

(U) Ask Zelda!: Underwater Battleground

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

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(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
