

Management styles

A light-hearted look at 3 recognisable management styles!

The "seagull" manager....

Description:

'Seagull management' is a humorous term that is used to describe a style of management whereby the person 'flies in, poops on you and then flies away again'.

When they are there, they typically give criticism and direction in equal quantities, often without any real understanding of what the job entails. Then before you can object or ask what they really want, they have an 'important meeting' to go to.

The experience of having a seagull manager is not positive. Whilst they are there, they talk non-stop and actively discourage anyone else from saying anything. This can include avoiding eye contact and continuing to talk over you if you start to say anything.

You may typically feel under-valued and generally abuse. The best thing that can be said is that they are typically there not very often and you can largely get on with the job by yourself.

Why it happens: The Seagull Managers like to consider themselves as important. However they also know that they do not know that much and fear being exposed by questions or debate. They consequently grab the talking stick and do not stop until they can excuse themselves and leave. It is possible that they really are busy, but what they miss is the importance of person-management. They are likely to be strongly task-based and consider the 'soft stuff' as fluffy and unnecessary. Their approach is thus highly transactional based on the simple premise 'do as I say and you'll continue to get paid'.

Tactics for dealing with a Seagull Manager:

- If you can work independently, then the best approach is often to listen patiently then ignore them. As long as you are delivering value, they may not actually be too concerned about how you get there. Unlike the micro-manager they are not that interested in control over you.
- A novel approach is to deliberately 'chase' them with complex detail for which they have 'no time'. As they retreat or waffle at you, offer a simpler alternative that is easy for them to accept. You can also always reframe what they said, casting it into a more sensible light.
- Because the most important thing in the Seagull Manager's life is the Seagull Manager, if you can deliver results, then they may well leave you to your own devices or give moderate support. Deliver regular short messages that show you are making good progress.
- Also work to make them look good to the rest of the organization (despite temptations to the contrary!). If they think you are acting contrary to their interests, they will just fly by more often and poop on you even more!

If you are a manager: If you are a manager, then seagull management is of course something to avoid. It is a trap that may seem easy but in practice it will alienate and demotivate your staff. If there are wiser people above you, then they also will find out what is happening and your advancement will halt or regress.

The real lesson here is to sustain a good relationship with your people. Whilst you need not (and should not) be best mates with them, you should respect them and communicate regularly and with integrity. Listen too -- this is a key skill and frequent activity of good leaders.





The "kipper" manager....

Description

Fish might unfairly be accused of being two-faced, as you only get to see one side at once. **This principle is also applicable to the two-faced manager who has different faces and styles depending on the situation.**



When they are with more senior managers they are typically model employees, putting business first and themselves last. Yet with their subordinates, the reverse is often true, with the individuals carrying the can for both pulling out the stops to get things done in time and then blame when things go wrong through no fault of their own.

The kipper will change with the wind as the need arises. They are chums when things need doing and backstabbers when there is glory or reward to be gained. The kipper's hero is probably Machiavelli.

Why it happens

The key reason why the kipper is so two-faced (or many-faced) is that their values with regard to integrity are largely non-existent. They literally see nothing wrong in acting differently with different people and may even be proud of their ability to act differently in different situations, calling it something like 'style flexibility'.

Historically, the kipper may have been taught that 'this is how it works'. They may also have a deeper background where trust was low and abusive relationships common.

Tactics for dealing with a Kipper Manager:

- Make sure you always have something that the kipper needs. This will force them to keep their "kinder" (or "nice") face towards you.
- If the kipper regularly turns their bad face on you, consider fighting fire with fire and standing up to them. Many kippers will turn a kinder face to those who are not easily cowed. Also consider taking the matter further, particularly if you can show the kipper is seriously breaking company values.
- Kippers are natural cowards and admire power. They are hence susceptible to blackmail, although this is seldom a good approach! If, however, they know that you know something that they do not want others to know, no words may be necessary and they may treat you much better.
- If you are a more senior manager and suspect you have a kipper in your ranks, get 360 degree views on them from different people. The kipper may also happily betray themselves in boasts of what and how they got people to do things for them.

The "mushroom" manager....

Description

In a common metaphor the 'mushroom manager' plants you knee-deep (or worse) in the smelly stuff and keeps you in the dark.



In practice, this means you get to do all the work that they do not want. They do not communicate and generally ignore you, so you do not know their plans or what else might be going on in the organization.



Why it happens

Mushroom managers are often more concerned about their own career and image. Anyone who appears as a threat may well be deliberately held back as their ability may make the mushroom manager look bad.

Mushroom managers may also have their favorites on whom they lavish attention and the plum jobs. Others are swept away and given the dross.

Managers may take the mushroom route is that they just do not care about some or all of their people. Sometimes mushroom managers are just incompetent and know no better.

Tactics for dealing with a Mushroom Manager:

If you are a quiet mouse who likes to keep your head down and avoid other people, then you may like a mushroom manager, just so long as they do not over-do it. Somebody has to handle the unpopular work which may make you feel safe and comfortable. Staying away from other work is fine as it lets you go home at a regular hour. Not everyone needs high ambition.

On the other hand, a mushroom manager may annoy you as they hold back your career and give you little opportunity to shine.

- Be assertive.
- Talk to them about what they are doing and the effect they are having.
- Do not lie down and be the doormat who says 'thank you' for any scraps they care to throw you.
- Remember that you always have more power than you think you have.

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