them by. Point out that they still have a lot to offer, and bring them in on things they can possibly help with or contribute to.
- Suggest that they put all their organization- or target-specific knowledge down on paper (or better yet in a wiki page -- see **related article**) by creating some working aids or historical/reference documents for the office before they leave. (If they seem reluctant, a little flattery works wonders.) We don't want their expertise walking out the door with them!
- For those times when you feel them dragging you down with their complaints, don't hesitate to say just what you did in your letter. Tell them that you're excited about working here -- just as excited as they are about their impending retirement, and while you're happy to share in their optimism about the new adventures that await them, the complaints are starting to affect your own enthusiasm for the job.

What advice could you give them?

- Read Job-lover's letter. Limit your griping to others who share your opinions and situation, and don't poison or erode the enjoyment that newer employees have for the job.
- Reinvent yourself! Find a new role in the time you've got left. OK, so maybe your dream job (COBOL programmer?) became obsolete and the best parts of your current job are now automated. It's a bummer, to be sure; but you might be an excellent mentor for a computer scientist. Or a great staff officer, with your detail-oriented brain; or even a good manager. Spent your career as an operational linguist? Become adjunct faculty certified and teach language or area studies courses. Try something new to keep yourself interested and engaged. It will keep your brain young, too.
- If you've got a year or more left, this is your chance to branch out, take a risk. Explore an avenue you didn't pursue earlier because it wasn't a career-enhancing move. Now that there's no fear of stalling your career, take that leap. Even if it doesn't work out, you'll be retiring soon anyway. And if it does work out, you may like it enough to stick around a while longer.

In conclusion, Job-lover, if you can just hang in there and ignore the griping, the situation in your office will change on its own -- one retirement at a time.

Zelda

Note from Zelda to "Just Plain Uncomfortable": Zelda is concerned that, with other questions ahead of yours, she won't be able to give you a timely response. Please discuss the situation you mentioned with your EAS counselor and get his/her advice in the matter.

(U) Ask Zelda!: Boss Is Steering Us Wrong

FROM: "Zelda," Dispenser of Advice on Workplace Issues

Run Date: 04/04/2013

(U) The following article is unclassified in its entirety.



A question for Zelda: My coworkers and I have run into a sensitive issue. Our office travels frequently, and we usually share rental cars. Our manager, however, is not a good driver, and none of us wants to ride with him driving again. In the past we have been able to arrange people/cars such that he does not need to drive, but for an upcoming trip, he has reserved himself a rental car and denied another traveler's rental car request. How can we communicate our concern without insulting our

manager?

-- Petrified Passenger

Dear Petrified Passenger,

Oh, gee. Am I allowed to say "I don't know?" This is a tough one. I can think of all kinds of underhanded solutions for preventing your boss from driving on your trip (like dropping an anvil on his foot or plying him with beers at dinner and then insisting he not drive while intoxicated), but no easy way out. The only advice I can give you is to approach him directly and tactfully.

Select one person to speak to the manager (whom I'll call Dale)--perhaps the one whose rental car request was denied. This traveler should set up a private meeting (to lessen the embarrassment) when Dale is relaxed and not in a rush. I see the discussion going something like this:

Trepid Traveler: I was wondering if you'd consider letting me reserve the rental car and do the driving on our upcoming trip.

Outcome 1

Dale: Sure, that would be fine. I hate driving, anyway. I only turned down your request because I had already put it on my **RTA**, but it should be easy enough to switch.

Outcome 2

Dale: Why? I've got it covered.

TT: Well, please don't take offense, but I get a little nervous riding in the car when you're driving.

Dale: I see. I'm sorry I made you uncomfortable. Sure, we can switch the car to your name for this trip.

Outcome 3

Dale: Why? I've got it covered.

TT: Well, please don't take offense, but I get a little nervous riding in the car when you're driving.

Dale: What's wrong with my driving?

TT: You drive a little faster than I'm comfortable with. // When you take your eyes off the road and turn around to talk to people in the back seat, I get very uncomfortable. // The two fender benders on our last trip while you were driving left me unsettled. [Substitute the misdemeanor of your choice.]

Dale: Hmm. You should have said something. I didn't realize I was making you nervous. I'll be more careful about that in the future. If I do it again, please speak up right away.

Trepid Traveler, you should prepare for all three scenarios... and any others you can think of, knowing your boss. Decide, before going into the meeting, whether a promise to do better is acceptable or if you want to push for Dale not driving at all. Focus on your own reaction ("I'm uncomfortable...") rather than blaming his behavior ("You're a terrible driver"). Be prepared to cite specifics, such as excessive speed and taking eyes off the road.

Be respectful and discreet. If he doesn't want to relinquish the car keys, ask him to suggest a solution to the situation. After all, he is the manager and you should be able to bring your problems to him for guidance. If he challenges you and says you're being too sensitive, you may want to mention that others feel the same way--but I'd suggest using that as a last resort, since he might get more defensive if he feels like his staff is ganging up on him.

Once he agrees to either let someone else drive or drive more carefully when others are in the car, thank him--for his acquiescence and for being approachable on the subject. If it turns out he will be the one driving, don't forget your St. Christopher medal*... just for good measure.

Edna

* Saint Christopher is the patron saint of travelers.

(U) Ask Zelda!: Taking the "Ouch" Out of a Slouch

FROM: "Zelda," Dispenser of Advice on Workplace Issues

Run Date: 09/05/2013

(U) The entire article below is unclassified.



Hello Zelda,

I need your help. I recently took a leadership position and so far have had a great transition into my new duties. The first few months were great, until my main mission point of contact took a new job. His replacement does not have a "go-getter" attitude. He skips meetings, gives me incorrect information, and does not take his job seriously at all. All of these actions force me to work longer hours to make up for his laziness. He knows that at the end of the day I am not going to let the task go unanswered. So he frequently talks about sports, and is seen on his unclass workstation on ESPN. I have tried to be nice to him, but I am at my breaking point. How can I work around this person's terrible work ethic?

--Super Stressed Supervisor

Dear SSS,

Congratulations on your new position! Whether leading a small team or a large organization, leadership can be very rewarding. It also comes with its share of headaches.

If this is your first leadership position, I would advise you first off to get a mentor. Even if you had a technical mentor before, you should now have a management mentor. This person will be able to provide you tailored, ongoing advice for dealing with situations like this that arise as you navigate your new role.

For now, and with limited knowledge of your specific situation, here are my suggestions.

From your note, it doesn't sound like the person you are referring to works for you. If he does, the answer is easy--you would counsel him on his job performance. Your supervisor and LEAD classes can help you gain the necessary skills for this. But without the power to hold him accountable, you can try the following.

The Front Door--take the direct approach, and start as low on the totem pole as possible.

Plan A:

Your first step should be to have a talk with this deadbeat. (For the sake of brevity, I'll call him Edsel.) And stop being so nice. Now, I'm not suggesting that you turn into an ogre, but if you smile and downplay his slacker-ness, he'll never get the message that there's a problem. You need to approach him cordially, but with your serious face on.

Stress your mutual goals and the importance of setting up a process to achieve them. Since he

appears to be a sports fan, you could try sprinkling in some sports analogies about teamwork. Tell him in a firm but polite way that you had a great relationship with his predecessor (whom I'll call Terry), and that you'd like to have the same kind of partnership with him. Be specific when you describe what worked for you. Did Terry give you daily updates? Meet with you regularly? Include you on operational emails?

Ask Edsel to do the same. Tell him exactly what you need from him--including deadlines--and get his agreement to follow through.

Be open to his point of view. He may see things a different way or have a reason why he can't give you what you need. Listen and consider his take on the situation. Some compromise may be needed.

Plan B:

If the direct approach doesn't work, contact his supervisor. (Is the supervisor at the same management level as you? If he's a tier above, go to Plan C.) Explain that you're not getting what you need from Edsel and that the mission/organization is suffering. His supervisor should either counsel Edsel until his work improves, or assign another employee who is not such a dud to be your liaison.

In both of the above cases, provide feedback. Meet again with Edsel (Plan A) or his supervisor (Plan B) a week or two after your initial meeting and let them know whether things have improved. If they have, thank them for helping to rectify the situation; if not, ask for a higher level of effort/assistance.

Plan C:

Your next recourse is to elevate it to your own boss. Your management should be able to work out an arrangement with Edsel's management that doesn't involve you working extended hours to make up for his lack of initiative. And be sure to focus on what you need that he isn't providing. Omit mention of his sports talk and ESPN.

The Back Door

The good news is that you had a few months of great training and transition into your new position. By now you should have the lay of the land and know the players. Is there someone else you can reach out to to get the information you need?

The Doghouse

Take heart; if Edsel is as bad an employee as he sounds, I'm sure you're not the first to notice. If he doesn't shape up, he will probably be gone from that position before long.

Zelda

(U) For this unrelated question that arrived in Zelda's mailbag...

(U) From the one side of phone calls we can't help but overhear in our office, we believe that one of our co-workers is on the receiving side of an abusive spousal relationship (verbally abusive if nothing else). No one knows the person well enough to approach them, and of course we could be completely wrong, and we only hear one side of it.

(U) What, if anything, to do?

...Zelda deferred to the experts at NSA's Employee Assistance Service (**EAS**). They responded as follows:

(U) "In response to the situation, the employee who has overheard the conversation could tell their management about their concerns. The manager could meet with their employee privately to discuss their concerns. The manager could offer EAS services to the employee. We have a clinician on duty every day who could meet with the employee quickly. We could also provide support to the manager as they have this difficult conversation with their employee." See also the **Workplace Violence Prevention website**.

(U) Be Zelda for a Day: Butterfly Not Working the Mission

FROM: 'Zelda,' Dispenser of Advice for SIGINTers on Workplace Issues

Run Date: 12/03/2010

(U) Note: The entire text of this article is UNCLASSIFIED.



Dear Readers,

For this month's column I'd like to try something a little different. I will take a break from providing advice and I invite the readers to be Zelda for a day. Here's how it works: read the below question and think carefully about how YOU would respond. Then go to the associated *SIDtoday* Blog (link provided) and post your "official" response. Good luck!

Zelda

Question:

(U) I have a member of my team who is very cheerful and helpful -- everyone likes her -- but she's not working up to her grade level. She's very friendly and easily drawn into a lot of non-work-related conversations. She is also a team player and quick to help, but the things she offers to do are things like organize luncheons, acquire office supplies, and be our rep to "extra-curricular activities" (such as Family Battle Rhythms). This woman is a grade 13 and I expect more high-level work out of her. I've tried everything I can think of to get her to do more "real" work, but I'm starting to think that being sociable/talkative is just the way she is and there's nothing I can say or do to change that. Still, I don't think it's fair to the other team members who have to take up the slack (or to the taxpayers) for this situation to continue. What should I do? -- Supervising a Social Butterfly

(U) Post your wise counsel on the ***SIDtoday* Blog**.

Approved for Release by NSA
on 08-26-2014, FOIA Case #

(U) Ask Zelda: 40 Winks at Work

FROM: 'Zelda,' Dispenser of Advice for SIGINTers on Workplace Issues

Run Date: 07/06/2011

(U) The entire text below is unclassified.



Dear Zelda,

We have an employee who sleeps 15-30 minutes every couple of hours at her desk. This individual is detailed to our office. Our management knows about the sleeping but yet does nothing - doesn't get in touch with her management. It would be nice if all of us could take a "nap" at our desks throughout the day but it's against policy - at least I thought it was. Any suggestions on what can be done since management wants no involvement?

Sincerely,

Sleepy's co-worker

Dear Wide Awake,

Boy, not since Kindergarten have I heard of such a practice. And even then, it was only one nap per day. I'm curious - do these power naps really work, like the Energizer Bunny getting recharged? Is "Sleepy" super-productive after these mini snoozes?

You mention that your management knows about the daily dozing and yet does nothing. Since I like to give people the benefit of the doubt, perhaps there is a reason why they are doing nothing about it. Maybe this person has a medical condition that causes her to fall asleep every few hours, and your management is aware of this and is therefore accepting of the behavior.



Whether the nodding off is a result of a sleep disorder, working two jobs to make ends meet, stress-induced insomnia, or profuse partying, my suggestion is to bring Sleepy's behavior to your management's attention -- even though you think they already know. (It's always safest not to assume.) This can do one of two things: either guilt your supervisor into taking corrective action or provide you with an explanation.

He might tell you that he is currently addressing the issue. (If done correctly, you would not be aware of a counseling session between your supervisor and Sleepy.) Although the supervisor is not at liberty to divulge personal information on a medical condition (if it is that), he can tell you that he is aware of the napping and that there is a valid reason why he's permitting this behavior to continue. Your direct approach will allow him to see that his seeming lack of action is causing confusion and discontent

among his workforce, and might prompt him to make alternate arrangements (such as directing Sleepy to go to the Medical Center for her naps).

As a reminder to supervisors out there, ignoring a problem in the workplace does not make it go away; it simply compounds it. By not taking immediate corrective action, you risk the chance of creating a morale problem among your "good" employees. Sure, it can be unpleasant and even difficult to confront these things head on, but direct reports will appreciate it and gain respect for a supervisor who recognizes inappropriate behavior and puts an end to it. Being in management can be draining at times, but that's no reason to shirk your responsibilities. You can always take a well-deserved nap -- once you get home.

Edna

(U) "Ask Zelda!": Watching Every Word in Snitch City

FROM: "Zelda," Dispenser of Advice for SIGINTers on Workplace Issues

Run Date: 09/09/2011

(U) Note: The question has been edited for brevity's sake. The below column is unclassified in its entirety.



Dear Zelda,

Here's the scenario: when the boss sees co-workers having a quiet conversation, he wants to know what is being said (it's mostly work related). He has his designated "snitches" and expects them to keep him apprised of all the office gossip -- even calling them at home and expecting a run-down! This puts the "designees" in a really awkward position; plus, we're all afraid any offhand comment or anything said in confidence might be either repeated or misrepresented.

Needless to say, this creates a certain amount of tension between team members who normally would get along well, and adds stress in an already stressful atmosphere. There is also an unspoken belief that he will move people to different desks to break up what he perceives as people becoming too "chummy." (It's been done under the guise of "creating teams.")

We used to be able to joke around a little or talk about our favorite "Idol" contestant to break the tension, but now we're getting more and more skittish about even the most mundane general conversations ("Did you have a good weekend?"). This was once a very open, cooperative group who worked well together. Now we're more suspicious of each other and teamwork is becoming harder. Do you think this was the goal?

Silenced in SID

Dear Silenced,

Wow, that takes "intelligence collection" in a whole new -- and inappropriate -- direction!

It's lonely at the top

First let me say that I do not think this manager's intent is to discourage teamwork. What it sounds like to me is that he (I'll call him "Michael") feels like an outsider and wants to be in the know. It can be lonely being the boss. You sit closed off in an office and miss the easy camaraderie with your co-workers, while at the same time feeling the need to "police" their behavior. Maybe someone told Michael there was too much chit-chat in his organization or that some specific problem existed, and resorting to snitches is his misguided way of ferreting out the culprit(s). Either that or he's been watching too much "Law and Order."

Why don't you try this: go overboard communicating with him. Call him over when he's wandering around spying on people and fill him in on things. Give him details of work projects and ask his

opinion about mission matters so he feels like he's "in the loop." Get others to drop by his desk periodically just to say hello, "hope you had a good weekend," or "How 'bout them O's?" I bet that will satisfy his need to know what's going on and he'll back off with the nosiness.

NSA=No Secrets Allowed

We work in an Agency of secrets, but this kind of secrecy begets more secrecy and it becomes a downward spiral that destroys teamwork. What if you put an end to all the secrecy by bringing it out into the open? You and your co-workers could ask Michael for a team meeting and lay out the issue as you see it: "We feel like you don't trust us and we aren't comfortable making small talk anymore for fear of having our desks moved if we're seen as being too chummy." (Leave out the part about the snitches.) Tell him how this is hampering collaboration and affecting the work, ask him if he has a problem with the team's behavior, and see what he says. Encourage him to come directly to the employee in question if he has a concern (rather than ask a third party to gather intel for him). In any case, the meeting will clear the air. Stick to the facts and how you feel, rather than making it about him ("We're uncomfortable" vs. "You're spying on us").



If, after your attempts to bring things out in the open, it becomes clear that Michael is simply evil (some people live to stir up trouble), your best recourse may be to approach Michael's boss with the problem and perhaps Michael can be reassigned. Be sure to focus on the effect it's having on the team's work when you talk to his manager.

No one likes a tattletale

"Silenced" implied that in this situation the snitches were unwilling accomplices for Michael. The reluctant snitches feel like they're "damned if they do and damned if they don't," and everyone else is walking on eggshells. If you are bothered by snitches in your office, whether of the unwilling or voluntary variety, the best solution is to keep your behavior above reproach. Be a good performer, watch what you say and do, lock your screen when you step away from your workstation, and keep fodder for wagging tongues (your Viagra stash, photos of your wild-and-crazy girls' weekend in Atlantic City) at home or out of sight. If you are put in the "unwilling snitch" position, I would advise telling your boss that you're not comfortable with the role and to please not ask that of you.

Trust is hard to rebuild once it has been broken. Your work center may take time to heal after this deplorable practice is discontinued, but give it time and hopefully the open cooperation you once enjoyed will return.

Eddis

(U) "Ask Zelda!": Enjoying (?) the Ride

FROM: "Zelda," Dispenser of Advice on Workplace Issues

Run Date: 12/07/2012

(U) The article below is unclassified in its entirety.



Dear Zelda,

I work in **OPS1**, and because of a bad knee, I enjoy riding up the escalators instead of taking the stairs. It's a big help to my knee pain. My problem is people who get on the escalator behind me, then make annoying noises when I don't start dashing up the escalator, and just enjoy the ride. Sometimes they push by me, rather rudely, and then quick step their way to the top. This annoys me. The steps are right there beside the escalator. If they want to rush up the steps, why don't they just do that? If they want to go even faster, why not the elevator? Am I wrong for wanting to stand there and let the escalator do its work? What's the official protocol for riding the OPS1 escalators?

Dear Easy Rider,

We Americans are in an unending quest for speed. An airplane that can cross a continent in hours was not fast enough -- they had to create the **SST**. A meal that took hours to cook when I was a child can now be microwaved in a matter of minutes; and yet people are *still* impatient when they have to wait to heat their lunch behind a co-worker warming a frozen Lean Cuisine. It seems the faster we go, the faster we want to go.

No, you are not wrong. Standing on the step while it moves to the next level is what escalators are meant for. While it is polite to stand to the right so people can pass, if it's a narrow escalator you are under no obligation to start dashing up it if someone behind you starts "tailgating" and/or making annoying noises.

Since I am not an official Escalator Protocol Officer (EPO), I will give you **Zelda's Rules for Riding the Escalator:**

1. Step onto the bottom step, single file.
2. Stand to the right and hold onto the rail (so you don't fall if it stops suddenly).
3. If you want to hasten your ascent, you may walk up the escalator by passing people on the left -- as long as there is room to do so without pushing them aside; otherwise, wait behind them until they reach the top and disembark.
4. If you want to walk up stairs, use the non-moving variety. It will be safer and provide space on the escalators for those who need it.*

Are you a speed demon quick-stepping your way to the top? Do you get impatient on the OPS1 escalators when an "Easy Rider" is in your way? Why not take that opportunity as a reminder to stop and smell the roses... or the cafeteria's pot roast? Slow down and enjoy the ride!

~~Zelda's~~

* Addendum for urbanites: If you take the metro/subway in a major city where the escalator is very long and slow and there are no regular stairs, you may modify these rules when you are in a hurry to make a connection. If you are on a full escalator and happen upon an individual who has not seen a copy of Zelda's Rules for Riding the Escalator and is standing on the left, blocking your ascent, you may politely ask her if she would mind moving to the right for a moment to let you by so you can make your connection. But be considerate: this may be a person who is slightly claustrophobic and is uncomfortable being underground on a packed escalator when she cannot see ahead of her. Be sure to thank her for accommodating your request.

(U) Ask Zelda!: Suffering from Neglect on Planet Schmooze

FROM: "Zelda," Dispenser of Advice on Workplace Issues

Run Date: 01/04/2013

(U) The below article is unclassified in its entirety.



I have a question/problem for Zelda. My supervisor spends hours (sometimes 3 or more) each day chatting with one of her subordinates. It is always the same subordinate and they also get together socially outside of work. It doesn't bother me that they two are obviously friends, but what does bother me, and other coworkers, is that we often can't get in to speak to the supervisor about work related issues because you-know-who is in there having a chat. Also, we are a busy office and people are beginning to speculate whether these two have enough work to do with all of this chatting going on. Any suggestions on how to handle this?

-- Frustrated

Dear Frustrated,

I'm guessing that as a child, you were taught that it's rude to interrupt someone's conversation. Perhaps your parents even drilled into your head "children should be seen and not heard." I never understood why...

Anyway, this is one instance when I think assertiveness is called for. News flash -- it is not always rude to interrupt! Think of it this way: if the building were on fire and she didn't hear the alarm, she'd want you to interrupt her chat -- wouldn't she?

If you need to speak to your supervisor and she is talking to her friend, give them a reasonable amount of time to finish their conversation (5 or 10 minutes?) and then break in. Knock on the door or stick your head into her cubicle and say something like, "Excuse me, I'm sorry to interrupt but I need an answer on this right away/this morning/before I can proceed." She will probably say, "Sure, we were just wrapping up" or "Give me five minutes and I'll be out to see you." Alternatively, you could say, "Sorry to interrupt, but could you please come by my desk when you're free? I have an issue I need your guidance on."

If the door is closed and you're too timid to knock, call her on the phone! She can always say, "I've got someone in with me right now, I'll call you back" if she doesn't want to end her conversation.

Either way, the two of them will get the message that mission needs her attention and they will curtail their discussion. If you and your co-workers do this every time you need your supervisor, she will realize that her office requires her leadership and will probably start being more available to you; but if you never break in on these chats, she will think the office is running fine without her and continue shooting the breeze with her friend to pass the time. Furthermore, if her friend is the chatty one, your supervisor may even appreciate the interruption as an excuse to politely extract herself from the

conversation.

You know, this makes me think of a new adage for the workplace. How about "supervisors should be seen and not heard"? 😊

Edna

(U) Ask Zelda!: How to Deal with Resistant Reggie

FROM: "Zelda," Dispenser of Advice on Workplace Issues

Run Date: 07/12/2013

(U) The entire article below is unclassified.



I have a question for Zelda. It happens in every office, there's the one person that is stuck in his or her ways and complains nonstop. In my office in particular, I'm training an employee that's been a linguist, a programmer, and now learning an entirely new trade. When I show the person how to do something, he finds a detail that he doesn't like and argues with me for well over an hour. In addition, his other duties are completely neglected and he's not being held accountable. This has of course deterred me from working with him. Now he's complaining to the boss about it. I've told the boss about the constant arguing and I'm told to find a way to train him. I'm the fourth person to have these problems, the other three have since moved on. What would help me stop the arguments before they even start?

--Losing Patience

Dear LP,
Have you tried duct tape?

No, I'm just kidding. But I know you wanted to... am I right? ;-)

I'm going to give you several options. You may have to use the shotgun approach--trying different tactics to see which will work.

Past success

From what you've said, it sounds like this person has burned through 3 other trainers before you. Did any of them have any success? If so, I would contact them to see what worked.

Enlist the supervisor

It also sounds like your boss isn't giving you much support. Ideally, the boss should lay down the law with your complaining co-worker, whom I'll call Reggie, and tell him to stop arguing with you when you are trying to train him. Reggie's resistance could be his way of putting up roadblocks to a job he doesn't really want to learn. Or it could be fear of failure, as he steps out of his comfort zone and is being forced into a new line of work. But in any case, his supervisor can counsel him on his behavior toward his trainer (you).

Adapt to him

Ask Reggie how he wants to be trained. Perhaps he prefers to read and absorb instructions before

sitting with someone and/or trying it himself. This would give him time to get used to what's being asked of him and allow him to gain some familiarity with the process. Ask him what kind of training scenario has worked well in the past for him, and why. Maybe you can adapt your style or process to be more in line with what works for him.

Set ground rules

Before you even start training him, establish some ground rules. Both of you can and should have input here. Get him to agree not to interrupt, except to ask for clarification. He is not allowed to argue the process he is learning. Once he learns the task your way and does it for a while, then he is free to create a better way of doing things.

One of **his** ground rules may be that you explain **why** things are done a certain way... Or, no more than 2 hours of OJT without a break.

Whatever they are, write down rules you both can live with, and then stick to them. Call each other out if one gets broken.

Regarding his complaint that you are avoiding him:

Tell him you're willing to train him, but not to have your time wasted. Agree on a set amount of time each day and tell him you need to make the most of that time because you both have other work to do. That means intensive concentration, no going off on tangents, and maximum effort put forth.

Use psychology

Try to get to the bottom of the issue. Ask questions aimed at bringing him around to your way of thinking, but with his buy-in. Let him see that cooperating with you on his training will be to his benefit.*

Acknowledge his criticisms

Validate his feelings that there might be a better way of doing things, but don't let them interfere with the training. Have him jot down a note every time you get to an area that he would like to argue about, and have him put it in a "parking lot." (If you've taken a **LEAD course**, you probably know what this is.) Once it's captured briefly on paper, move on and continue with the training. Let him know that at the end of his training, his concerns and ideas will be addressed--either by you or his supervisor. If all goes well, by then he'll have a better perspective of the overall process and may dismiss some of his objections on his own.

When all else fails...

Remind him that at performance review time, it's his butt on the line and the sooner he learns how to do the job, the better he'll do on his eval.

These are only a few ideas, but should be enough to get you started. It's tempting to throw up your hands and say "this shouldn't be my problem." But think of it this way: your boss has given you a challenge. Show her you're up to it. You will look particularly impressive if you can succeed where others have failed.

Good luck!

Edits

(U) Zelda and the Grammar Geek Jointly Cure the "Dr" Dilemma

FROM: "Zelda," Dispenser of Advice on Workplace Issues, and
 Gabby, the Grammar Geek
 Run Date: 11/07/2013



(U) Editor's note: This question fell somewhere between the purviews of Gabby the grammar geek and Zelda the advice giver, so they BOTH took a shot at answering... The article below is unclassified.

Hello, Gabby (the Grammar Geek) here. The following question was sent in to *SIDtoday* for either Zelda or Grammar Geek--the writer wasn't sure of which way to go. I'm happy to answer it, but I think a joint response would be nice for this one. After having my say, I'm going to lob it over to Zelda, to give her the opportunity to add some advice. Here we go...

Dear Zelda,

I have many co-workers who have earned a PhD but do not think it is appropriate to refer to them as "Dr. Jones" or "Dr. Zaius" in writing. I had always been under the impression that the title "Doctor" was reserved for those who had medical degrees, whereas placing PhD after a name is the preferred way of addressing a non-medical doctorate holder. This may be a question for the Grammar Geek, but I wanted to try here first to find out what the NSA-culture answer is. Thank you!

Signed, Mr. ...



Dear Mr. ...,

I believe that anyone who has earned a Ph.D., MD, Ed.D., or any doctorate has earned the right to be called "Dr. [last name]." It is true that "Ph.D." or "MD" (or "Ed.D." or whatever) after the name is an equally valid way of displaying their name, but never both. (You don't say, for example, "Dr. Marcus Welby, MD." It's just "Marcus Welby, MD" or "Dr. Marcus Welby.") Just to be sure that I'm not mistaken, I checked with Emily Post, one of the foremost authorities on etiquette. She said that a doctorate degree is usually used professionally (either as John Smith, Ph.D., or Dr. John Smith) but often not socially, so you should ask what the person prefers. She

added, "When in doubt, it's never wrong to acknowledge the degree."

You mentioned NSA culture. Here in our often informal environment, where peers are usually on a first-name basis, I'd hope that "Dr. Zaius" wouldn't expect the honorific in casual conversation around the office, but I suppose there could be an office here where everyone is "Mr. Smith," "Ms. Jones," and "Dr. Cooper." In any case, to answer your core question, no, the title of "doctor" is not reserved only for medical doctors.

What I don't like are the people who place "Dr." in front of their name without the credentials. I once visited the office of a "naturopathic doctor" who proudly explained to me that she had completed a whole six-month course in this field, which seemed to include mainly learning how to operate the computer and interpret some scores. She went by "Dr. [first name]." I really don't mean to knock this form of alternative medicine, but it seemed to me that she didn't really deserve that title.

Now, even though I've been at NSA for quite some time, I feel like I'm invading Zelda's turf. So let's see what she has to say...

Oh, Zelda, are you over there? Could you take a look at this question?

[Zelda takes the keyboard.]



Dear Mr. ...

I cannot speak for the entire NSA culture, but I believe you should call these people whatever they wish to be called. In some cases, very senior-level people at NSA with multiple doctorates prefer to be called "Joe" or "Jill"; while other, lower-level workers insist on going by DrXX. For day-to-day communication, you should just call them by their preferred form of address... even if their "doctorate" is in Creative Abbreviating from The Internet School of Texting.

Now, if there is a formal roster or speakers listed on a program, you should standardize the titles:

- Dr. Jill Jones
 - Dr. Abraham Zaius
 - Mr. Cornelius Chimp
 - Ms. Zira Panzee
- Dr. Joseph Schmoe

Rather than

- Joe Schmoe
- Dr. Jill D. Jones
- Dr. Zaius
- Cornelius Chimp
- Z. Panzee

As for the NSA culture, I think it depends on where you work and the position of the person. I have worked in some mostly-military organizations where we used **only** people's ranks and titles--never first names, and others where the military and civilian staff all went by first names only and no titles or ranks. I also believe it is more common to use someone's title if they are a high-ranking person in the organization, regardless of what that title is (e.g., **Ms.** Shea, **GEN** Alexander, **Mr.** Inglis, **Mrs.** Fleisch, **Dr.** Wertheimer).

I agree with Gabby that the title Dr. is not reserved just for medical professionals. But it should not be abused, and by that I mean used as a club to wield clout. True story: I received a postcard advertisement in the mail from a realtor who prominently displayed his picture and name, John C. Doe, PhD. I happen to know this man was a former psychologist who became a real estate agent after he retired. Yet his ad seemed to suggest that he held a doctorate in real estate!

So my recommendation would be to use the title Dr. only in situations involving the subject you got your doctorate in. But then again, I'm a bit of a socialist...

(U) Ask Zelda!: Afraid of Retribution

FROM: SIDtoday

Run Date: 11/20/2013



(U) Dear Zelda,

(U) I work in an office that has always been known for its great people, high morale, and excellent work. About 2 years ago, a new manager arrived. Although she was easy to get along with at first, over time her true colors began to show: screaming fits in the office, foul language, disrespect, and unreasonable demands and expectations became commonplace. Things have gotten even worse now, to the point that people literally cower at their desks in hopes that she doesn't know they're there, lest they get raked over the coals for something they weren't aware they had done wrong. (Actually, usually there was no wrongdoing: she often contradicts her earlier instructions.)

(U) Some of us have approached higher management about the situation, only to learn that they were well aware of it but were hesitant to do anything about it--we think that they're afraid of her, too. When she made a decision that seemed to be a clear case of waste, fraud, and abuse, someone lodged a complaint with the IG [Inspector General]--only to result in a screaming lecture from her when she found out about the complaint, and warnings not to do it again (which in itself is an IG concern, right? "No fear"?).

(U) The bottom line: this person is a bully, and we now operate in an environment of daily fear. Highly skilled people are applying for any job they can find just to get away, which is having an impact on mission. We know about the employee dispute resolution center and other services, but no one wants to use any route that isn't anonymous, out of fear of retribution.

--Help??

Dear Help??, this is really something the Office of the Inspector General--which investigates allegations of fraud, waste, abuse, and violations of law, rule or regulation--should answer, so I passed it over to them. Here is their response:

(U//FOUO) "The situation you describe includes several concerns that the OIG routinely investigates, including possible violations of rules prohibiting the creation of a hostile work environment, abuse of authority, whistleblower reprisal, and failure to provide full and complete cooperation with the OIG. You can refer such allegations to the OIG through the OIG Hotline (963-5023) for action. You may also type "**go IG**" in your browser to access the OIG webpage, where you can **anonymously** report your concerns. We also encourage personal meetings with an OIG Hotline Manager, which can be scheduled via email or telephone. Whatever means you use to report concerns to the OIG, your confidentiality is guaranteed by law and by NSA policy.

(U//FOUO) If you provide information to the OIG, and later have questions or concerns about the manner in which the case was handled, the Assistant Inspector General for Investigations, [redacted] [redacted] would be happy to meet with you to discuss the case within the bounds of protecting both confidentiality and privacy."

-Zelda

(b) (3) - P.L. 86-36

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Approved for Release by NSA on
08-26-2014, FOIA Case # 77070

(U) "Ask Zelda!": Emails Going Unanswered

FROM: "Zelda," Dispenser of Advice on Workplace Issues

Run Date: 08/03/2012

(U) The below column is unclassified in its entirety.



This month's column addresses unresponsiveness, especially by managers and leadership. Zelda received a couple of letters asking for advice on pressing leadership for follow up. They complained about emails going unanswered for weeks and even months, and asked about the proper email etiquette to remind one's boss or colleague to please reply.

Dear Waiting for an Answer,

You ask when it is permissible to simply not answer email. Spam and other shotgun-type messages come to mind... But in my opinion it is rude to simply not answer a work-related email that is specifically addressed to a certain person. Even if you don't know the answer, a quick note to that effect is called for. Yes, managers are busy people, but so are analysts, staff officers, and others.

Now, what to do about it... First off, don't take it personally. Avoid reading too much into the person's non-response. There could be technical glitches, information overload, accidental deletes, emergency leave, or simply varying communication preferences at the root of it. Don't assume the person is intentionally blowing you off, and don't get angry about it.

Please realize that if you are awaiting a response from senior leadership, one problem might be that several people may be accessing her email (the senior, her executive assistant, her office manager), and once the first person (such as the exec, scanning for "hot" items) reads the email, it becomes unbolded and doesn't appear "new" anymore. This might cause the senior to overlook your message.

Below are a few suggestions. Use your best judgment regarding the suitability of each solution for any given situation. If it's an important, mission-related necessity, you can use some of the more drastic (and pushy) measures; but if it's just a "nice to know" or organizational survey about your summer picnic, you can probably proceed without the person's input if none is readily forthcoming.

Email Options

- After a reasonable amount of time, send a follow-up note, including your original text. Perhaps the first one got overlooked.
 - Use the "High Importance" flag (red exclamation point) if it truly is of high importance and urgent. Use this *sparingly*.
 - Request a delivery receipt (under Options, when composing the email) -- at least you can see if the recipient opened your message.
 - Add a Reminder flag for the recipient. When composing the email, select Follow Up, then Flag for Recipients, then select a date and time that you would like them to be reminded about your email.
-

- If it is a peer or lower-level employee, cc the person's supervisor or action team for accountability. It's especially important to keep the supervisor in the loop if you are tasking a peer to do something.
- Invoke a higher authority. If this information was requested by the DIRNSA or SIDDIR, dropping that person's name -- especially in the Subject line -- will most likely expedite things.

Non-email Options

- Pick up the telephone! This handy device was once used all the time for business questions. It's easy to ignore an email; harder to ignore the question when you ask someone via phone.
- Contact the senior leader's exec or office manager and ask him to get an answer for you.
- Visit in person -- drop by (if that's acceptable) or request a short (5-15 minute) meeting to discuss the matter face to face.
- Leave a note on the person's desk/monitor/chair/white board/car (OK, don't go that far) asking if they have had a chance to look at your request.
- If it's a significant action, engage the appropriate Registries to task it out and get you a response.
- Call in the big guns. Your boss or someone higher up the chain might have better luck in obtaining a response if it's something that's important to the organization.

Make it Easy for Them to Reply

- First, be sure that you are asking the right person. If someone sees a question outside his area of responsibility, he is more likely to ignore it. If you are unsure of whom to ask, you might consider adding words to this effect: *If you are not the correct person to address this matter, can you please refer me to the appropriate authority?*
- Give the person several ways to contact you (phone numbers, email address(es), room number/desk location). Not everyone likes to communicate by email.
- Along those lines, ask others who know the person what her preferred method of communication is (see **previous column**) or how best to get a response from that individual.
- Ask if there's any additional information you can provide to help them make a decision. Perhaps your initial email was unclear or too long, and they don't realize you're waiting for an answer or what you want from them. Be very brief and clearly state up front what you need from them and by when.

Overall, be polite but persistent. In a perfect world, everyone would answer their email promptly, but it has become increasingly incumbent upon the person needing the information to track it down and pester (nicely) people for answers, thanks to "Big Email" (an offshoot of Big Data??).

One Final Thought

Email is the great leveler. Anyone with a computer or cell phone can now receive email, texts, or tweets from people who were previously inaccessible, such as CEOs and celebrities who engage in those activities. While we've gotten used to this direct contact/access, it would be wise to remember that not so long ago, these people had "gatekeepers" (secretaries, managers, etc.) whom you had to go through to communicate with the big guy -- and there was a reason for that.

I'm just saying...

Eddis

(U) "Ask Zelda!": Know-It-All Doesn't Know Much

FROM: "Zelda," Dispenser of Advice on Workplace Issues

Run Date: 10/04/2012

(U) Editor's comment: The below article is unclassified in its entirety.



Dear Zelda,

"A 'helpful' co-worker, let's call her Malon, keeps offering unsolicited advice on personal matters. The trouble began on New Years: after discussing resolutions, I commented that no matter how hard I try, forcing a resolution is difficult. Malon somehow mistook this as a request for advice. Now she sits on high, ruling from her tower with some unhelpful 'helpful' advice. What's worse, now she has the confidence to tackle work-related issues, but is generally offering bad advice. How can I, without hurting feelings, explain that what she is doing is the opposite of help?

Sincerely,
-- Helpless"

Dear Helpless,

There's nothing worse than a know-it-all who thinks she's qualified to dispense advice on any subject; and especially annoying when someone gives her her own column as a forum! 😊

When it comes to Malon's advice on personal matters, just ignore it. If she doesn't eventually stop dispensing advice, even though you clearly aren't following it, you can try one of the following:

- Tell her that when you made the comment you were simply making an observation and not looking for a solution.
- Say, "Thanks, Malon. I know you're trying to be helpful, but that just wouldn't work for me."
- "I appreciate your trying to help, but I have a new [psychic advisor/financial counselor/neighbor/girlfriend] who is really wise and I've found [his/her] advice perfect for me."
- "Really? That's an interesting idea. Have you ever tried it yourself? And how did that work out for you?" (This must be said without the slightest trace of sarcasm to avoid hurting her feelings.)
- Stop sharing your problems at work (I mean that in the nicest possible way 😊) or preface it with, "I'm not looking for advice, but..."
- If her advice is given in a group setting, throw it out to the others -- "Do the rest of you find that to be true?" or "What do the others think about that solution?"
- If her unhelpful advice falls into a particular category, for example it's always stuff she has no experience with, you could gently point that out to her. "Malon, I notice when you give advice on baking, it's great. We all appreciate the tips from your years as the White House pastry chef. But since you don't have any children or grandchildren, your parenting advice isn't as appreciated."
- Try to find a helpful nugget in what she says. "I wouldn't be able to train for a marathon because I have bad knees, but that walking club you mentioned might be a possibility." Note:

this won't discourage her from giving advice, but it's a way to let her down easy if you want to disagree with her suggestions.

If she is giving out bad work-related advice and others think she is knowledgeable about these matters, it would be best to take the gullible ones aside and tactfully point out to them that, although Malon is trying to be helpful, she doesn't have the background to provide sound guidance in these matters and your organization's tech director would be a much better person to advise them.

You might want to consider one other thing: although you find Malon's advice unhelpful, there may be people in your office for whom it is right.

Tempted to Give Advice?

It's very tempting to offer advice -- so much easier to fix someone else's problems than your own -- but it's a tricky business. People are biased by their personal experiences and what's right for one person may not be right for another. Here are some guidelines for those tempted to dispense advice.

- Try to determine if the person just wants a sympathetic ear. Often what seems like an invitation to fix a situation is really just a request for empathy. If you can't figure out which, ask; or try sympathy first (such as patting them on the back and saying "You must be a saint to put up with that"). After you have been reasonably supportive, if they ask, "But what would you do?" then feel free to advise away.
- Don't give unsolicited advice, and don't give advice outside your area(s) of expertise. If the person wants your opinion anyway, caveat it ("I know nothing about cars, but I personally like the green one because it matches your eyes.").
- Sometimes a person is looking for you to validate their decision. If this appears to be the case and you would have made different choices, you can always say, "I might have done it differently, but it appears you've really thought this through and this is the right decision for you. I hope it works out well for you."
- Most importantly -- don't be upset if the recipient doesn't do what you suggest, even if they did ask your opinion.

Edits

(U) Ask Zelda!: Wrong Address

FROM: "Zelda," Dispenser of Advice on Workplace Issues

Run Date: 02/04/2013

(U) Note: The article below is unclassified in its entirety.



Dear Zelda,

My friend's new boss just referred to her as "young lady," as in, "Nice work on the white paper, young lady." Several years ago I was in a job in which the GCM [Global Capabilities Manager] of the office I was in usually referred to women subordinate to him, including me, as "young lady." In fact, I wasn't younger than him--so the term clearly had no relation to age. To me, the use of "young lady" in that context was demeaning. Am I overly sensitive? What's the best way to counter this behavior? I'm guessing that

responding, "thanks, old man," although extremely satisfying, would be neither wise nor appropriate.

-- Not a "Young Lady"

Dear old gal middle-aged woman female employee of indeterminate age:

You are correct--the response "thanks, old man" would be both unwise and inappropriate; and no offense, but yes, I think that you are being overly sensitive.

It is very difficult to know what might offend someone, and it's particularly a minefield for men in the workplace when addressing female colleagues. While some things are obviously wrong (such as "baby" and "old broad"), there is a gray area where offense is in the mind of the beholder. Some women may like being called a "girl" or "young lady" because it makes them feel youthful, while others (like you) take offense and find it demeaning.

I believe this man's heart was in the right place. He knew many women are sensitive about their age, so he combined a compliment ("young") with a genteel/polite word for a female adult human ("lady")... and yet he was still wrong.

So what's a fella to do?

Using a person's name can be a safe option, as long as you know what they prefer to be called. For some, especially in a foreign country, use of their first name may seem too forward; while the Miss/Mrs./Ms. option opens up a whole other area in which to err. And the use of an unwanted nickname (don't ever call me Zel or Zeldie!) makes many bristle. For those who aren't so good at remembering names, "young lady" or "young man" may seem like an ideal alternative.

I could get into a whole philosophical discourse on the subject, including the use of "young lady" as a term of endearment or familiarity and the emotional echoes of being told, "Young lady, go to your room!" by an angry parent--but I'll leave those types of discussions to **the SIGINT Philosopher**.*

If this expression--or others--bothers you, I suggest **education is your best recourse**. The next

time a man calls you "young lady," let him know, in a nice way, how you would prefer he address you. If he asks what's wrong with "young lady" you can explain that while you're sure he didn't mean it this way, you find the phrase demeaning, and tell him why. I'm sure he will appreciate the insight and will do his best to comply with your wishes. But don't be surprised if you get dark looks from the other women in your office who miss being referred to as young ladies.

Eddie

* Just for the record, I would never put shoe polish on anyone's headphones--that would not be civil. And as for stealing a fruit cup from the break room... well, it might be a different story if we were talking about chocolate. 😊

(U) Ask Zelda!: The Perils of Pauline

FROM: "Zelda," Dispenser of Advice on Workplace Issues

Run Dates: 03/17/2014 , 03/18/2014

(U) The below column is unclassified in its entirety.



Dear Zelda,

I was wondering what you would suggest for the following situation: I had a co-worker in a previous office who used to greet me everyday with a list of reminders of things she needed me to do. Throughout the day, she would continue to remind me, as though I had forgotten and I needed to do things on her schedule. She also frequently had snide comments regarding my work, and would complain at least once a day about everything that was wrong with our organization. This was particularly bad, in my opinion, because she wasn't setting a very good example for our junior analysts. Frankly, I wasn't sure how to deal with her at the time.

Put-upon Pauline

Dear PUP,

It sounds like you solved your own problem by switching jobs. But for the sake of the person who replaced you, I will tell you what I think you should have done.

There are two issues at work here:

- your co-worker's bossy behavior toward you and
- her complaining about the organization, which is setting a poor example for junior analysts.

Miss Bossy Pants

My first question is, why are you taking orders from a co-worker who is not your supervisor? Next time she greets you with a "to do" list, refer her to your team or branch chief. He should be the one assigning the work, not her.

In general, if people other than your boss task you to do things for them -- whether within or outside of your immediate organization -- I suggest the following:

- Go to your supervisor and tell him that Miss Bossy Pants (don't use that expression) just gave you this list of things she wants you to do by [insert her deadline].
- Let him know what other things you're currently working on.

- Ask him to prioritize your work so you know which things to tackle first.

He may look at the list and assign some or all of it to someone else. Or he may decide Bossy Pants needs to do her own work. He may even have a talk with her to encourage her to come to him with her list of needs, rather than assign things to her co-workers, so he can retain control over the organization's work load. In any case, the above steps will help manage his expectations about your other deadlines and keep him in the loop.

Negative Nelly

If your co-worker's attitude is poisoning the work environment for newer employees, have a private talk with her and tell her so. (Tactfully.) She may just think she's letting off steam and not realize the impact it's having on others. If her behavior doesn't improve, you can bring your concerns to your work center supervisor. See this **previous Zelda column** for more advice on the subject.

My dear Pauline, there is no need for you to feel like a helpless damsel in distress. Take charge of the situation and involve your supervisor, when necessary. By following the above recommendations, you should easily be able to neutralize this Negative Nelly Bossy-Pants.

Zelda



(U) Ask Zelda!: Rising from the Ashes of a Ruined Reputation

FROM: "Zelda," Dispenser of Advice on Workplace Issues

Run Date: 04/11/2014

(U) The below column is unclassified in its entirety.

Zelda,

It's amazing how gossip can generate so much harm -- and those that continue to gossip either have no clue how it impacts others...or they have no heart. I have a friend who experienced a hurtful event a few years ago and he deeply feels that the damage has destroyed his reputation beyond repair. He was a high performing employee who is now lost in the stairwells of NSA. What advice would you give him?

-Distressed

Dear Distressed,

That is so sad! What a shame that some wagging tongues have destroyed this employee's morale, and possibly his career. Here is what I would say to your friend.

Open letter to Stairwell Haunter

My dear fellow, I am very sorry to hear about the callous behavior that has distressed you so. It's clear that these gossipmongers have hurt you deeply. Now, however, you are hurting yourself. By hiding from your work life, you are perpetuating the damage done to you by others.

I understand that you may feel embarrassed, betrayed, and a host of other negative emotions; but the trigger event happened *years* ago. Your grieving time needs to end. While this hurtful event may still be fresh in your mind, let me assure you that others have moved on and forgotten about it. At the very least, it's a distant memory. By withdrawing, you're fostering a negative opinion of yourself among those who don't know about the original event. Instead of dwelling on the past, focus on the reputation you are building today. You can remake your image. Even publicly humiliated people--including former U.S. presidents--have picked themselves up and moved on after such events.

You are not alone. You have friends who care about you (such as *Distressed*) and want to be supportive.

I urge you to start by talking with **EAS**. It's free, confidential, and you can go during work time.

Get a fresh start. Switch jobs, if you feel like everyone in your current office knows your painful history. Try a tour outside of the building where nobody knows your name.

Focus on doing a good job and ignore any real or imagined whispering behind your back. Your stellar performance will speak for itself and people will begin to judge you on what they observe, not what is

said by others.

You were a high-performing employee once and can be again. We spend half our waking hours at work don't allow yourself to be miserable. Come out of the stairwell and rejoin the workforce; the Agency needs you.

Open Letter to Gossipers

This is a reminder for those who are tempted to indulge in gossip to consider the devastating effect it can have on the person being maligned. It may seem like a harmless pastime, but can have long-lasting and tragic effects.

E. J. [Signature]



(U) Ask Zelda!: Careless Whispers

FROM: "Zelda," Dispenser of Advice on Workplace Issues

Run Date: 05/15/2014

(U) The below column is unclassified in its entirety.

Dear Zelda,

It has become commonplace these days for my coworkers to drop their voices down to a whisper when having certain discussions in the office. It seems very rude to have a conversation in front of other people and deliberately exclude them that way. It also creates an exclusionary clique culture, where some are in the know and others are not. Plus it is super distracting!

If they are not comfortable with being heard with what they are saying, perhaps it is something they should keep to themselves? I wish they would at least take their discussion elsewhere instead of doing it right up in my face. It is especially demoralizing when everyone in the cubicle bay but me is part of the conversation, which means I am the one person they are trying to keep out. I have considered asking my supervisor for guidance, but I am not sure what if anything can be done.

Sincerely,

- On the Outside

Dear Outsider,

Boy, I'd like your problem. I can hardly concentrate due to all the loud conversations in my workplace. I wish my co-workers would whisper! Still, I see your point.

If it is an intentional snub, then yes, it's rude. They should take their convo elsewhere or use Microsoft Lync to silently "chat" with each other.

Try not to read too much into the whispering. Maybe they're keeping their voices down so they won't disturb you, especially if they believe you are hard at work. Or they might not think you'd be interested in the conversation. Perhaps it's a personal, private, or embarrassing matter that they only feel comfortable sharing with their closest pals. Or maybe they're planning a surprise party for you!

Are they darting glances your way and then giggling? If not, there's nothing to worry about.

If you can't ignore it, try initiating a short conversation with your cube-mates occasionally to let them know you're open to some unofficial chit-chat. Your attempts to be friendlier may be met with more inclusion on their part.

If that doesn't work, you could always try the direct approach:

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- Stroll into the cubicle bay and ask, "What are we talking about?"
- Turn around and insert yourself into their discussion by saying, "What's so funny?" or "Are you discussing the American Idol elimination last night? Because I totally didn't see that one coming."
- Roll your chair over to them and innocently whisper, "Why are we whispering?"
- And then there's always the blunt, half-kidding approach: "Guys, I'm getting paranoid that you're talking about me, since I'm the only one excluded from this conversation."

Your nosiness will either get you included or they will take their chats elsewhere. But don't blame me if the former results in a far worse work distraction for you. If that happens, read this **previous column**.

-Edits



(U) Ask Zelda!: Break it Up!

FROM: "Zelda," Dispenser of Advice on Workplace Issues

Run Date: 06/05/2014

(U) The below column is unclassified in its entirety.

Dear Zelda,

What can one do about fellow employees (particularly contractors and military) who, for their hourly breaks or their long-awaited HOUR-LONG break, come to my desk to chit chat. Even though I'm engaged in work, they walk up to me and start talking. Bearing in mind, not only is this NOT MY BREAK, I do not TAKE BREAKS, except to get my food or use the restroom. How can I kindly inform them that they are disrupting my work? My posture and the OMG look on my face apparently are too subtle. Some are daily offenders, and some are much less frequent. Please note: I did not include NSA civilians because they rarely speak to each other.

Thank you,

Shoot Me Now

Dear Shoot Me,

An *hour-long* break? What organization do you work for??

I have noticed this behavior in just about every office I've been in, and it has not been limited to contractors and military. There is one factor that allows this situation to flourish:

the weak link (a.k.a. the too-nice person).

This is someone polite who listens to--and acts interested in--the conversation. Even non-committal grunting can be seen as encouragement to continue for these visiting "breakers." The weak link may not be the intended target of the visitor, but provides an excuse for lingering in the cubicle (for example, if the object of one's secret affection works in the same cubicle bay).

It sounds like you might be the weak link -- time to change that.

You must, at all costs, avoid being seen as a good or sympathetic listener. Perfect the stay-away-from-me vibe. This involves a quick glance up when the interloper approaches (extra points if you scowl) and then keep your eyes glued on your monitor. Keep typing as she talks, even if you type gibberish. If she says something that requires a response, count to 5 (slowly) before answering, and then keep your response brief. Something that doesn't invite further comment.

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Other options are:

- Excuse yourself to make a phone call.
- Say, "I'm sorry, I really have to get this report out."
- Squint at your monitor and mutter something under your breath, letting them know that you are engrossed in an issue on the screen.
- Stop working, turn to face her, and ask, "Can I help you with something?"
- Enlist a friend to give you an "out." This might be someone in the room who notices you have been cornered, or someone you can send a quick email or instant message to who will call you on the phone. When it rings, answer it and then tell the "breaker" it's an important call that you have to take. If they don't immediately leave, say "This is going to take a while."

I'm sure this sounds harsh and impolite, but if you have already tried subtle body language and gotten no results, this is the next step.

By the way, I find it sad that, in this break-laden (broken?) work center, the NSA civilians rarely speak to each other. Sure, too much chit-chat is disruptive, but a short, friendly greeting now and again wouldn't hurt!

-Edki



(U) Letters to Zelda: More Suggestions from Our Readers

FROM: SIDtoday

Run Date: 06/09/2014

(U) Last week, *Zelda* addressed a question about employees who take long "breaks" by hanging around other employees' desks and disrupting their work. **Zelda gave good advice**, but several readers wrote in with more great ideas for getting rid of these unwanted visitors. I guess spending your break annoying someone who's busy at work is a fairly common practice...and yet, some people *still* don't take the hint!

SIDtoday readers wrote:

- (U) There is an additional suggestion that I have found most useful. All you have to do is task the person who interrupts you with work. They will 1.) leave immediately and 2.) stop visiting you.
-- (U//FOUO) [redacted] (b)(3)-P.L. 86-36
- (U) I feel like "Shoot Me Now" has missed out on the oldest trick in the NSA book for getting out of unwanted diversions/conversations -- put headphones on! :) Listen to the radio, news, meditation music, or nothing at all, no one will be the wiser.
-- (U) Name withheld
- (U) [I recommend] something like "I'm sorry, but I'm busy on this, and not able to talk. Thanks." It essentially makes clear with no ambiguity that the chatter's break needs to be taken elsewhere - and probably doesn't burn any bridges regarding work-related talk in future.
-- (U//FOUO) [redacted] (b)(3)-P.L. 86-36
- (U) Whatever happened to honesty? While feelings might be a bit hurt at the beginning, there has to be some sort of diplomatic way to get the point across without burning bridges. Something to the degree of "Listen, I enjoy our conversations, but lately they have become much more frequent and are lasting for a pretty long time -- they are starting to affect my work. Can we catch up at a time when we both have a free moment?"
-- (U//FOUO) [redacted] (b)(3)-P.L. 86-36

(U) Do you have more advice for people with this type of problem? **Share your suggestions** on the **SIDtoday blog**.