

## The Globe and Mail

June 7, 2006

# As new manager, scan the terrain before throwing your weight around

By SUSAN PINKER

**Dear Susan,** I am a new manager and, since I started in this company, I have unearthed a lot of errors and loose ends. But, whenever I correct my subordinates and insist on correct procedures, they answer that this was how they were asked to do it by my predecessor.

Recently, a subordinate went over my head to complain to my boss that I am micro-managing. I have other cases of insubordination and disrespect for my authority, and I don't want to go to extremes to find ways to discipline or dismiss them. What should I do?

--Agent for Change

**Dear Agent,** Take a virtual Valium and back off. You are trying to crack your managerial whip without taking the temperature of your new surroundings. This take-no-prisoners management style is alienating your staff.

Before you have a full-scale mutiny on your hands, take a deep breath, step back from these early conflicts and scan the terrain. And if it's not too late, see how you can form alliances instead of enemies. The long view should get top billing, not same-day results.

Ultimately, you'll only get co-operation by involving the employees in the nuts and bolts of your cleanup program by asking for their input and handing off some of the responsibility and accountability to them instead of assigning blame. That's when you'll see a little motivation on their part. How do you do this? One way to learn new management tricks is to take a course. Ask your supervisor to send you on one, or if it's still too early for the company to make that investment, find one and pay for it yourself. This is a sure-fire way to try new techniques on for size while enhancing your profile. And it's a popular mid-career gambit.

Returning from a research trip recently, I was seated beside a British IT professional who was using her own time and money to attend a weekend conference. The skills and networking were well worth the cost -- not to mention the fatigue, as she'd have to jump in a cab right after her return flight and head to her London office first thing Monday morning, she told me. Before takeoff, her cellphone rang and she promptly gave an impassioned weekly progress report to her team leader via headset. As I buckled up, I

reflected that if I ever needed to hire a computer interface architect, she'd be first on my list.

Still, transatlantic travel is not a prerequisite for professional development. One manager friend keeps up with trends by reading in the bathtub.

A mentor can help you with the long view as well as with immediate snafus. There is plenty of evidence that scientists, entrepreneurs and executives who are advised by an expert get a leg up in skills and advancement. Research shows the gender or ethnic background of the mentor doesn't make much difference, but there should be a friendly affinity between you. And the mentor should have at least a decade more experience so as to be able to share knowledge and contacts freely without feeling threatened by a protégé's success.

This is not just a model for transferring business savvy. Even successful criminals have mentors, according to a study published last year by Carlo Morselli and Pierre Tremblay, both of the Université de Montréal, and Bill McCarthy at the University of California at Davis.

By interviewing 268 prisoners, they discovered the ones who raked in the most and avoided incarceration the longest had mentors at a critical juncture near the start of their careers. "What does the mentor do? He steers them, gives them direction, provides networks, contacts and has a long-term effect," Mr. Tremblay said.

This is not what I mean by take-no-prisoners and it's not what you mean by corrections, but you get the point.

**Dear Susan,** I've heard that one of my colleagues is jealous of me. Although we work on the same unit and get along well enough on the surface, I've heard rumours that she resents it when I get challenging cases. I'm just doing my job the best way I can and don't want to make her look bad or feel bad. How can I win her over?

--The Nemesis

**Dear Nemesis,** No one talks about the green-eyed monster, yet it thrives, hidden but ubiquitous, in every workplace. More than three-quarters of all employees at all levels feel or witness envy or jealousy, according to a much-quoted study done in the nineties at St. Mary's University in Nova Scotia. Yet, these powerful emotions are rarely aired and there's not much research on how to diffuse them.

"There's an emotional flash that a rival is making inroads. But it's a social taboo. People feel it but don't want to talk about it," says Robert P. Vecchio, a professor of management at Notre Dame University who researches jealousy and leadership.

His evidence shows that senior, more politically astute staff report being the targets of envy more often. "They have greater job longevity. They feel that others resent their

accomplishments. They feel more competition at work." He calls them Cinderellas because they feel that merely doing their job well provokes envy .

But often they really are in the inner circle. They may have risen to their positions legitimately, through talent and hard work. But a lack of transparency among senior management, along with a sense of insecurity among individual staff members provide the perfect growing medium for professional jealousy.

There's not much you can do to disarm your colleague. If you're in a team, it won't hurt to make sure she gets credit for her work. Be collegial and generous, keeping in mind that envy comes from a lack of self-confidence. And if you're in a supervisory position, being inclusive in decision making will reduce backbiting, Prof. Vecchio says, as an information vacuum prompts people to fill in the blanks with half-truths.

But if stories like Shakespeare's Othello and the Old Testament's Joseph have endured, it's because envy and jealousy have staying power.

Copyright Susan Pinker 2006