

JUICY WORK NEWS

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Mobley's Musings: Feeling Overwhelmed? Edit!

Along with her iconic tweed suits, little black dresses, and No. 5 perfume, legendary fashion designer Coco Chanel was famous for this advice: "Before you leave the house, look in the mirror and take one thing off" — perhaps a necklace or bracelet. "It is always better to be slightly underdressed," she said, in the belief that less is more. *

I find Chanel's philosophy applies to more than fashion. When a friend described what she was planning to serve for an upcoming holiday dinner — turkey and ham, mashed potatoes, yams, mac and cheese, roasted carrots, and on and on — I could tell from her voice that overwhelm was on the menu as well. I suggested she take Chanel's advice and edit.

When I'm planning a dinner or cocktail party, I start with all the ideas I have in mind and then, knowing I can't possibly include them all, I edit. Sometimes I run out of time to prepare a dish, or I can't find a key ingredient at the grocery store, or I need to adhere to certain dietary restrictions. Whatever the reason, the items I cut from the menu are rarely missed. People attend gatherings for connection; the food is secondary. If I am running around frantically trying to serve a multi-course meal and not taking the time to enjoy my guests, I have missed the point of inviting them.

A client was working on a presentation to the board of his organization. As he kept coming up with things to tell them, his deck got bigger and bigger. He told me he had been given 20 minutes for his presentation and he wanted to devote half that time at the end for questions. Using the rule



Lift or Drag?

Are Your Employees the Wind Beneath Your Wings or an Anchor Tied to Your Feet?

One of the keys to success as a leader is having the time to think strategically. If you want to devote more time to strategic analysis, your staff will likely have to step up their game, take on more responsibilities, and become more self-sufficient in their work. If you are their personal help desk, they won't learn, and you won't get the lift you need to devote time to higher-level work.

Lidia was a new manager with five direct reports. A few times an hour they'd reach out to her on Slack (her team's communication platform) asking how to do things, how to prioritize their work, and what she thought of the work they had just completed. If she didn't respond within 15 minutes, they'd reach out again asking for feedback. While Lidia

of thumb of 2 minutes per page I told him he had time for maybe 5 or 6 pages, not the 17 in his current draft. We went back and edited out all but the most important concepts and ideas. It made his presentation better and I'm sure the board appreciated his focus.

Consider this concept when you are feeling overwhelmed: what can I edit out to make my life a little easier?

*Chanel also noted that “a woman can be overdressed but never over-elegant.”



Ask Sandy When Helping Can Hurt You

A client came to me to work on her executive presence. She seemed confident, spoke clearly, and carried herself well. I was curious about what had caused her to come to me.

She said she had gotten feedback that she was “trying too hard to prove herself.” I asked her why she thought she'd gotten this assessment. She said she took pride in her work: she was always prepared, completed assignments early or on time, and rarely had her work returned for corrections. She admitted that she tended to overdress, wearing suits when others dressed more casually, but that was her personal style.

She described herself as wanting to be helpful — often making copies of agendas and handouts to bring with her to her meetings in case someone had forgotten to bring their own. And after her meetings, she'd tidy up the conference room, throwing out coffee cups and papers, wiping crumbs off the table, and putting chairs back where they belonged.

When I asked her whether her colleagues did anything similar when they held meetings, she said she hadn't thought about it, but then realized they do nothing. “Who cleans up after their meetings?” I asked. She said they send in their admin. That was her “a-ha” moment: cleaning up the conference room instead of delegating the task was a perfect example of doing

wanted to be helpful, she had her own work to do, and their neediness was dragging her down.

I asked her what expectations she had set with them regarding meeting with her, setting their own work priorities, and getting feedback. She realized she had not set any. Then I asked what expectations her own manager had set with her. She explained that she met with her manager once a week for feedback and guidance, and to see whether there were any tasks she could take off her manager's hands. I asked her whether she was offering to take on these tasks to provide lift for her manager or because her manager expected it. She realized she was taking the initiative on her own, not because her manager expected it, and she'd assumed her staff would do the same. Lidia provided her manager lift while Lidia's staff anchored her to them.

When talking with leaders about improving their performance, I ask who on their team provides them lift and who pulls them down. Then we work on ways to achieve more lift and less drag.

There are three main strategies to increase lift: set “lift expectations” for staff to add value beyond their assignments, offer support and training so

things that, no matter how helpful, made it look like she was trying too hard.

She continued to turn in excellent work products and tidy up her workspace, but no longer did she clean up other peoples' messes.

Think about what signals you are sending when you take on tasks usually handled by support staff. Being helpful and kind is a wonderful trait, but too much of it — especially when it's not within your job description — can affect how people view your leadership.

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



that staff can learn and grow, and hire people who are eager to shoulder your tasks. Some leaders fear that in tasking a staff member with their work, the staffer may prove better at it than they are. I say that is a gift: you can only move up if there is someone who can take your place.

In setting expectations for lift, be clear with staff about how much autonomy they have in making decisions, completing and submitting work, and taking on new work.

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