



Mobley's Musings: How did that become my job?

In listening to clients, I hear that some people can't stand to see tasks left undone. As a result, they take on more work than others and often come to resent it.

One person, who lives with her dad and brother, explained her frustration. "If I start taking the kitchen garbage out, it becomes my job," she told me. "So as much as it drives me crazy to see the garbage overflowing, I have to just walk away." She had learned the hard way that if she stepped up even once to take out the garbage, her father and brother would assume it was her job and would never lift a finger to help.

When we sense our willingness to pitch in is being taken advantage, resentment builds. Instead of fuming or ignoring the tasks, a more constructive response is simply to request that someone else do the task. Another approach is to point out the need for group members to share responsibilities. These days, many working moms are feeling overwhelmed with the demands of their job and the added responsibility of helping their children with online learning. By setting boundaries about what you are and are not willing to do—and sticking to them—other family members will be obliged to step up. But you can't assume others will pick up the slack if they refuse to acknowledge tasks that need to be done. A dispassionate conversation about shared responsibilities can save hurt feelings and diffuse resentment.

One place where people often refuse to acknowledge shared responsibilities is the office breakroom. People pour themselves the last cup of coffee and don't bother making another pot. Or they leave the pot nearly empty without turning the warmer off. The next morning, the coffee pot is burned beyond use. Then there are the dirty cups left in the sink for someone else to wash. Whoever steps in to clean the mess not only gets no thanks or recognition, others may think their work must not be important since they have time to clean.

The best response to breakroom myopia I've seen was when the CEO walked into the kitchen and began washing the dishes. All of a sudden other people came in to help. After that, dishes were no longer left in the sink. In a less subtle approach, an office manager who had tried to get people to share in cleaning up the kitchen announced she was hiring a person to come in three times a week to clean up after them, with the cost taken from money set aside for bonuses.

How you handle shared responsibilities is a personal decision that says volumes about your care for others as well as your self-care.

Sandy



Ask Sandy

Is success intimidating?

When you experience difficulties working with a colleague, does it ever occur to you that others might find you intimidating? Maybe you are quicker to see a solution or more experienced than your colleague. Perhaps your confidence causes others to gravitate toward you while your colleague is shunted aside. You don't intend to make your colleague feel diminished but things just come easier for you. If you think your abilities are intimidating others, adopt a humble approach and offer to share with others how you've gained your skills. You'll find your gifts are even more powerful when they are shared.

When the person who feels intimidated is your boss, the dynamic is different. Your boss can feel intimidated when you point out errors in her work, disagree with her approach, or never ask for her help. You may think you are being a great employee by coming up with better solutions on your own, but your boss may feel minimized and not respected. To show you value your boss's opinion and lessen her sense of intimidation, share your approach and thinking with her and ask for feedback. Giving your boss feedback can be tricky; save time and irritation by asking if the boss wants feedback first before launching into a critique of her solution or decision. To soften your feedback, you could phrase your concerns in questions: "I like this idea. I wonder how our competitors/board/employees might view this change?" If the boss hadn't considered these implications, she can still address them without appearing to have been directly challenged.

What if you are intimidated? Do others' success, position, physicality, or booming voice make you feel less than? When someone is intentionally trying to intimidate you, consider that he may actually feel insecure and is masking it with bravado. When you put yourself in someone else's shoes you can better understand their feelings and build a relationship based on empathy with them. If the person feels cared about, the need to intimidate goes away.

Perhaps you feel intimidated by a colleague who seems smarter, quicker, or more knowledgeable about the work than you. Ask the person to help you develop the knowledge and skills they have. When people realize you admire their abilities and want to learn from them, it can be disarming. They may not have even been aware of their gifts, just as you may not fully appreciate your own. Take stock of where you are strong and acknowledge that you can't be good at everything. Enjoy supporting others' gifts.

Learning for Leaders: Pay attention to how people perceive you. If they are fearful, they won't perform at their best.

Coaches Corner: Help clients recognize when they intimidate others and how to make others more comfortable. And, if they are intimidated, help them manage those emotions productively.

If you have questions you'd like Sandy to address in future newsletters, email them to sandy@learningadvantageinc.com



Delegation Supports Growth

There are so many reasons why it makes sense to delegate. First of all, delegation allows direct reports to grow and learn new tasks. Second, it allows managers to take on more responsibilities. And delegation provides the opportunity for people to do work that is appropriate for their skill set.

Nevertheless, a complaint I often hear from employees is that their managers don't delegate to them. The inability or unwillingness to delegate can hold managers back and frustrate their subordinates. To improve their abilities, managers need to first realize what is keeping them from delegating and then learn how to align their delegating approach to their staff's skills, experience, interests, and motivators.

Why People Don't Delegate

"I can do it faster than if I have to explain it to others."

"I don't want to overload my staff."

"I feel guilty delegating junk work."

"I'm the only one who can do it."

Managers have all kinds of reasons for not delegating. As a coach the first thing I want from my clients is the real reason they don't want to delegate. And then I ask them to look at their reasoning differently.

If the story they tell me is that they can do the work faster on their own, I ask if the task is a recurring one. If so, investing the time to teach others will pay off in the long run. If it is a one-time task, perhaps doing it themselves is the better way to go.

It is laudable that a manager doesn't want to overload staff. I ask them to consider whether the staff would develop by doing the task and would in fact be willing to take on more work for the opportunity to learn and grow. And while administrivia isn't exactly thrilling work, by spreading it among staff, no one has to take on too much of it. Some managers lay out the monthly admin tasks and let people sign up for whichever they prefer to do. For some people, tackling routine work can be satisfying and provide relief from complex tasks. And some may actually enjoy doing basic tasks. Managers shouldn't assume that just because they don't like to do it other people won't.

I have found that some managers simply don't like asking for help under any circumstances. I remind them that part of their job is to develop their staff, and delegating work is one way they can achieve that without feeling like they are imposing. Giving staff increased responsibility and the opportunity to learn new things is important for their growth.

After significant probing some managers confess that they don't delegate work because they are more comfortable doing the tasks they know than taking on the higher level work. I point out that in declining to develop competencies necessary to advance in their own careers they're also stifling the development of their staff. And while they may think they're protecting their job by being the only person skilled in an important area, they are digging themselves into a hole. They'll never be promoted if no one can step into their job. These revelations often lead to deeper conversations about what they from their jobs.

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