

(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

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.

Felita
