Are you one of those who have sleepless Sunday nights and dread going to office every Monday? Does the wait for Friday begin every Monday morning for you? Do you feel your company really needs a Chief Happiness Officer? *What? You did not think one existed? Go to google.com and type ‘Chief Happiness Officer’ now and you will be amazed how this new designation is trending.*

Are you one of those who are clueless to deal with office politics? Do you feel you are one of the best performers at work and do not get recognized due to your boss or due to an over smart colleague who takes the boss out for drinks every Friday?

Well, first relax and take heart. Because one, you are among the 99.999999% people who feel so. Such is the pervasiveness of the problem that even our good friend Google throws about 54,40,00,000 results in just 0.64 seconds when searched for the term *work stress*.

Work hours can be as enjoyable or as torturous as your equation with people at work.

You spend more time with your office colleagues than your family but probably the only thing you share with a lot of colleagues is the thought and the wish of never seeing each other again.

But alas. You don’t have a genie to grant this wish. And so you have no choice but to carry a smile on your lips as you negotiate your way through the day. And life goes on.

Your next obvious thought would be that if work life is just so difficult and happiness at work place so much elusive, shouldn’t you just rush to the Himalayas? You must be also cursing yourself for wasting money on this book (*unless you got a complimentary copy in which case you still are wasting your time).*

Well, take heart. After ten years of getting up at 7 AM and leading a semi robotic cubicle life five days of the week; after having met so many different species of men and women at work, I now feel wise enough to throw some insights around the topic - “How to deal with different kinds of people at work, whether they are your colleagues or bosses or even juniors.” *Yes. Juniors too. For those of you, who felt managing juniors was easy, wait till you become bosses.*

I can tell you that there are ways and simple ways to deal with people who make life difficult at work for you. In this book on ‘Corporate Avatars’, we will classify and dissect the different devils that make life miserable for us at work and offer practical strategies in dealing with them. Hopefully, you will find handy solutions to the problems at your workplace and I will become a famous *lady baba* (read consultant) on work-stress management. *And maybe someday, I too will launch a de-stress herbal tea, become a big shot businessman like Baba Ramdev and not need to work anymore for anyone else, thereby attaining work-stress nirvana.*

**The Free Rider**

Mr. Gadhaa Prasad is always under stress these days. His team mate Aalsi Lal passes on his work cunningly over to Mr. Gadhaa. During any team assignments, Aalsi Lal goes missing, citing some urgent ‘other’ assignment.

Mr. Gadhaa has no option but to finish both the people’s work alone. He sulks and complains behind Aalsi Lal’s back. But what to do? End of the day, if the project fails, even Gadhaa Prasad’s grades/promotions take a hit. And so, unwillingly, grudgingly he does Aalsi’s share of work as well.

Gadhaa Prasad tries to tell himself it is about teamwork. And may be the next time, Aalsi Lal might do both people’s work as a gesture of courtesy. But sadly that next time never comes.

Aalsi on his part exactly realizes how Gadhaa thinks and is in fact smart enough to make use of it. *Ok ok, my bad! I use the word ‘smart’ and not ‘cunning’ here. Gadhaa Prasad is angry reading this. But trust me, Aalsi knows Gadhaa’s thought process and takes liberty with it. And even though Gadhaa Prasad know that Aalsi Lal exploits him, Gadhaa sulks behind Aalsi’s back but never has the courage to tell Aalsi about it. So isn’t Aalsi smart and Gadhaa...*

As if this was not enough, Aalsi comes at the last moment when Gadhaa is about to present the work to the boss. And before Gadhaa knows it, the boss is appreciating Aalsi for his hard work.

We all have met men and women who feel they have been born to relax and others to slog on their behalf. People who feel they can easily ride on other’s hard work. This breed of *Free Riders* can do an amazing amount of nothing the whole day and still crib about being drained-out. Another common trait of this species is that they would jump in at the final moment, just when you are about to go to the boss to present the findings. While ‘we’ stand as a team in front of our boss, in your heart you know how the other person has just not put the efforts he/she should have. And yet, the success is the team’s and not yours alone.

More amazingly, the population of this breed is exploding and more of these *Free Riders* can now be found everywhere, be it at school, college or corporate world.

When it comes to ‘Ms.’ Free Rider, she generally rides on her beauty to get someone also do her share of work. Men drool over her and she capitalizes on this to pass on her assignment/project in exchange for a coffee date.

When The Free Rider is a boss, things get even worse. By virtue of his authority, he passes on even his work to you. So when his boss tells him to make a presentation, he conveniently offloads that to you. Even worse, he proudly says that he trusts you enough to shoulder ‘this’ important project. But when it comes to presenting stuff in front of his boss, he takes credit for all the research and walks away with the crown.

So now, imagine you are stuck with The Free Rider team-mate and the Free Rider Boss. Then God help you! But since Mr. God is not around most of the time and remains invisible, so till the time you find him read on to find some quick tips to deal with The Free Rider species.

***Tip #1 - Clear work division:***

Unclear work distribution is a sin when it comes to dealing with a Free Rider teammate. In fact, as a mosquito needs stagnant water for breeding, Free Riders survive best in an environment where the work responsibilities are not clearly divided. So if you have a Free Rider teammate, the next time your boss assigns a project to the two of you, immediately discuss the work division with your Free Rider team-mate. Send out the work division over an email to the team and include your boss in it.

*(Golden Rule 1: Your boss may not be reading each email. Nevertheless, copying bosses is the easiest way to send messages across.)*

***Tip #2 - If you need him/her to work on something, do not only rely on verbal communication:***

The ancient scriptures preach that we trust people. But in this corporate world where each day seems like a Mahabharata battleground, trust people with caution. Take time in relying on people’s verbal commitments, especially when they have broken your trust the first time. When working with a Free Rider, whatever you discuss with them should go on an email for records. So if he later says he cannot handle his share of the work, ask him to put that over an email so at least the boss knows who is enjoying a comfortable ride and who is the mule (*read ‘hard worker’*).

***Tip #3: Always pretend you are busy even when you are not.***

Each time you get the slightest hint that Mr. Free Rider is about to pass on the baton to you, start sulking on the load of work you already have and how you are finding it difficult to cope up with it. Make him feel guilty of doing what he is about to do. And may be some wisdom will strike from the heaven and he would for once, want to contribute.

***Tip #4 : If you still have to do his share of work as well, then let that be known to everyone***

The Free Rider would want you to make the presentation while he presents it. He would want you to do the dirty work while he handles the creamier bit. Be stern and say you would present since you have done the dirty work. If he still manages to cunningly do the glamorous presentation, do not let him steal the show. When he is presenting, interrupt him and ask ‘innocent’ questions. Obviously if he has not done his homework as well as you have done, he would stammer. Enjoy the show.

*FINAL TIP WHEN NOTHING ELSE WORKS: Gadhaa Prasad has just read the holy Hindu scripture Gita, which says we all bear the fruits of our Karma. He plans to forgive Aalsi for his ignorance of this mystical law.*

**The Workaholic**

Banta has recently changed jobs and his new boss Santa is a workaholic. Santa, it seems, has been born on this earth only to work. Day in and day out, all Santa talks and cares about is work. Even loo times are not spared. Banta has lost his appetite ever since lunches have become working lunches. Each time Banta opens his email, there is some or the other email from Santa. Banta has stopped connecting Wi-Fi on his phone, scared to find yet another email asking him to contribute to increasing the country’s GDP. But that does not seem to have helped. When it comes to work, Santa does not shy calling Banta in the middle of the night and asking him to check his email. And technology innovations like Whatsapp are not helping either.

Banta knows Santa is married and wonders how his wife ever manages to steal his time and attention, given that Santa seems to be married to his work. May be, she has given up on him.

Recently Santa told Banta he would be on paternity leave. But the emails did not stop coming even when his wife was howling in pain. Santa was back at work in two days. Banta wonders if his boss is paid in crores for the amount of effort he puts at work or really has nothing else in life to do than work. He is torn between respect for his boss for Santa for his sincerity to work and helplessness at not being able to catch up to his boss’ expectations from him.

Banta’s latest girlfriend has threatened to quit if Banta does not learn to find time for her. Banta does not want to lose her, but neither does he want to be kicked out of this awesome job he has just landed in.

In the new age of cut throat competition, one in every ten people we meet at work place are the new age *Santas.* People seem to be working round the clock. Thanks to the Internet, people are on emails even in their sleep. While most sensible people get up and freshen up the first thing in the morning, Santas get up and check emails. While most sensible people spend weekends with family, for Santas there is no concept of weekdays and weekends. Each day is working.

While we may all want to have Santa as a part of our team, but the same may not hold true if Santa comes as a boss. While most people in the organization respect Santa for his dedication, the fact is that people working closely with Santa soon feel drained and exhausted. For the simple reason that Santa expects everyone around him to be available at all times, checking and replying to his emails. Santa’s pace can actually demotivate his teammates and many soon leave.

Have you too ever had a boss like Santa who chased you with a shining sword to meet the scary deadlines? Read on..

***Tip #1 - Set the expectations right the first time :***

A lot of us, in our initial days at any new job, give in easily to our boss’s expectations; hoping once we have established ourselves, we will go and talk to the boss. Some of us fall into the trap of assuming this is a one-off pressure time owing to the criticality of the project; little realizing that it is less to do with the project but more to do with our boss’ innate personality type.

So, the first thing we need to do is to set the expectations right the very first time. Giving up too much too early might look appealing. But in an attempt to please our bosses, if we do not draw the boundaries ourselves, changing expectations later is easier said than done and would probably cause more heartburn.

One of my very close friend once had a workaholic boss and he did the same mistake. It took him a threat to resign to actually correct it later. Once the expectations were set properly, he went on to work with the same boss for ten years.

***Tip #2 - Learn to prioritize***

Since your boss is passing on massive load of work on you, learn to recognize what is really urgent and what can wait till the next day. Trying to finish all at one go can be too stressful. When in doubt, it is Ok to even walk up to your boss and seek his opinion on what he feels your priority should be. On one hand, it will sensitize your boss that there is a lot on your plate and on the other hand, when he would prioritize “B” over “A”, he would not send you an email asking for an update on “A”. Prioritization becomes really important especially as one grows up the ladder and there is more than one project one gets involved in.

***Tip #3 - Learn to say ‘No’ :***

Saying ‘No’ is probably the most difficult thing to do for most of us. We feel it might not go well with our boss and hence our chances of appraisal/promotions. A lot of people I have come across feel that if they say ‘No’ to their boss once, then the boss may underestimate them later and not involve them in critical projects, thinking they cannot deliver.

I have had friends who have cancelled their most important personal engagements just because their boss called them up last moment and asked them to work on an urgent presentation. And none of these people have done this happily.

Trust me, fear is the biggest hurdle to growth. Contrary to how we feel, a lot of bosses actually appreciate people who speak their minds. After all, you are not saying you are shying away from work. You are actually giving your best in office hours and are not going to be totally dead in the after office hours. But at the same time, you cannot be sacrificing weekend after weekend only in work, seeing your life pass by. Most importantly, unless you speak, your boss is not God or your wife whom you expect to hear the unsaid.

Having said all this, if your boss in fact does not take it positively and your worst fears do come true, always remember there is no dearth of good work and opportunities for the real ‘smart’ people out there. So keep the fear aside and say ‘No’.

***Tip #4 - Do not do to your teammates what your boss does to you***

A lot of us fall in this trap of passing the pressure over to our teammates since it has been passed on to us from our boss. Remember, if this happens, your team may support you for some time. But they would not respect you since they do not see your standing up to your boss for your own rights.

I have had occasions when I have walked up to my boss, clearly telling him I need more hands in my team if he wants me to take on a new project. I have listed what all my team is currently on and the scope of the work in the new project and how there would be bandwidth issues and quality of delivery may suffer. Fortunately, all my bosses have understood and found me an alternative, whether it is an addition in the team or de-prioritizing something else. My team has appreciated my ability to not pass the pressure on to them, rewarding me with excellent results in the work assigned to them; clearly a ‘win-win’.

***Tip #5 - Be available when there is actually something critical to deliver :***

While I am not an advocate of working weekends after weekend, one must understand that there will always be situations when you do need to be in office over weekends, especially during critical releases.

Do not be a hard liner then and say ‘No’ on such occasions. This can really backfire. On the other hand, if you show your flexibility during such occasions, your boss would also be flexible the next time you say ‘No’ for something not so time critical.

One of my friend has a cyclical profession. He works like a donkey when needed. But does not shy away for asking for compensatory offs when the season is lean.

*FINAL TIP WHEN NOTHING ELSE WORKS: Banta is taking a deep breath and the next time his boss calls him at 12 AM in the night, Banta is going to tell him he is having sex and would appreciates privacy.*

**The Whining Kid**

Rondu Mal had a unique problem. He felt being happy in life was a crime. He behaved as if his survival in the world depended on how gloomy he could look. If he would be happy, someone would come and steal his happiness and punish him. It was as if Rondu Mal had just witnessed some character dying for the 6666th time in the latest TV soap and was still finding it difficult to cope up with the loss.

Hasmukh Mal was Rondu’s team mate. Every day morning when he wished Rondu Mal a good morning, Rondu would retort and ask what was so good about the morning. After all, it was the same office, same work and same pressures. Hasmukh wondered if Rondu had some personal issues that made him a whining kid. But then whenever he had met Rondu’s wife, she was the sweetest harmless female he knew. How could Rondu not be happy with her?

During tea breaks, Rondu Mal would tell Hasmukh how the world was getting more polluted, inflation was at an all time high, his travel time to office was increasing owing to the traffic on the roads and how his EMIs were killing him. Hasmukh wondered why did Rondu have to buy four houses in the first place and crib later.

When Hasmukh tried to divert the topic to work, Rondu would sulk and talk how there was so much politics around and how he wanted to leave the job. It was a different matter that Hasmukh had been hearing this for the past 8 years and wondered if Rondu was actually so unhappy, why had he not left till now. Hasmukh knew how well Rondu was paid and in fact, being in the same team, found the team culture really good and encouraging. Hasmukh wondered why Rondu never felt positive about life and instead of thanking God for all the good things in his personal and professional life, Rondu always focused on the negatives.

Slowly and as a result of spending too much time with Rondu, Hasmukh too started feeling everything wrong around him. That was when Hasmukh decided to ignore Rondu but that was hard, given Hasmukh had to work closely with Rondu. The tipping point came when Hasmukh called a group meeting to plan a celebration around Rondu’s promotion and Rondu walked up to Hasmukh asking if people were conspiring against him since he was not made part of the ‘secret’ meeting..

‘The Whining Kid’ is the name I have given to the people who sulk every moment in life. Being around these perennially stressed people is just so depressing in itself. As much as one can, such people should be avoided as many great saints have emphasized on the importance of surrounding one with positive people. However, many life Hasmukh are not as lucky and have to deal with such people day in and day out. What are they supposed to do? Start sulking back? *Nooooooooooooo*

Here are my tips to avoid making Rondu Mal’s out of Hasmukh’s :

***Tip #1 - Try to be direct and honest with them.***

The first and foremost thing to do is to see objectively if the person has some real issues or are most of the issues are figment of his imagination. I had a colleague who was always complaining over all trivial issues. Right from her favorite dress not fitting her to her boyfriend not giving her enough time. Soon I realized, I did not want to drown myself in her trivial problems.

I started talking to her and telling her how most of her issues were just so trivial and how blessed she was to have a loving family, a great working environment and growth opportunities. I told her how she was missing on a whole lot of good things in life just because she was too busy sulking. This was not a magical overnight transformation and it took many such conversations before she actually understood my point. But once she did, she realized the fun of being happy and was appreciative of me being direct with her and helping her change her attitude.

Believe it or not, I have a friend who keeps worrying about the future of her two year old daughter. One day, I really asked her if she was sure of her own breath the very next second and what use it was to sulk of something which is decades away, especially when nothing about it is to be done right now.

A lot of times we feel the other person might feel offended if we show them the mirror. But often that is necessary and need of the hour. Remember, you are actually helping the person by making him/her happy.

***Tip #2 - Sharing good and positive stuff with them.***

While for some people as was the case of my friend, the problems may be small. In certain other cases, the person may actually be struggling with some real problems.

It is only human then to be supportive of these people and share good and positive stuff with them. Make them appreciate the good things in their own lives. Focus on positives with them. Encourage them to stay positive as negativity would not help them either.

***Tip #3 - Divert their negative energies to positive actions***

It is important to make the person think of not just problems but also actions he can take to make things better. A lot of times, people prefer to sulk and it seems to be, somewhere down the line, most whining kids just whine without any reason. Their objective is not even to find a solution to the problem but just whine.

It is so very important to make the whining kid realize that there are two kind of problems in one’s life; one where one has control and the other where one doesn’t. The problem where one has control can only be solved if one stops sulking and looks objectively for solutions. The problem where one has no control - sulking would only make it worse. Tell him to do his best and leave the rest.

*I had a friend who would keep sulking of his growing belly but would not stop gorging on food. Every time he spoke to me about his problem, I would counter question and ask when was he joining to gym. He stopped whining in front of me.*

***Tip #4 - Limit your interactions if needed. Do not start complaining with them.***

While it is important to be supportive of your colleagues, it is equally important to know where to draw the line. Do not start sulking with them. If the other person’s constant negativity is making you negative too; then the best is step back and limit your interactions.

While it may sound selfish to not help people in need, one can only help to a certain extent. If the other person does not want to be happy and take control of his own emotions, nor can you.

*FINAL TIP WHEN NOTHING ELSE WORKS: Hasmukh Lal has just gifted Rondu Mal a pack of laughter inducing tablets. Rondu Mal is going to have the time of his life.*

**The Netaji - I love playing political games**

Mr. Sadhu feels his new colleague Mr. Netaji is on a secret mission; “Mission Bring Sadhu down”.

He keeps Sadhu out of a lot of important information loops and then makes a fool out of Sadhu in the meetings. Mr. Netaji speaks positively to Sadhu when the two are alone. But in meetings with the boss, he never seems to agree with Sadhu. Sadhu secretly wishes Mr. Netaji is thrown out of the office for his petty acts but is equally worried now of his own future thanks to all the office politics going on around him. Sadhu has recently started watching the new Ekta Kapoor drama to learn techniques of dealing with such people but her protagonists shed a lot of tears, which Sadhu would not want to do.

However much we all want to stay away from office politics, every organization, and every team has it to a certain degree. A lot of us even participate in it, sometimes not even being consciously aware. In fact, office politics is a topic on which a complete book can be written.

A recent study conducted by a well known head hunting company showed office politics as the #1 reason people change jobs. We can deal with a lot of personality types, but when it comes to dealing with people who indulge in politics, the game just gets tougher. Simply because, is it not enough to go to office that one also needs to counter politics. And if one was actually adept at handing politics, wouldn’t one have been sitting in the parliament in the first place?

The reasons why politics is so prevalent in workplaces are not hard to find. Thanks to the bell curve methods of appraising people, it is just not enough to be good but we are all judged in comparisons to our peers. There are always resource constraints and constant battles for more resources within teams and team members. And that is where, most people do not just focus on bringing out their own strengths in front of the bosses but also by trying to highlight their peer’s weaknesses.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that Netajis are like cancers, the earlier detected, the more chances of being cured. The first and the foremost way of dealing with the Netajis at workplaces is to even realize that there are games being played around us. Most innocent souls do not even realize this till very late when the damage is already done. In the Mahabharata, the Pandavas did not even realize they were being taken for a ride till a very late stage, when they had lost everything. And that is where, the situation gets slightly dirty.

However, before you freak out and start wearing the detectives hat and suspecting everyone around you, look at some simpler and easy ways of dealing with the Netajis.

***Tip #1 : Keep your antennae open***

As I said earlier, most people are not able to deal with office politics because they are not even aware of the fact that such a thing is happening around them. Remember, when the great king Asoka could not save himself from it and the great king Yudhisthira fell prey to it, then we are but immortal souls in *Kalyug*. By closing one’s eyes and ears and simply wearing red glasses, if the world could actually turn rosier, then the prices of red glasses would have skyrocketed.

So, first we talk of few symptoms of spotting a Netaji around us.

Is there someone in the team who regularly takes out the boss for lunches and dinners outside work and the boss then sides with him/her in the most stupid of arguments? Is there someone whom you have caught hiding information from you even when the information impacted your work? Is there someone who seems to be bad-mouthing about you behind your back? Did you entrust someone with any information only to realize later that the information had been made public? Is there someone who does a lot of sweet talk to you but it is not corroborated by that person’s actions?

Being aware of some of these behavioral patterns to understand the people around you becomes essential, especially as one grows up the ladder. Identify the Netajis around you, so you can plan your defenses well in advance.

***Tip #2: Indulging in gossips is not going to help***

A lot of people, when they realize they are being victimized actually go and gossip about it to other co-workers. A wise man once said, “*Do not do to others what you do not want to be done to you.”* By indulging in gossips, you are not finding a real solution to the problem, rather you are becoming a part of the problem yourself. While it is tempting to bitch and gossip, remember that’s what you do not like in the first place when someone else bitches or gossips about you behind your back. In fact, when dealing with office politics, choosing your words carefully is the first and foremost rule. It is better to speak less and carefully than to be caught off-guard when dealing with Mr. Netaji.

***Tip #3: Do not lose your nerve. Focus from the work***

Because if you do, then you have given Netaji a big victory. Remember, Netaji is out to prove that you are not a valuable resource. And by now only focusing on dealing with Netaji and not focusing as much on the work, the battle can never be won. Instead, counter all attacks by the Netaji with your work. Let your work talk and silence those who are out to mar your reputation.

***Tip #4 : Have a diverse group of friends***

Every person likes to be associated with a group. It provides a sense of security. But my doing so, if one distances oneself from people across other teams, then sooner or later, Netaji is out there, weakening your reputation among these teams from where you alienated yourself. It is ok to form alliances with certain groups, but not at the cost of completely alienating one from the others. Having a diverse group of friends, across departments certainly helps. They become your eyes and ears and also the much needed support when the war is on.

***Tip #5 : Gather evidences and confront the backstabber***

I had a colleague who would always withheld information from me. He would not talk of his requirements with me but suddenly bring them up in the meetings with my boss. In the first two three meetings this happened, I seemed like a complete fool. He was a very senior person in the organization and I hesitated taking him head on. I wondered why he disliked me and started avoiding him. This only aggravated the situation, until in one of the meetings, it crossed the threshold of my tolerance and I clearly told him how it would really help if I was aware of the requirements before hand and I could come better prepared for discussions. My boss agreed with me and told the Netaji how information must flow transparently. The next time around, Netaji was more careful and stopped playing games with me.

When confronting someone, it is important to be as objective as possible. Do not bring in subjectivity to your arguments. Rather throw evidences and proofs that no one can oversee.

However much the Netaji may seem confident outside, he knows within his own self you can expose his petty politics. Confront him to make him insecure of his own doings.

***Tip #6 : Walk up to seniors if needed***

Asking for help is not a bad thing. I have had a lot of freshers walking up to me and discussing their concerns about their peers. I myself have walked up to my seniors whenever I found myself unable to deal with the situation despite my best attempts. We all have a confidante, someone to whom we can walk up to for guidance, someone whom we can trust with our secrets and someone whom we feel has seen the world more than we have. It can be a friend, a coworker or even our parents. If you have done your best and are still not able to beat Netaji in his game, maybe you need another head to strategize.

*FINAL TIP WHEN NOTHING ELSE WORKS: Sadhu is planning on pouring a tube of glue on Netaji’s chair today and pasting Netaji’s posters across the Connaught Place complex with the caption, “Beware”.*

**Mr. Jailor**

“*Meri Aawaaz suno, Mujhe Aazaad karo..”,* Kaidi was listening to this song and wondering if this song has been written keeping him in mind. After all, Kaidi so wanted to sing this song for his colleague, Jailor.

It seemed to Kaidi that the mantra in the Jailor’ life is “*My Way or Highway”* and that he had grown up with an overdose of the song, “*I am the best*”.

Jailor was one of the early people to join the team and had more knowledge. However as the team grew and more members joined in, Jailor was afraid of things slipping by and that made him constantly poke his nose in Kaidi’s work. Kaidi almost felt that given a choice, Jailor would certainly like to do everything on his own. But since he too had 24 hours in the day, poor Jailor was forced to delegate and work as part of a team.

Kaidi was tired of Jailor’s constant nagging and offering suggestions. In meetings, even when someone was asked Kaidi a question of his work, Jailor would jump in and start talking. Kaidi felt suffocated and craved for freedom to do his work. Kaidi did not feel the need to get married because Jailor was almost behaving as if he was Kaidi’s wife.

I had a friend whose boss would even tell her how she did not use her laptop efficiently and tried to give her tips on laptop shortcuts every now and then. While it seemed ok for the first one or two instances, his constant attention to her way of typing agitated her and soon when she was with her, her focus was less on the presentation she was delivering but on the keys she was pressing.

People like Mr. Jailor are not hard to find. They want to define every small thing. Right from what time you walk into the office, how long you go for your tea breaks to how you should have written a particular email and so on. While they say, they want you to take decisions, inside their heart, they dread the day when you do that. Believe it or not, I have seen a lot of very senior leaders falling prey to this weakness. I have often wondered why someone at the Vice President level in an organization wants to decide on what color a particular button on the website be.

Worse still, while Mr. Jailor does the micromanagement because he is looking at perfect deliveries, his very act of trying to control everything leading to his team losing morale and motivation. Soon the team members stop using their own brains and only work on directions given to them. This leads to poor performance, aggravating Mr. Jailor’s fears and the cycle repeats.

So how does one really revolt against the loss of freedom? The good news is that, it does not need a mutiny to break free. Rather, simple tips which can make life easier for both the Kaidi and the Jailor.

***Tip #1 : Understand what makes a person behave as a Jailor***

So, what makes a person micromanage? Does the person suffer from obsessive-compulsive disorder?

Well, Sometimes micromanagement is to do with that person’s own insecurities of losing control. Sometimes, it is lack of confidence in your abilities. And sometimes, it is merely their lack of understanding the art of delegation. Sometimes people micromanage when the team is small but are not able to give it up as the team expands.

Also look around whether the person is behaving like that only with you or with everyone around. If that behavior is only with you, it would also help in having a look at some of your past deliveries and critically analyzing them for any gaps or misses.

By understanding what makes a person behave the way they do, one can really work on the cause rather than the effect to nail the problem.

***Tip #2 : Dispel his concerns***

If the other person is afraid to lose control, no matter how much ever you voice your concerns the person would find it difficult to let go. Under such circumstances, it is important to dispel the person’s concerns. For example if the person wants to feel important, praise him/her in front of others. If the other person is not confident of your abilities, try first winning his/her confidence, talking of what you did in your previous workplace, your achievements so far. If you give the best possible output in whatever small you do and then demand more freedom, chances of you being heard and perceived correctly are much higher.

***Tip #3 : Try the conversation way***

I am a firm believer in the saying that half of the world’s problems can be solved by simple conversations. Fear of confrontation is one’s biggest enemy sometimes. One of my friend who had a Jailor teammate once walked up to him and said, “*I really want to understand from you where are the gaps in my skills. A lot of times I see you are doing things I am supposed to do and taking decisions I should be taking. I feel I can give my best output when I am thinking on my own rather than merely doing project management. Entrust me with responsibilities and then give me some space for me to be able to grow.”*

Her teammate who had been micromanaging without even realizing he was doing that, without being cognizant of the effect it was having on the other team members saw merit in her words and promised to consciously work on his weakness.

One of my colleague had this habit of asking me for an update every hour, till I walked up to him and clearly communicated that his constant reminders were not helping and that I would proactively share updates as and when I have some. I sugar coated it by saying, “*I know you are keeping busy and I also understand Project A is very critical. Just wanted to let you know I am on it and rest assured, I would proactively keep you posted on any further progress. Hope that works.”*

Even if the person does not accept his weakness, having a conversation sends out a strong message of disapproval and forces the person to rethink his behavior.

***Tip #4 : Be more data driven***

Nothing can beat a micromanager better than data. One of my friend told me how she and her team mate constantly fought over whether a certain button on the website should be red or blue. Until she came across a research proving that the clicks are higher when one color is chosen over the other. Backed by this research, she had a higher convincing power and the case was won. Whenever there are cases where you want to do a thing in a particular way, data/logic not only helps support your case but also helps you build credibility. Rather than making it a me versus you, data helps keep it objective. So, the next time your boss tells you how you should build a full blown product, throw some stats around the benefits of launching the product early in the market. It would make you look intelligent and might just tilt the decision making in your favor.

*FINAL TIP WHEN NOTHING ELSE WORKS: Kaidi is going to ask and inform Jailor about everything : how many cups of tea he had, when he slept, what he ate. In parallel, he is forming an army to start the 2057 mutiny against Jailor’s oppression. Kaidi is wondering if he would still want to celebrate Independence Day on Aug 15th or on the day Jailor leaves the organization.*

**Mr. Spoon Feed Me**

*“Disha, I wanted to know if we can change the color of the border from light blue to the existing dark blue. Needed your go ahead on it.”*

Ahhh...I sighed...Why could this guy never make the tiniest of decisions without letting me know? Agreed, I was his boss. And agreed, it was important to keep the boss posted on the stuff you were working on. But to this detail !

Mr. Spoon Feed Me was the opposite of Mr. Jailor. Because he wanted to be spoon fed, to be micromanaged. He needed directions at every step. Every time he saw me around, he had something to discuss.

As a leader, you can only grow to the extent your team grows. When a new person joins in your team, it is ok to hand hold the person for the first couple of weeks. But if the person continues to ask for directions months after he is in the system, it sucks a lot of your bandwidth and makes you wonder if you hired a wrong person. Because the amount of time Mr. Spoon Feed Me needs from you, you would rather do the work yourself.

But then you don’t want to be harsh and write off the person yet. So how do you really convert Mr. Spoon Feed Me into a valuable resource? Let’s see.

***Tip #1: The right induction is really crucial***

I have often realized that the first two months are probably the most important months in terms of the learning curve. These initial months need to be spent on learning about the company culture, understanding workflows and products/services of the company. If you become a demanding boss and expect results from day one, the person may just deliver with your help. But lack of proper induction can always keep hurting in the long run.

Whenever you have a new joinee in your team, share whatever you can with them; documentations, emails and all resources that can help a person develop a strong framework before starting on his first project.

***Tip #2: Be patient and understand the person’s strengths***

Understood that the person is not coming up to speed as fast as you want him to. But does he compensate this with the other strengths he brings on the table? Is the person good at documenting? Is he good with people? Is he hard working?

While Mr. Spoon Feed Me takes longer to become independent, realize the strengths that he has and align him work according to his strengths as much as possible. This would help him develop confidence in his abilities and ramp up faster.

***Tip #3: Push their limits***

Sometimes people are simply scared of failures. They rather want their bosses to take their decisions so no one blames them later for any shortcomings. For such people, always encourage them to start taking their own decisions. Force them to spread their wings and inculcate a feeling of independence in them. Be a little less available so they are forced to take their own decisions. If you never push your team, they will remain stagnant. Sure, the work will get done, but don’t expect to experience excitement and growth without encouraging them to operate out of their traditional comfort zone.

One of my boss would always ask me to not just come to him with a problem but also three solutions to it and also my recommendation. At first I hated it. I thought what was his role if I was to find solution to everything. It was much later that I realized how much of this attitude of my boss really helped me grow into an independent person.

***Tip #4: Align them to the right project***

If the person is not confident of making his own decisions and needs constant directions, align the person to a project where a group collectively comes to a decision. Mr. Spoon Feed Me would thrive in a project where everything is clearly specified and there is less uncertainty. It is important to align the right person to the right job to get the best out from everyone.

*FINAL TIP WHEN NOTHING ELSE WORKS: Look within you. Is it your micromanagement that is causing the person to not grow out of your shadow?*

**Mr. Maggi Noodles**

I had just come back to my seat discussing a critical project with a business counterpart. As soon as I sat on my seat and opened my emails, I saw an email from him marking all the stakeholders and asking for the project to be done by next week. What? Was I reading it correctly? Did he mean I should complete the project specification by then? Or did he really mean I should finish the project by then? He must be out of his mind? How on earth could we do this in a week? My first instinct was to reply with a *You must be joking* sticker.

Perhaps he had been too inspired and got carried away by the recent launches of instant mixes and express coffees. Perhaps, his previous job had been with a company making instant noodles. Mr. Maggi Noodles is what I now call this person because I feel this person must be so obsessed with Maggi that he wants everything instant in his life now.

Hasn’t this happened to a lot of us? Our friends in the field who meet the customers and give impossible commitments without asking us. And then they work backwards and tell us it needs to be done by a certain timeframe.

How on earth can one explain to these folks that it is your mistake to overcommit to the management/customers and now I cannot burn myself to meet the ‘funny’ timelines. Funny because you can push a team to deliver something which can be done in two weeks to be delivered in one week. But you cannot really be pushing a team to deliver something that can be done in two months in a week.

So when Mr. Maggi demands, here are my two cents as to what needs to be done:

***Tip #1: He needs to be educated about all the implications***

A lot many times, because Mr. Maggi is in a state of hurry, there are high chances he has not even thought about all the implications of the project. For example, he may have thought of a difficult customer and asked for a quick fix. However when suggesting the quick fix, he may have forgotten about the other customers and how the new flow would impact them. Or he may simply be unaware of all the components.

In all such cases, make him think through his own decision twice before implementing anything. If needed, give him a training of *How Stuff Works* so he understands all the components and dependencies before shooting a timeline.

In my long career, I have often met a few such people who take decisions in a hurry and later come back and ask who made the stupid decision. Do not feel pressurized by the ticking clock. Instead do the thing in the right way it is to be done.

Shortcuts can work on a short run but can leave everyone burnt over a longer period. Shortcuts might mean bad implementations and can come to hurt as the business scales.

***Tip #2: He should be doing the re-prioritization***

Mr. Maggi tells me A needs to be completed in a day. A second later, he tells me B is also important. I tell him how unlike Goddess Durga, I unfortunately have two eyes. If he really wants A first or is his focus B? It makes life easier for both of us. If there are any resource limitations in getting Mr. Maggi his instant noodles, that needs to be immediately brought out and made clear to everyone. If the same teams are supposed to be working on both the projects, either the expectations have to be reset or things prioritized.

***Tip #3: Do not lose focus on the quality of delivery***

As a software developer, I have had team members who always wanted to do quick fixes to issues. No one wanted to spend time doing a proper long term fix. Everyone wanted credit on faster deliveries, not bothering how it would come to hurt later. Slowly and incrementally, even the quick fixes became unmanageable. One fix broke the other. That is where everyone realized the folly of doing too many quick fixes.

When Mr. Maggi wants things to be fixed quickly and the same is not feasible, stand up for doing things the right way rather than the fast way. Make the team aware of the long term implications of taking the fast route. Losing focus on the quality is disastrous in the long run. A balance of speed and quality is what is always needed and if someone loses sight of that, make sure you bring that up.

***Tip #4: The concept of MVP***

If the salesperson has already made a commitment to the customer and the same needs to be managed somehow, think of the MVP or minimum viable product. Minimum viable product serves the customer’s basic needs without the fancy stuff. It also helps in testing the waters without too much of an effort. So if the salesperson wants you to develop a complete new web page by tomorrow, build out a static page if possible. If the director expects a complete script overnight, tell him you can come up with the concept note and that can be presented to the production house to get their but-in. MVPs work best in situations where a lot needs to be done in a small time and the requirements themselves are dynamic.

***Tip #5 : Learn to say “No”***

If the teammate is expecting to land on the moon, politely say efforts are underway to develop the spaceship that can take a common man to the moon. Till that is developed, you do not really have a parachute. He would make faces as if you have tried to force him to visualize Mamta Banerjee in a mini-skirt or may be Sunny Leone in a burqa. But so be it. Let him deal with his frustration while you keep your calm.

*FINAL TIP WHEN NOTHING ELSE WORKS: Every time I go out now with this person for tea, I make sure I order a Maggi and ask him how Maggi must be his favorite dish given he wants everything instantly done. I think he gets the point.*

**Mr. Dumb**

It was the tenth time I was explaining the concept to him. I started doubting my own communication skills as to why I was not able to explain something as simple as this to him. Mr. Dumb was standing there, his mouth wide open. Had he understood it this time? Or do I need to tape my own voice, give it to him for him to be able to play it over and over again till he got it? It was important that he understood what I was saying as he was supposed to be taking it from there. But I could not simply waste my lifetime trying to get something in his head. Ever since Mr. Dumb had joined my team, I had been losing a lot of my hair scratching my head over how to get the knowledge across. My blood pressure was on its way of hitting the only century I possibly could ever hit in my life. Something had to be done about this.

On the surface, Mr. Dumb might seem to be harmless. After all, he means no harm to anyone. All he wants is to learn. The only problem though is in the amount of time and effort it takes to bring him up to speed. Mr. Dumb is the perfect test to one’s patience and tolerance level. He comes to you with such dumb questions that make you want to laugh and shout at the same time. What is worse is that he does not even realize that his question is stupid and neither does he feel bad in coming back with the same question over and over again. Even people with low blood pressures can develop a high blood pressure in his company.

You feel like giving a *Bharat Ratna* to the teachers who taught this guy in school and managed to survive. Why? Because a recent study (*yeah yeah, one of the 1,00,00,00,00,000 of those awesome studies)* even proves that working with Mr. Dumb can kill you.

Given a choice, you would have never hired Mr. Dumb in the first place. If he is not hired by you, you secretly curse the hiring manager to get this person in your team. If he is hired by you, you try to forgive yourself. After all, you are just a human. Nevertheless, life , especially the corporate life does not offer many choices in terms of people we meet. Does it?

So what do you do? Do you give up on him? Do you walk up to your boss or HR and tell him you cannot work with Mr. Dumb? Please remember that complaining may probably seem the easiest thing to do. But that does not make it necessarily the best approach. More so, because Mr. Dumb has good intentions to work. Only that he is not well equipped for the job at hand. So reserve this extreme reaction of escalating for the really needed situations and the really harmful species. For now, take a deep breath and focus on the easy tips:

***Tip #1: Is it a hiring issue?***

Every person has his/her own strengths and weaknesses. Whether or not a person succeeds depends a lot also on whether companies have hired the right person for the right job. What can be a small hiring mistake for an HR manager can be disastrous for an individual and the team. I have seen places where a non engineer was put in an software architecture team with the HR team banking on that person’s communication skills. Now how on earth was a non technical person supposed to understanding algorithms and codes. And how can someone’s communication skills be a substitute to technical skills needed for the job. What then was the fault of the poor fellow?

Without sounding demeaning to a lot of my HR friends, HR people do have a narrow perspective and are in a rush to close positions. Hiring managers have their own targets and sometimes do not even interview someone properly before hiring. The result - chaos for everyone once the person joins. Understanding someone’s strengths and weaknesses and giving them tasks relevant to their strengths can really prevent such dumb questions to come in the first place. Spend enough time in the hiring process to avoid draining valuable time later.

***Tip #2 : Try alternative methods of explaining***

So now that you know the hiring mistake has been made, what do you do? How do you try to work in the best possible manner with Mr. Dumb?

While explaining any stuff to that person, are you using too many jargons and confusing him all the more? Is the person actually dumb? Or is he afraid of you and hence is not telling you how it is not he who is dumb but you who is not understanding his question? Is the person making some assumptions that you are not? Are your assumptions same as his? Have you tried explaining in alternate ways? All these small things can actually make an intelligent person sound stupid.

Try breaking the explanation in steps. Interject the person in between and ask him to repeat what he has understood. Tell the person to stop you wherever he does not understand something. Be polite and encourage feedback.

Even if that does not work, tell some of your co worker to explain the same thing to the person. May be someone else explaining in an alternate way helps.

***Tip #3 : Do not try to show off your knowledge in front of them***

I once started talking about my work to a new joinee in the company. But my attempt to show off my knowledge backfired. The person thought I was some learned soul who had answers to all his questions. Before you talk to someone, it is so very important to understand the person with whom you are getting into a conversation. If you try to tell you are intelligent to a dumb person, then be prepared for dumb questions too.

I have had people who ask me about my work. When I explain and they do not understand after one or two rounds of discussions, then I only make further attempts to explain if it is really necessary. For example, if the person is from the team who choses the website colors and he does not understand how the supply chain works, then tell him to put his inquisitive mind to rest, since it is beyond his scope and need to understand it. Tell him that you can chat up in detail sometime later over lunch or coffee, since it would need more time for you to explain the details. It is a polite way of saying, “*Try learning from YouTube instead”.*

***Tip #4 : Arrange a training session for them if needed***

I have seen instances when people are hired and put on the job from day one, without any basic training. Most companies undermine the importance of induction training and instead expect the person to start delivering from day one. No one realizes that it is this myopic view that makes life difficult for the person and he begins to act stupid. In such cases, a detailed session covering all basics is what it takes to help the person take on and fly. If needed, arrange a basic training session for the person to make life easier for everyone in the long run. If the training has to be arranged by the HR, talk to the HR in such a way that it does not come across as a complaint.

*FINAL TIP WHEN NOTHING ELSE WORKS: Take a deep breath and join yoga classes. Try finding Mr. India and ask him for his gadget so you can go invisible the next time you see Mr. Dumb walking up to you.*

**Mr. Lazy**

It was 9 AM and the day had just started at work. Mr. Lazy though seemed tired already. He had yawned ten times in the last 5 minutes, each yawn infecting 2 more people around him. It was the start of the day but Mr. Lazy already seemed tired. It was time for a tea break.

11 AM - In between the numerous coffee and loo breaks in the last two hours, Mr. Lazy had managed to send out two emails. His eyes were at the cafeteria; waiting for food to arrive.

12 noon - Mr. Lazy was hungry. Food was here and he could concentrate no longer on the work.

2 PM - After a two hour long lunch break (*yeah, two hours. Don’t we all live and work for food?) ,* Mr. Lazy was back at work. But wait. Was he not suppose to call his landlord and explain about the leakage problem? And was he not planning on meeting his friend in the other department?

Work could wait.

Yes, I can go on and detail out Mr. Lazy’s day. But I am too lazy for that.

Mr. Lazy is the guy who takes long lunch breaks, numerous coffee breaks, has a lot many personal calls to attend and is always of the opinion that work can wait. It’s definitely not easy to be around such co-workers and you wonder why the boss does not notice the guy’s laziness. You wonder why you slog while the other guy enjoys life. So what do you do about a co-worker who does not work; whose 9-5 workday has 20 coffee breaks, an equal number of loo breaks and a long lunch?

**Tip#1 : Don’t let the person distract you**

As long as the person’s laziness does not have a direct impact on your work, don’t let Mr. Lazy impact you with his laziness. Sometimes we just spend a lot of our energies in seeing what our peers are doing, rather than just focus on our own stuff. Just because Mr. Lazy is taking 20 coffee breaks, do not increase your caffeine intake. Just because Mr. Lazy is busy with facebook, do not start randomly posting. Focus. After all, you are accountable for your work. And not his. And always remember, good work always gets noticed. As does laziness. Unless, of course, the guy is the CEO’s son-in-law.

**Tip#2 : Don’t get their laziness infect you**

Laziness is contagious. Out of the 20 coffee breaks, he might ask you to join him for 10. Out of his two hour long lunch break, he might want you to stay with him for an hour. Avoid joining him in the party. Remember, you dislike him for his laziness. Don’t get infected.

**Tip#3 : Don’t let them free ride on you**

There is a finite amount of work to be done. So if Mr. Lazy does not deliver, the boss might just come to you with additional work. Learn to say no to extra work if it means extra burden on your work schedule.

*FINAL TIP WHEN NOTHING ELSE WORKS: As soon as the clock strikes 6 and you see Mr. Lazy still at his desk, walk up and ask, “Not going home today? Overtime?”*  Humor wins over everything else. Right time and in the right way; so it does not come across as a complaint and yet is straight enough for the message to come through.

**Mr. Meetings**

“*Disha, what do you have to say about it?” ,* my boss asked me.

“*Of course..mmm..”* , I struggled to find an answer as I did even know what the question was in the first place. Two hours had passed since fifty people were sitting in one room for the meeting. Most were only physically present by now.

Some were thinking of what they had brought for lunch. Others were pretending to be working. Still others had Facebook opened on their mobile phones and were secretly checking out the profile of the new girl who had joined a day before.

As for me, I was half asleep when the boss caught me unaware.

*“Sounds good. I am in.” ,* I shot in the dark.

My boss looked at me and smiled. I had just been tricked and had agreed to spend my next few weekends in office for ‘important’ follow-up meetings. It was too late when I realized what I had done.

How often have we received a meeting invite and our first thought is that it is going to be yet another long fruitless meeting? Haven’t we all sat through long meetings and said to ourselves, “*what a waste of time, why have I been invited in this meeting? I could have been doing something better than sitting here and pretending to be a contributor to the meeting” ?*

My friend, Shweta once told me how she had a colleague who suggested a meeting for every email she would send across to him. So much so that she secretly started doubting if the guy was in love with her that was using meetings as a pretext to spend time with her.

So how does one strike a balance between work and meetings? How does one deal with a teammates who it seems come to office only to do meetings? What does it take to keep Mr. Meetings in check?

**Tip#1 : Make sure the meeting has an agenda**

Every time someone sends a meeting invite without a clear agenda, make sure to ask what would be the exact agenda of the meeting. After all, we do not want to be discussing city’s weather and last evening’s match (*sure that is a great stress buster. But for discussing this, a meeting invite is really not needed. Isn’t it?)*

Defined objectives always help and sends out clear signals that you do not enjoy attending meetings where people come together only for sipping tea and enjoying samosas.

In fact, it even helps to have the agenda and points of discussion clearly defined and sent out along with the meeting invite. Better still, if one is able to also define clearly the ownership for each of the points to be discussed, it not just allows everyone to focus on the job at hand but do the homework before walking into the meeting room.

**Tip#2 : Make sure the meeting invite does not go viral**

I had a friend who told me how her boss would want almost the entire company to be part of every meeting. The meeting was arranged, then postponed many times over since someone or the other was invariably busy. Getting everyone together in the room was a task in itself. Work was derailed since important decisions were put at the mercy of such meetings. This wasted a lot of time for everyone. But her boss would just not have the meeting till the entire town was not present.

Even when the meetings were successfully arranged, everyone came in the meeting with their own agenda. It became a free for all, where the loudest had his voice heard. By the time people walked out of the meeting, most had actually forgotten the initial agenda why the meeting was called in the first place.

It is a no brainer that the more people are present in the meeting room, the longer a meeting is likely to get. Worse still, meetings with such large audiences generally do not achieve the desired outputs.

Have the organizer experiment with a smaller audience meeting, ensuring that you still send out the minutes of the meeting to the larger group, inviting comments and suggestions. When sending out the meeting invite, clearly specify the mandatory versus optional attendees to avoid confusion.

In my friend’s case, it was her boss’s boss who came to the team’s rescue. He suggested this approach to my friend’s boss, who decided to try this approach. It worked for everyone and now saves almost one man day a week, 52 man days an year for everyone; a win-win for situation for everyone.

**Tip#3 : Do not be a random participant**

Just as it is important to not invite too many people to a meeting, it is also important that you do not waste your time attending meetings where you are not needed or where you cannot really contribute. Politely declining such invites can save you a lot of time and energy.

Fresh out of my MBA, I had this super excitement of trying to be a part of a lot of meetings. I would walk up to people and tell them I wanted to be a part of every discussion. After all, I thought meetings would be a great place to learn and pick up business insights.

Though it did help, after a while, I started getting exhausted and felt burnt. All I was doing was attending meetings. My junior colleagues also became dependent on me to be present in every meetings. They stopped taking decisions and waited for me to be present to decide.

Thankfully, I realized this and soon started limiting my participating to meetings where I was really needed and where I could really contribute. I started delegating some of these meetings to my other team members, expecting them to take the calls wherever required.

And before I knew, I started saving precious time for myself while grooming my team for taking their own decisions. Ever since then, I have always politely declined invites wherever I do not feel I can add much value.

**Tip#4 : Avoid deviations and keep the meetings time bound**

A lot of people have the habit of digressing from the key agenda of the meeting and take the discussions in an altogether different direction. And before one realizes, there is complete chaos in the room and everyone walks out of the room super confused.

A lot of us have had colleagues who hijack the meetings to discuss what is relevant only to them. The group starts the meeting with a different objective and digresses.

In such cases, it always helps if someone can play the role of a cop, trying to discipline the discussion and keep it focused. Play the role of a timekeeper, summarize the discussions at an intermediate step, try to build consensus. If someone tries to steer discussions in other directions, politely intervene and ask the person to reserve that for later discussions.

A lot of companies have a group discussion round when they interview candidates even for very senior roles. The idea is to see how a person carries a discussion. Candidates who have spoken to the point and have steered the group back to the main point whenever the group has digressed score brownie points in the eyes of the recruiter.

**Tip#5 : Have clear actionables or take aways from the meeting**

Whenever Mr. meeting calls for a follow up meeting, make sure you discuss the progress of the previous meeting’s actionables before just randomly doing meetings. I once had a colleague who would call a meeting, then get super confused on its takeaways and soon after call a follow up meeting. Sending out meeting minutes with clear actionables always helps in keeping the follow up meetings less frequent and shorter.

*FINAL TIP WHEN NOTHING ELSE WORKS: Have a lot of water to avoid dehydration due to excessive coffee intake; thanks to Mr. meetings love for ‘get-togethers’.*

**Ms. Short Skirts**

*Her red mini skirt was the talk of the floor everyday. People spoke in whispers about her; men appreciating the eye-candy and women in disgust. Her skirts were getting shorter by the weeks.*

*Ever since Ms. Short Skirts had joined our team, the attendance in the team was at an all time high. Men arrived early, eagerly waiting to catch a first glimpse of the lady when she walked in. Women looked at her stealthily. Her dressing sense made most other women in the office feel like aunties. Her perfumes could make heads turn. The seat next to hers suddenly became the most coveted trophy. Men in my team were desperate and could even die to be be put on a project with her.*

Preeti, a friend of mine was telling me about her new colleague and I was laughing my heart out.

At first, when Ms. Short Skirts joined her team, Preeti did not bother too much about the girl’s dressing style till she started noticing how men in her team were spending more hours at work but their productivity was at an all time low. Most men were spending time secretly ogling at Ms. Short Skirts and most women were spending time gossiping about her. Preeti also realized how Ms. Short Skirts was passing a lot of her work to her ‘admirers’ in the team. The attention being showered on Ms. Short Skirts was inspiring some other females in the team and the workplace seemed to be turning into a club-party place. There were clients coming in everyday and the entire atmosphere was not conducive to hosting them.

That was when, Preeti finally decided to speak sternly to the girl and give her some ‘gyaan’ over the etiquettes of workplace dressing. However telling someone to change her dressing style was easier said than done. It had to be done in a manner that was least offensive and embarrassing for both her and Preeti. Any wrong word chosen could even go against Preeti. And yet, the message had to be crystal clear.

Here is what Preeti did and suggests to be done:

**Tip #1 : Avoid too much attention to Ms. Short Skirts**

Though difficult to do, but most of the time , the attention that Ms. Short Skirts gets is short-lived. Ignorance is sometimes the best way to counter the short skirts attack. Once the initial euphoria fades and people begin to settle with the new girl, things tend to normalize on their own. The more attention Ms. Short Skirts gets, the more she gets encouraged to dress inappropriately. Instead, just ignore her attire for some time and instead talk to her only about her work. Give some time for this to settle, before taking any action.

**Tip# 2 : Convey it through subtle hints first**

It is best to convey the message through subtle hints instead of being too direct. Every time Ms. Short Skirts took a sick leave or sneezed, Preeti started telling Ms. Short Skirts on how she should cover herself properly to avoid catching cold. In another random conversation, another girl in the team joked how there was a sale in the town and Ms. Short Skirts could try buying longer skirts at the same price.

**Tip# 3: Have a candid conversation**

If the subtle hints are ignored, try having a conversation in a manner least embarrassing. If you feel that there is a problem with the way the employee is dressed, try speaking to the person in private. Don't challenge the employee's taste or fashion sense. Rather, explain what is unacceptable about the employee's attire according to the policy standard. As far as possible, make it an informative discussion, not a critical one.

**Tip #4 : Discuss the matter with the HR person**

When it comes to maintaining the decorum at workplace, HR people are generally the first people who should be noticing inappropriate dressing style of a particular employee. In fact, HR should speak to Ms. Short Skirts clearly communicating the same. But in case the HR person has not yet seen the problem or ignored it or the HR person is himself in ‘love’ with the short skirts, walk up to them and tell them to intervene. An HR person talking to the employee conveys the message without causing embarrassment to either of you. Having the HR circulate dress code guidelines over an email can also be the least intrusive way of putting the message across.

*FINAL TIP WHEN NOTHING ELSE WORKS:* *The HR gifted a salwar suit to Ms. Short Skirts on her birthday. She got the message and came dressed in jeans the next day.*

**Mr. Underpaid**

Rajat had quit again. This was his third time in an year. Mr. Boss wondered how Rajat managed to find time to give all the interviews, do the negotiations with other companies and come back and resign. Rajat was an invaluable asset to the team and he knew it. There were a lot of dependencies on him and Rajat took care of his work, always performing and delivering more than the boss’ expectations. But he also exploited all of this to keep coming back every now and then and asking for a raise, threatening to quit if his demands were not met.

Mr. Boss was in a fix. Should he give in to Rajat’s latest demand? Or should he just let Rajat go this time? How would the team manage if Rajat was to actually leave? Mr. Boss was cursing himself for having let so much of a dependency being created on one person.

We all have team members who threaten to resign every now and then for a salary or position raise. They are ready to take back their resignations provided their demands are met. While it is justified to ask for one’s due, Mr. Underpaid never seems to feel satisfied.

So how does Mr. Boss handle this situation? What if the other team members got to know of this? Wouldn’t they start following Rajat’s footsteps?

**Tip #1 : Is the demand justified? Is he on a mission critical project?**

It is so important to see if the employee’s demand is justified. Is Mr. Underpaid really not getting his due? Or is he simply being greedy, trying to exploit the dependencies on him?

If you feel the person’s demands are justified, the call is simpler to make. It is more a question of how to budget for the increment. However, if you feel the employee’s demands are not justified, can you simply ask the person to go? What if the employee is on a mission critical project with no back-up? In such a situation, you may really not have much choice but to retain him for this time. However, if the project is not super critical or if there is a back up to fill the void, do not give in to Mr. Underpaid’s demands and tantrums.

Take into account factors like the market trends, project dependencies, other employees at the same level in the organization before making a decision on the increment.

**Tip #2: Follow the two people rule**

I have seen people who first build a lot of dependencies around them, only to try to cash on them later. A senior member in my team always hired people he knew to be part of his team. This increased his bargaining power whenever he resigned. Companies and bosses need to see through all such things early on to avoid costly damages at a later stage.

As a manager, I have realized how important is it to always have a minimum of two people work on any project. This minimizes dependencies and does not let a pressure situation get created when someone resigns from the team. Always follow the two people rule to weaken Mr. Underpaid’s strategies. Having a backup helps one take more objective decisions as a manager without being under undue pressure owing to the dependencies.

I have seen companies who give in every time Mr. Underpaid resigns, only to realize their own folly later. Hard but true is the fact that every one is dispensable ; even you and Mr. Underpaid.

**Tip #3 : Saying ‘No’ to frequent resignation tactic**

Take sufficient time before saying “No”. Being too quick to say no may give the impression you don’t value the employee, and you don’t want your employee to think that. When you take time to consider the request, however, it shows you genuinely value the employee, even if your answer will be no.

When declining a salary hike, try to give a proper rationale to the employee. Sometimes, it may just be not the company standard to pay above a certain level for the kind of responsibilities the person is handling. Sometimes, it could be the employee’s performance that does not justify the increase. And sometimes, it could also be the overall impact on the other team members that can lead a company to decline a salary increase. As far as possible, try to be honest and direct with the person when declining a salary hike.

If a person is being greedy, no matter how critical the person is for the team, politely tell him how his frequent resignations spoil his reputation among everyone. Turn the table and set expectations from the employee for him to expect a particular raise.

**Tip #4 : Try offering stocks instead of direct cash**

Even when you decide to give in to the person’s threat, try deferring the raise and linking it to a future deliverable. Have most of the raise given in the form of variable and performance linked incentives instead of a fixed compensation increase.

To minimize the damage and reduce the chance of Mr. Underpaid resign again in the next quarter, offer him stock options instead of cash in hand. ESOPs vested over the next couple of years can serve as a good retention tool for high performing employees.

*FINAL TIP WHEN NOTHING ELSE WORKS:* *Say goodbye to Mr. Underpaid. Give his salary to another team member and motivate them to overwork to compensate for being overpaid.*

**Mr. Suggestion Box**

The last couple of days I had hardly been able to work. Mr. Suggestion Box was eating away into my time.

*Disha, why don’t you do blah blah blah? It will help you improve blah blah blah..*

I was sick and tired of the frequent suggestions that were coming my way. If only, I could ask him to might as well do my work, since he anyways knew better than me.

Remember the famous Hindi movie, *Jab we met*? Remember how Kareena Kapoor’s character Geet kept eating the head of Shahid Kapoor’s character, Aditya? She did not even spare him when all he wanted to do was commit suicide. We all loved her in that role, didn’t we?

After all, we Indians are born to give advice. It is part of our DNA. Perhaps, that is why none of us can resist the temptation of telling others what should they be doing. It is so much fun to throw advice around. So much so that consultants are the highest paid race in the country. They are paid to give advices in beautified formats.

At our workplaces, we all have people who are ready to give suggestions at the drop of a hat; people who should have been born as counselors but have landed in the wrong profession.

So it turns out, one such personality used to sit next to me at my office. Every other day, he asked me what I was working on. And before I had even told him what it was, his stream of suggestions started to flow. He seemed to be exploding with suggestions.

At first, I appreciated his interest in my work and thanked him for his suggestions. The innocent me not knowing at that time that this encouragement was going to come back and haunt me. Mr. suggestion would want me to not just hear him out, but he would follow up to ask if the approach I followed was different from what he had suggested. Soon after, it became impossible for me to sit next to him. I started sitting in meeting rooms, craving for some ‘me’ time.

Things became worse and soon every time my mom switched on the *Asthaa channel* on television, the face of Mr. Suggestion appeared instead of the babas on TV. And that is when I decided to discover ways to remain sane and not lose my cool with Mr. Suggestion buzzing around me like a bee:

**Tip#1 : Do not pay too much attention to him**

Most of the time, Mr. Suggestion is looking for attention and appreciation as a reward for his wonderful suggestions. Give him that and he is likely to feast on your head. Ignore him and he will soon find his next victim. The irony here is that, most times when Mr. Suggestion walks into our environment, we actually encourage him. By the time, we realize our folly, we have become Mr. Suggestion’s best friend.

**Tip#2 : Tell him to keep his emotions in check**

A friend of mine had a colleague who was fresh out of college. He kept telling her how if the company did X,Y and Z, they would have 100% market share. A lot many times, my friend tried to tell him the follies of his ‘strategic’ thinking. But he was not convinced.

One day, the Mr. Suggestion in him reached his pinnacle and he walked up to their CEO telling him how the CEO should be doing X,Y,Z instead of A,B,C. No one knows what transpired, but my friend tells me, Mr. Suggestion has become Mr. Silent since then.

Share this anecdote with the Mr. Suggestion in your life and chance are bright your Mr. Suggestion will learn to keep his emotions in check.

Sometimes, all that is needed is to politely tell the other person you would prefer to solve the problem using your own approach or method and that you really do not need any suggestions at this point. Thank the person for all the free suggestions he has made so far but tell him how you would come to him yourself if and when you really need help.

**Tip#3 : Do to him what he is doing to you**

Funny as it may sound, this surely works. I had a colleague in one of the business teams who always had suggestions on my product specifications. He had an opinion on all I did and kept offering me suggestions. Since he was in a position of authority, I could really not tell him his advice was not needed. Until one day, I started giving him suggestions on the business strategies. I started suggesting how he could do things to improve his unit’s performance.

Post that day, the person understands the world will be a better and more sorted place if everyone first focused on their own work, before giving suggestions to the other.

*FINAL TIP WHEN NOTHING ELSE WORKS: Buy a soundproof headphone and put that on, every time Mr. Suggestion is around. Every time, he tries to speak to you, start humming. Or give him the ‘what’s your problem’ look and continue working.*

**Mr. Email Expert**

Had Mr. Email Expert left the company? How come I had not received any email from her in the last few microseconds. *OK OK, microseconds is an exaggeration. Seconds?*

We all have people in our organization who love to write an email for every sentence they want to utter in their lives, who wish to copy the entire organization in every email they send, whose emails are really long and cryptic and whose emails were probably the reasons why emails have a ‘Spam’ option *(only that you have to work with them and cannot possibly mark their emails Spam)* . I can bet these people even talk to their wives through emails

*Baby - can you update what are you cooking today for dinner?*

*Darling - I am booking the movie. Confirm the timing that suits you.*

*Baby - Ok, please block the time in my calendar...*

Some of the common traits of Mr. Email Expert : he does not understand the difference between ‘To’ and ‘CC’, he writes such long emails that you always mark his emails for reading at bedtime, his outlook probably does not have a ‘Reply’ option but only ‘Reply to All’, SOMETIMES HE KEEPS HIS CAPS LOCK ON FOR AN ENTIRE EMAIL, he is an avid messenger user and even uses the same short forms in the emails he sends to you, sometimes he replies to a three month old email with ‘Looks good’/’Ok’/’Sure’ making you wonder if he just got a time machine and went into the past. When Mr. Email has nothing much to say, he simply starts sharing articles from the Internet to curb his compulsion of sending frequent posts.

Some of his emails make you laugh, some make you feel sad for his English teacher and some are simply too cryptic and make you pull your hair. His long emails are a big reason you dread reading emails.

So, unless you are an email expert yourself, try the following tips to convey the message across:

**Tip#1 : I just missed your email**

If you are lucky, do not bother about majority of the emails that are being sent your way by Mr. Email Expert. Chances are high you are anyways not an ‘intended’ recipient and most of these emails are just FYI for you. Any time, Mr. Email walks up to you asking why you did not reply to his/her email, tell Mr. Email Expert how you receive trillions of emails everyday and ask him to keep you in ‘To’ in emails which specifically need your attention and replies. Chances are high that your advice would be ignored. Give it nevertheless.

**Tip#2 : ‘Reply All’ and ask if you are actually an intended recipient of the emails coming your way**

Politely ask the other person if the email is really meant for you. Chances are once you do this, a lot of other people would also do a ‘Reply All’ and ask the same question. Ask to be bcced out in case the email is irrelevant to you. Tell him 99.9999% a work gets delayed because the email is sent to the wrong recipients.

On one such instance, I had a person write to me for any random issue he faced. While I felt morally guilty when I did not revert to him, after a while, it became too painful. I started writing back telling him how a certain issue was not in my purview and he needed to speak to someone else on the same. The person still kept sending the emails my way. I finally had to stop replying.

I have been part of a growing organization where roles and responsibilities changed very fast. In such cases, there was a real gap where a lot of people did not know which email needed to go to whom. As a result, most people ended up copying the entire company in the email, hoping the right person would pick up the thread and reply to it. We solved this problem by sending out any organizational update to all the concerned stakeholders so people were spared from a lot of unintended emails coming their way long after they had changed roles.

**Tip#3 : REPLY TO HIM WITH CAPS LOCK ON**

As hilarious as it sounds, I once did this to a colleague who kept sending ALL CAPS LOCK emails my way. He got the message and got his caps lock key repaired.

**TIP#4 : Keep your replies short and only to intended people**

Nothing frustrates an email expert more than short replies. If you feel something can take more than 2 iterations to be finalized over email, walk up to that person, call him and just reply that you would discuss in person and close. Do not make it a long exchange over emails wherever possible.

Also, our normal tendency is to use ‘Reply All’ very liberally. However a lot of emails can be trimmed and replied only to the relevant people, moving the other people to Bcc. This cuts shorts lots of unintended emails to a larger group, saving time for everyone.

**TIP#5 : Ask the HR to arrange email communication sessions**

I once had a colleague who would write such cryptic emails that I had to call him back every time to understand what he wanted to say. Another of my colleague who too received this emails exchanged another 4-5 emails with this person simply to understand and decrypt the message.

As trivial as it sounds, 70-80% of work discussions happen over emails. Email communication skills have become more important than ever before when offices have gone global. If you feel that certain teams or individuals need to be trained on the email communication etiquettes, do not shy in asking the HR to conduct email communication sessions for specific people in your team. Talk to your manager about it and suggest him to take this session for the team. A day spent in training is worth more than innumerable man days wasted in irrelevant emails.

*FINAL TIP WHEN NOTHING ELSE WORKS: Introduce Mr. Email Expert to the world of twitter.*

**Mr. Busy**

Mr. Busy had just got himself ‘Employee of the month’ award for showing off his donkey like skills. After all, Mr. Busy pretended to be working168 hours a week (*yeah, I know the week anyways has 168 hours. So, you get my point, right?)*

His emails usually came at 2 AM, 4 AM in the night. Mr. Busy differs from Mr. Workaholic in fake vs. real. While Mr. Workaholic actually slogs, Mr. Busy pretends he does. Some common symptoms of Mr. Busy are that he intentionally keeps the papers spread in his cubicle, grows his beard and eats lunch on his seat. He has a spreadsheet set as the wallpaper, just in case, someone walks by when he has gone to the loo. He presses Alt-tab every time you go to his seat, chances are that he was checking out Facebook in the name of work. You walk up to him and he starts banging his keyboard.

I once had a colleague whose seat always had a jacket hung. At first, I always wondered how this person was always in office before everyone and was in even when I left very late from office. One day I needed to speak to him for something urgent and called him. The noise in the background was like a movie show. Since then I observed the person was always leaving his jacket behind giving an impression he was around. Voila!

Another colleague of mine kept telling him he was too busy to speak to me, even when we needed to work on a common project. I later realized he said this to almost everybody else.

A friend of mine told me about me about a person in his team whose emails started coming in around 2 AM in the night. My friend wondered if the guy scheduled all his emails to be specifically delivered when the world was sleeping or was he simply a nocturnal being.

Mr. Busy has all these amazing talents. The amount of energies we spend in work, he actually spends in faking to work. There is nothing more frustrating when Mr. Busy gets the employee of the month award. You feel like banging his head against the wall, you feel like killing the HR for being blind, you feel like not working for an organization which cannot differentiate between smart workers and fakes.

But alas, you cannot keep changing jobs. So how do you deal with the Mr. Busy(s) at work?

**Tip# 1 : Ask him smart questions**

Mr. Busy is only faking work. Ask him smart questions in front of everyone and outwit him.

*I saw you reading the research article the other day. Can you summarize it for me?*

*Can we set up a meeting at 8 PM tonight, given that you generally are around at that time?*

**Tip# 2: Make him commit to deliverables**

If you are noticing someone is spending long hours at work but most of the time is found in the cafeteria, make the person commit to deliverables. After all, all that matters to you at the end of the day is clear deliverables and not if the person has made office his home.

I have worked with a bunch of people in my team who took almost 10-15 breaks a day for their smoke. Now, I could not really time their smoke breaks; nor was it appropriate for me to ask them to cut down on their smoke; I did insist on having specific deliverables and then leave it up to the person to decide on how they managed it along with their smoke breaks.

Mr. Narayan Murthy, co-founder Infosys had long back written a very beautiful email to all his employees urging on the importance of working smartly rather than working hard. That email has always remained in my heart. Every time, I have someone in my team who pretends busyness, I make sure I have a conversation with him around that letter, putting across the message that it is not the time he spends which matters as the actual deliveries. Linking incentives to performance rather than the number of hours spent can really go a long way in curbing this menace.

**Tip#3 : Fixed working hours?**

One of my previous organization offered free breakfast, lunch and dinners. Most bachelors stayed back for all three meals. They would spend their evenings either at the office gym or playing TT. Soon this became such a nuisance that the HRs suggested we have fixed working hours instead of being a 24X7 workplace.

I, for one, am one of the firm believer in the philosophy that it is always better to spend eight quality hours at work than 17 hours where 2 are spent in the cafeteria, another 2 playing TT and the remaining on gossips and phone calls. People can work late once in awhile, but setting that as a rule than as an exception is inviting more of Mr. Busy to flourish.

*FINAL TIP WHEN NOTHING ELSE WORKS: Every time he writes an email at 2 AM, set an auto-reply saying “You are presently lost in your dreams and will only be able to reply when you reach office.”*

**Mr. Excuse**

It was my first experience as a manager. Mr. Excuse was part of my team. Come project deadlines, Mr. Excuse was ready with a new set of excuses.

*I had just too much to do.*

*Mr. XYZ did not co-operate with me and hence I could not prepare this document.*

*I feel I am born to climb Mt. Everest. Can you assign this work to someone else?*

*I did not get a written email from you. So, I did not start the work.*

*This work is going to take long. So, I decided to de-prioritize it.*

*Requirements were not clear.*

*Etc, etc etc..*

Mr. Excuse had no dearth of reasons why his work was never finished on time. Even the Delhi government’s odd even scheme was not spared as an excuse for making him late for work. A part of me wanted to empathize with him for the nth time. The other part wanted me to yell at him and tell him he was not paid to give excuses but deliver results.

*Why had he been sleeping till the last minute to come and tell me it could not be done?*

*Because of this stupid person, I too am going to miss on my promotion.*

*Are we working like a Planning commission that he wanted an elaborate documentation before starting his work?*

*Does he think he is the only one overworked and the rest are simply lazy?*

I boiled with anger within until steam practically started pouring out of my ears. I had a twin problem at my hand between finding a way of getting things done on an urgent basis and managing Mr. Excuse.

I found my ways of creating a culture of accountability and ownership in the team through these ways.

**Tip# 1 : Give him the benefit of doubt. But only once**

It is so important to first know if the person’s concern is really genuine or is he simply taking advantage of your genuineness. If it is the former, give him the benefit and try to find a solution to his concern. If it is the latter, kick yourself for being too nice with this person on earlier occasions. You can give someone the benefit of doubt, but only once. Being too nice can be a problem, especially if the other person isn’t so.

**Tip# 2: Delve Deeper**

One of the most common excuse people make is to pass the buck onto someone else.

*Mr. XYZ did not hand over the file on time to me. And so, I am delayed now.*

Ask questions: *Did you follow up with Mr. XYZ instead of patiently waiting for him to get back? If you did not receive the document on time, what action did you take? Why did you not escalate right then so some corrective actions could have been taken well in time?*

One of my colleague came from a bureaucratic organization where there were set processes for any small thing. When he joined us, he was confused how he could move forward without proper documentation and with mere discussions happening on a white board. It was only when I delved into his reason of giving excuses that I realized this and told him how things worked at our organization.

I figured out asking the right questions does two things - first, implicitly convey your dissatisfaction and secondly, makes you figure out if the excuse is really justifiable. Delve deeper than just accepting words on face value.

**Tip# 3: Stop tolerating his excuses and express dissatisfaction**

Ok, so you figured out the person was only taking advantage of your being nice.

Stop tolerating the excuses right then and there. Express your dissatisfaction with his excuses.

I had a member in my team who was practically ill every week. This impacted our timelines. But then how could someone fall ill every other week? And then keep sharing weekend party pictures on Facebook. On one such post, I could not resist commenting , *Seems you are all set to now take on the world. How about some work next week?*

A friend of mine works in a bank and had a month end closing cycle where she was bombarded with work. The Mr. Excuse in her team would walk up to her and cite some or the other reason for taking a leave around that time. Sometimes it was his wife’s relatives coming home, sometimes the kid’s exam and sometimes ‘personal’ work.

One fine day, my friend decided she could not take this anymore and told Mr. Excuse how she was really banking on him to deliver and how his absence put extra pressure on everyone else in the team. She politely asked him to not schedule personal appointments around the month end.

Unless you express dissatisfaction, do not simply assume the other person would fall in line. Tell the other person how his lack of ownership can impact his future ratings and the projects you can possibly assign to him. Cite examples of how some of his peers had been in similar situation and had managed to find their way through. Motivating through the examples of peers can set the expectations and put the message across.

*FINAL TIP WHEN NOTHING ELSE WORKS: Mr. Excuse just figured out he had not been included in a critical project he so much wanted to be a part of. He walked up to his boss to ask the reason. His boss gave him an excuse ‘I did not want to overburden you. I see you are already overworked and missing deadlines.’*

**Mr. Process**

It was a Sunday night. I was in the middle of an Alok Nath movie, shedding tears; when I got a call from a colleague that a critical workflow component had failed and needed to be immediately fixed. Forgetting everything about the movie, I stepped out of the movie hall, feeling like Sunny Deol to attend the call of duty.

I dialed the number of the person who was supposed to be working on the fix and explained the problem to him.

*Disha, can you send an email to me on this with proper screenshots and steps to reproduce?*

*What screenshots and steps to reproduce? Open the page and you would see the problem. And mail? It is a Sunday night. I am losing on the money I had spent on the movie and all the great knowledge about the Indian culture that Alok Nath was giving. And here you want me to send you an email?*

*I hate him, hate him, hate him..*came a voice from within me.

I wanted to tell him to give the process a miss and just solve the problem at hand.

But I knew I was dealing with a process oriented person who would not budge even if God himself came and told him to do so. I would only be increasing the levels of C21H30O5in my blood in trying to reason with him.

*(Before you start scratching your head trying to figure out what C21H30O5 is ; let me bring out the science student in me to tell you about it. C21H30O5 is a hormone our body releases in reaction to stress.)*

Here are my pearls of wisdom about working with Mr. Process and getting work done through him while ensuring you do not miss on the Sunday night movie:

**Tip# 1 : Understand where he comes from**

Often there are specific reasons that make a person process centric. Sometimes it is the organization culture itself that promotes processes. There are organizations where there are defined processes even for asking for a permission to go to the loo.

*Ok ok, that was an exaggeration. But you got the point right?*

So if the person has come from such an organization as part of his previous job or if your organization culture itself necessitates processes, then do not blame the person for being Mr. Process.

On the other hand, the person may have burnt the bridges somewhere else when he would have bypassed the processes, making him cynical about the same now.

There could also be scenarios where a lot of such ad-hoc requests are hampering that person’s productivity and hence he wants everything to be documented.

Understanding what makes a person the way he is goes a long way in finding ways to change his behavior.

**Tip# 2 : Build Trust with the person**

The most of process oriented people too have people for whom they bypass processes and deliver stuff outside the process.

During my initial days at one of my organization, a person insisted I document everything we discussed. He would not pick the work before the complete document was made and sent to him. I found it frustrating. After all, we were not working on tight schedules and his process orientation was putting extra pressure on me and slowing things. I patiently worked with him for the initial few months, diligently documenting everything. Over the course of the next few months, we developed a good working relationship and starting valuing each other’s work. Since then, I just have to pick up the phone and tell him to work on something. He trusts the document would follow in due course of time and does not stop work anymore.

Trust becomes even more important in situations where there is not a direct reporting relationship between two people. In such cases, your credibility goes a long way in ensuring processes do not become a bottleneck.

**Tip# 3 : Do not make bypassing process a habit**

Do not make bypassing processes a habit but only use them as an exception. It is ok to expect someone to do something without a formal communication, once or twice. But if you always end up sending out verbal commands without a record of the same, the other person tends to become jittery. And then when you really need to cut the process, the other person does not relent.

*FINAL TIP WHEN NOTHING ELSE WORKS: I wrote an appreciation email on Monday morning telling his boss how Mr. Process’s help and swiftness helped us save a couple of lacs in revenue. Mr. Process is happy and now just a call away.*

**Mr. Matchstick**

Mr. Matchstick was angry again. He banged his fist so loudly on the table that clouds of dust that had accumulated thanks to the ‘efficient’ housekeeping filled up the air in a dramatic way. His face was so red that for a moment his colleagues thought he was a balloon that would burst anytime. Everyone felt as if he was the police commissioner and they, the serial killer gang he had been on the lookout for.

Mr. Matchstick’s anger was not new to them. Not a week passed when he did not shout at his team members. He often accused his co-workers of misdeeds and generally gave his feelings a free rein. Behind his back, people often joked how his wife controlled him at home and all his frustration was vented when he was in office. His uncontrolled anger had led a lot of his teammates to move on. But Mr. Matchstick had not learnt to mend his ways.

When my friend told me of this person at his workplace, my first reaction was why was the company not firing the person. It turned out the person was a very senior person and a valuable resource since he always delivered results. But did that give him the right to burn at the slightest provocation? Was there nobody who could tell him how the world wasn’t necessarily that bad that he always had to be mad at people?

How does one really deal with such people who shout, scream and are rude? People who always feel they are the only ones who think right and all others are dumb? People who feel they alone are the custodians of a company’s future? How exactly can such people be taught to mend their ways? Read on..

**Tip# 1: Maintain your calm**

However tempting it may seem to react and shout back, doing so is only going to aggravate the other person’s anger. Be polite, yet firm. Maintain your calm. I am not saying that when he is shouting, you start think of the latest Sunny Leone’s movie and start smiling mysteriously. But maintaining your own composure will make the person realize his hot headedness and will not burn the bridges with both of you screaming. So keep calm and wait for your turn to speak.

**Tip# 2: Do not let his anger affect your work**

The worst damage Mr. Matchstick does is to curtail his team’s creative powers. His shouts and screams lower the moral of the team, so much so that people prefer to stop thinking and only follow his orders. If you have a Matchstick boss, it is important that you do not judge your performance basis his anger. Have confidence on your work and judge your work on its impact rather than how one single person thinks, even if that one single person is your boss. Do not let anyone’s anger affect your work and creative thinking.

**Tip# 3: Choose the timing to speak to that person**

If you have to tell the person he is wrong, do not tell it at a time when he is in no mood to listen. Instead, wait for the right time to tell him your side of the story.

I once got angry on my boss and blasted him on whatsapp at midnight. He did not reply. Next day morning, when I reached office, he calmly took me for a cup of coffee and told me he did not want to address my concerns over messaging but thought he would speak to me. This simple thing not only gave me time to reconsider my own words but also ensured he spoke to me when I was ready to listen.

**Tip# 4: Escalate if needed**

Though I am not a strong advisor of escalating stuff but if things go beyond the threshold, do not hesitate to escalate the matter to a senior person. After all, the era of bonded labor is long over. No one, I repeat, no one has the right to vent out his anger and be a matchstick.

*FINAL TIP WHEN NOTHING ELSE WORKS: A colleague of mine had a matchstick boss. Once she starting crying so loudly in front of him that the man forgot all his anger and never ever spoke rudely to her. Does this tip work if you are a man? Try it and see it for yourself.*

**Mr. Obstacle**

*“Let us start working on this project. It has tremendous possibilities.”, said the boss.*

*“Sir. There are so many risks in going ahead with it. What if there is a flood?”, replied Mr. Obstacle.*

*“A flood? In a desert? Are you kidding me?”, replied Mr. Boss*

*“Why Sir? We need to account for all the possible cases before we go ahead.”*

Mr. Obstacle is one man who always shows you the negative side of anything and everything. Talk to him about anything and he first thinks of things that can go wrong. Just like a flood in a desert.

If God had a Mr. Obstacle as a colleague, he would have never created the world. Or perhaps, if any of the entrepreneur today had listened to Mr. Obstacle, we would still be living in the stone age.

Everything we do comes with its own set of risks. And Mr. Obstacle has 0 appetite for risks. Which effectively implies that he sees a problem with just about anything you are about to do. While sometimes his opinions help you to think about all the risks, too much influence of Mr. Obstacle can stifle and make one feel suffocated. We all have many such Mr. Obstacles around us, who are ready with the negatives even before all the positives have been laid down.

So how does one ensure that one does not get too carried away by Mr. Obstacle’s opinions and instead continues to focus on the good things.

***Tip#1 : Focus on the goal at hand***

Understand and decide how much value you wish to give to Mr. Obstacle’s opinions. Remind yourself how it is not important to list problems but to find solutions. Remind yourself how while you need to be aware of all the obstacles, these should help you plan things better rather than dissuading you from your work. Objectively assess the benefits and the probabilities associated with each of the major obstacles.

***Tip#2 : Pre plan for contingencies***

While it is important not to let obstacles worry you, but careful listening to Mr. Obstacle and sieving out the relevant and pertinent obstacles can actually help you pre plan for contingencies. Do not blindly ignore all the concerns raised. Rather intelligently focus on the probable and more impactful ones.

***Tip# 3 : Offer and seek alternative approaches***

If Mr. Obstacle happens to be an important person, you would not like to simply bypass him and take a decision even when you know the other person is being far too pessimistic. Under such situations, you should offer alternative approaches to look at the objective.

My friend once had a senior who always saw problem with whatever he wanted to do. This was causing a lot of strain for him as he could not possibly move ahead without his boss’s approval. He instead started asking his boss about how he would approach the situation and what other alternatives were possible.

By making Mr. Obstacle suggest solutions to your problems rather than problems to the solutions you provide, you have just turned the table and made Mr. Obstacle shed his cop’s hat and look at things more objectively.

*FINAL TIP WHEN NOTHING ELSE WORKS: Mr. Obstacle wanted to go out and eat. I started listing the possible roadblocks of traffic jams, bad food quality with a possibility of food poisoning, boss calling for a ‘surprise’ meeting and calling us off-guard. Mr. Obstacle just told me how pessimistic I was and left for lunch with another colleague. I can now eat in peace.*

**Mr. Ass Licker**

The boss had just entered the entrance gate when Mr. Ass Licker went to take the car keys from him and park the car. As he saw the boss, he stood like a soldier ready to salute the boss for the service the boss was doing for the organization.

While at lunch, Mr. Ass Licker remembered the boss’s taste and got his lunch tailored to his boss’s taste buds. So much so that he had recently learnt his boss’s choice of innerwear and was planning on gifting the same brand’s products on his boss’s birthday.

Have you heard of someone who goes everyday to first drop the boss’s children to school, get them fresh veggies and help the boss with all the household administrative stuff? Mr. Ass Licker is a sycophant who tries to curry favor with his superiors. He can be found very close to the boss’s seat. He manages to laugh at every joke his boss makes, no matter how silly it might be.

He sets his eyes on the boss’s seat, only to greet the boss as he walks into the office. I have even come across people who have started smoking only to give company to the boss. Believe it or not, a lot of people start smoking only because their boss does.

You want to conveniently ignore this fellow and continue to focus on your work. After all, you do not want to stoop down to the level of this fellow in order to be appreciated. However, then you notice your boss in a candid conversation with this man and you experience anger, frustration. You feel like a fool when all you need to get the boss’s attention is to massage his ego. A part of you wants to befriend this guy and learn from him. Another part of you detests such cheap ways of getting noticed. A part of you knows this guy is privy to a lot of secret information. Another part of you feels it really does not matter.

How exactly do you handle such co-workers at work? Do you become one like him? Or do you break off completely from such colleagues?

***Tip#1 : Let your work talk***

Work can be the best antidote to all such co-workers. In a lot of cases, instead of panicking at the instant attention the boss showers on Mr. Ass Licker, focus on the work and let your work earn you the respect and credibility. All the appreciation gained by any other way can never be lasting. So, resist the temptation of aping Mr. Ass Licker and just be yourself.

***Tip# 2 : Realize that the boss can actually see through***

One of a very senior person I came across told me that while Mr. Ass Licker feels the boss is a dumb person who cannot see through all these tricks, good leaders in fact have a knack of sensing all such attempts at flattering them. I once was in a meeting with my boss and another colleague who happened to end all the statements that my boss made with “*Absolutely right Sir.”* My boss actually got irritated and told him “*I would appreciate if you can bring in an opinion different from mine, rather than just being a yes man.”*

Realize that the bosses and senior people have had many people trying to appease them through things other than work. Realize that they can see through all of such tactics and most leaders do not appreciate these.

***Tip# 3: Tell him you can see through***

A friend of mine had a colleague who always bought a separate box of sweets for his boss every time he visited his hometown. Everyone in the team could see through that. On one such occasion, when everyone was sitting in a meeting, my friend casually joked *Imagine if we all started bringing a pack of sweets for the boss. Poor guy would turn a diabetic.*

The guy knew all his team was able to see through his tactics and this damaged his reputation. Next time, he decided to drop the extra box for the sake of his ‘boss’s health’.

***Tip# 4 : If you are the boss***

And just in case you happen to be the boss of one such Mr. Ass Licker, what do you do? We as humans tend to get easily carried away by all the praise showered on us. We bring in a lot of subconscious judgments when evaluating someone. So when we have a team member who showers us with attention, who drops us home when we get late in the evening, objectivity is difficult to maintain.

Nevertheless, always remember the famous adage “*Do not do to others that you do not want to be done unto you.”*

I had a guy in my team who dropped me home everyday from work whenever I would get late. When it came to appraisals, I could not give him a good raise as his performance was not upto the mark. He was candid/dumb enough to walk up to me and tell me how I had not taken the right decision and how I should have taken into account the fact that he dropped me home so many times. I first laughed at the audacity of his remark and then on my foolishness in not realizing this before. But I knew I could not change my decision in his increment. So I changed my travel companion.

*FINAL TIP WHEN NOTHING ELSE WORKS: We recently got a T-shirt designed and gifted to Mr. Ass Licker. The anonymously gifted T-shirt was captioned “Baba Ranchor Das Chanchar”.*

**Mr. Gossip Monger**

Leena had just learnt she was going to get married. Only that she did not know to whom. The entire office seemed to know of her marriage, except of course, Leena herself.

She spoke to the person who had revealed this earth shattering news to her. Poor girl had only learnt it from someone else. Leena decided to go one level back and speak to her reporter’s source. But it did not end there. Soon, it seemed to be a long chain of people. When Leena finally managed to reach the source, the guy refused to accept that it was his doing.

Leena was about to propose to the coolest guy in office but thanks to the news of Leena’s marriage, the guy had just resigned.

Don’t believe this story? Think it is straight out of an Ekta Kapoor show?

Well, this happened with a friend of mine, the guy whom Leena was about to propose.

Mr. Gossip Monger is a person present in almost all of us. Given the huge success of gossip magazines, it is not an exaggeration to say that most of us love gossips and participate in them in our own small/big ways. Speculations around who is in a relationship with whom, who is getting an out of turn promotion, who is leaving the organization, what is being spoken about behind closed doors are some of the top trending lunch table discussions. These conversations reach their peaks around appraisal times and spread like a wildfire.

In fact, a lot of us start to indulge in gossips without even realizing it. Often, the gossip monger is a popular guy/girl among the other colleagues. Because no matter how unsubstantiated the rumor is, it does make a good story and bring in the entertainment at work. Before we know, we are already a contributor to the world of office gossips. Unless, one fine day we become a victim of one such gossip ourselves.

Gossips are harmless to a certain extent. But when they damage an individual’s or the company’s reputation, gossips can be really damaging. Too much gossip can spread negativity and hamper productivity. So, how does one deal with Mr. Gossip Monger who thrives on gossips at work?

***Tip# 1 : Do not be too friendly to him***

Distancing oneself from Mr. Gossip Monger is the first and the most important step to avoid getting pulled in deeply into the office gossip. It is easier said than done. But really worthwhile in the long run. If you do not want people to talk rubbish about you, as a rule, do not talk rubbish about someone else behind their back. Mr. Gossip Monger has an instant repulsion from people who do not add fuel to their gossips. Keep a low profile about your personal life. Even when talking about something very personal to a close friend at the workplace, look around to see if anyone is overhearing. Gossip Mongers have got some of the best eyes and ears in town. You do not want to be caught off guard.

When Mr. Gossip Monger is trying to talk to you negatively about someone else, however much you may dislike the other person, refrain from becoming a part of this mudslinging. After all, a person who can target someone else in front of you can as well target you when with the other person. Learn to distinguish between a true friend and confidante versus Mr. Gossip Monger.

***Tip# 2 : If you are the victim***

So you did not indulge in gossip yourself. But someone still decided to spread gossip around you. What do you do?

I, for myself, keep hearing about my own resignation every now and then. It has happened so many times that I just laugh it off now.

Understand why the other person has made you a target. Is it to do with his personal enmity/jealousy towards you? Or are you the *diva/rockstar* at workplace everyone wants to talk about? Enjoy the attention, even if it is unwanted.

Depending on the severity of the rumor, you can either choose to ignore it or confront Mr. Gossip Monger. In Leena’s case, the rumor had done much more damage. Mr. Gossip Monger deserved a showdown. Leena made it known to the person how a casual remark from him was damaging for her as a girl.

***Tip# 3 : If you are the boss***

As a boss, a lot of times, my team members come to me asking about a sensitive piece of information. Lack of information is the best breeding ground for all gossips. In such cases, a balance needs to be struck in revealing things to the team versus maintaining confidentiality. As a senior member of the team, assuage your team’s concerns when such gossips spread. Maintain as much transparency possible without parting with too much information.

For any change management, be a source of reassurance to your team by acknowledging their fears and worries. Armed with prior researched facts, tell them what you do know and can reveal; equally tell them what you don't know and do not make things up. When you don't know something, tell them that you'll find out.

*FINAL TIP WHEN NOTHING ELSE WORKS: I recently threw a party announcing my promotion. Mr. Gossip Monger is now super confused. For he had just spread an innocent gossip. He came to me and asked me if it was true that I just got promoted. Well, didn’t he know?*

**Ms. Talkative**

Ankit could take it no longer. Seeta had made it impossible for him to work. Seeta sat next to him. Ever since she reached office, she started blabbering (*may be she blabbered even when she was not in office, just that it was not of much concern to Ankit)*. From discussing minute details of what she had cooked for lunch; from bitching about her mother-in-law to discussing concern about the increasing prices of onions, the girl did not shut up even for half an hour at a stretch. Come Friday and all she had on her weekend shopping plans. Come Monday and all she wanted to discuss was how her weekend went.

Thanks to sitting with her, Ankit ended up knowing how Atul just had a breakup, Rita’s dog was having loose motions, Anita’s boyfriend was a gay and Anshul was trying to woo the new joinee, Sunita. Barring these interesting revelations, Ankit found it difficult to work amidst all the cacophony around him. Just when he seemed to have reached closure to finding a solution, Seeta would poke him and start blabbering about last night’s episode of *Big Boss.*

He recently bought the best noise blocking headphones to tackle this menace. But now every time his boss wanted to speak to him, she had to get up, walk over and startle the daylights out of him to make him listen. So the headphones were packed and taken back home.

Each time he tried to tell the girls to maintain some silence, the silence lasted exactly a minute before Seeta had an urge to share something ‘earth-shattering’ again. He wanted to yell at the girl but was scared of being framed in a case of female harassment.

Whoever came up with the idea of open work environments certainly did not have a colleague as Seeta. Whoever thought open offices fostered brainstorming certainly did not think about someone deep-frying your brain with their constant banter. So how does one really deal with such chatter boxes in the office who just seem to have been given so less work that they have all the time in the world to talk of useless stuff and are careless to not bother about the people who genuinely come to office to work?

***Tip# 1 : As far as possible, avoidance is the best measure***

Even though this was not possible in case of Ankit, but often changing seats or getting good quality headphones can be all it takes to avoid the chatterboxes without making it too obvious.

***Tip# 2 : Do not be too friendly to them***

The more friendly one gets to the chatter boxes, the higher are the chances for your being pulled in the random talks. Be professional with them and do not try to befriend these coworkers or else you would end up wasting a lot of your ‘paid’ time being part of useless conversations.

***Tip# 3 : Nonverbal cues can help***

One of the most common way of getting someone to know you are busy is to keep looking at your computer screen when they walk up to you and talk. Another one is to keep checking your watch repeatedly as the other person is talking to you. As soon as the chatterbox wants to involve you into a conversation, start looking at your watch.

A friend of mine had a colleague who used to sit next to the water cooler. Every time my friend would walk to get a glass of water, this colleague would get up and start talking. My friend eventually started pretending he was on a call every time he saw this guy walk up to him.

Another colleague of mine started talking work to the chatterbox in her team. Ms. Talkative got the cue and lost interest in my friend, saving them both an unpleasant face-off.

***Tip# 4: Talk direct***

In a lot of cases, Ms. Talkative would actually be ignorant of your unwillingness to chatter and direct talk can convey the message across.

I once had a new girl join in my team who seemed to be lively and bubbly. I thought I had found a good friend at work. It was all fine for the first few weeks. But soon, it started becoming a bothering affair. She would walk up every now and then and start talking. She would not bother asking if I really had the time and inclination to talk about Katrina Kaif’s latest love affair but started pouring every day’s page 3 news on me.

I finally had to tell her that I had a lot of unfinished work and would prefer not to waste time during the day and then sit late night to meet the deadlines. To my surprise, she took it very positively and understood I wanted to be left alone.

So, if none of the first three tips work, talking directly should convey the time pressures you have. This talk should be as objective as possible, not focused on the person’s talkativeness as such but rather on your deadlines and delivery pressures.

*FINAL TIP WHEN NOTHING ELSE WORKS: Every time Ms. Talkative wants to talk cricket, talk football. Every time she wants to work, start talking of the awesome blue film you saw the previous night.*

**Mr. White Liar**

*“I am sick today and would not be able to make it to work. Taking an off for the day.”*

*(*Truth: I hate to come to office everyday. It's an awesome weather today and I’d rather spend it shopping with my girlfriend)

*“I am not in office today. Can you call me tomorrow please?”*

(Truth: I hope you forget to call me tomorrow as well. We do not intend to work with you.

OR

Dude, it’s a Friday evening. I do not want more work for the weekend.)

*“I am stuck in traffic and getting late for work.”*

(Truth: The football match last night is the reason I woke up late.)

*“I was given the rockstar award at my previous organization.”*

(Truth: People pelted stones at me for my non-performance.)

*“The company is in good shape. There is nothing to worry.”*

(Truth: I am trying hard to get the investors to invest in us. I am as worried as you and the last thing I want is that you know the truth and resign at this time.)

Don’t these statements sound familiar? Haven’t we all been guilty of lying at some days to take a leave from work or to not attend to a client call on a Friday evening? Even those in senior positions have at some point or the other lied to their team members when things are not going good for the company. As bosses, we give a deadline to our teams and a different deadline to the clients (buffering for the unexpected delays).

So is lying at workplace all that bad? If we all are guilty of lying, why single anyone out as a white liar?

Well, a lot of money has been put in the study of lying at workplace. Workplace lies run the gamut, from small, everyday lies to whoppers, from benign (even helpful) to destructive. Several articles have been written dissecting lies at work. So, I am not going to repeat all the heavy HBR studies here.

Instead, I am going to focus on a specific kind of liar at workplace. Picture this:

*Boss - “Is the work at your end complete?”*

*Person A - “I am waiting on Person B to get back to me.”*

*Person B - “I gave them already.”*

Person A is perplexed. How and when did this happen? Just 5 minutes back, Person B had just told me he was working on it.

*Boss - “Person A, why do you have to give excuses?”*

Person A is boiling now with anger. His grandmother had told him how a person’s nose swell when one lied. Person A is waiting for the same to happen to Person B.

Got it?

I am talking of a coworker who says something else to you and something else to your boss ; a coworker who lies to save his ass ruining your reputation in the process; a cold-blooded liar who seems to go spineless in front of your manager leaving you in a crisis situation. Now while you hope that the person’s nose swells and the world sees through the swollen nose, let us figure out some practical ways of dealing with a white liar.

***Tip# 1: Figure out the pattern***

As in a lot of other cases, figuring out the pattern is the first thing to do. Is the person a repeated offender or did he do this for the first time? Did this coworker behave like this with someone else as well? If it is happening for the first time, it could very well be the case of a simple miscommunication between the two of you. If it happens regularly, it is time to be more cautious with the person the next time around.

***Tip# 2: Figure out the reason***

Workplace lies are said for a lot of different reasons. Sometimes it is out of one’s insecurity, sometimes out of sheer habit. Sometimes it is out of one’s desire to let others down and sometimes it is said to protect one’s own turf.

I had a senior person in my team who frequently lied to me about another teammate with whom I had very little interaction. The idea was to prevent the two of us get along well and team up. A friend of mine was due for her promotion. She knew either she or another of her colleague would get promoted. She confessed how she purposefully started filling her boss with white lies about the other person’s my personal life. Another person I know of simply did not like the assigned to him and started taking frequent leaves to cover up for his disinterest.

Knowing why a person lies can tell a lot about the person’s personality and help devise strategies to confront and expose the white liars.

***Tip# 3: Restrict verbal communication and switch to written ones***

When in doubt, take things on an email. That way the other person has the least chance to go back on his words. This is one of the key lessons I have learnt during my career. Whenever I have an iota of doubt about someone’s intentions, I always make it a point to document and send across all minutes of our discussion. It takes extra time and effort to pen things down but saves the agony at a later stage. This is one advice I have given almost to all my team members as well and most seem to follow and understand its importance, especially once bitten.

***Tip# 4: Understand that it is a small and connected world and the lies would come back to bite***

This tip is for all the white liars out there: In the age of spy cameras and sting operations, in the age of Facebook and internet, your reputation once damaged is very difficult to restore.

I once interviewed a guy and liked her. Later when I recommended another teammate to interview her, he came back and told me how he had worked with the girl in the previous organization and how she was notorious for her white lies. The candidate was instantly rejected despite the greatest of degrees and achievements.

Hope the message is clear on the wall. Period.

*FINAL TIP WHEN NOTHING ELSE WORKS: Keep a copy of the holy scripture Gita at your desk. Every time the white liar is near you, make the person take an oath of truth before he starts interacting.*

**Mr. Aloof**

“*Mr. Sharma, can we please discuss the implementation plan once before we send it out to the larger group?”*

“*Disha, why don’t you put all the discussion over a document and share it with me. Let’s collaborate over the Google doc.”*

This was not the first time this guy was doing this to me or to anyone else for that matter. Mr. Aloof had a wall around him, a wall that could not be broken. He wanted to be left alone.

Always.

From the moment, Mr. Aloof walked in the office, the only time he walked out of his cubicle was when he wanted to take a loo break.

*Yes, he had all his meals in his cubicle and often kept the door of his room closed.*

It was as if he was a parrot who wanted to be caged.

Mr. Aloof restricted all the communication with the team only related to work. Not a word extra was ever heard by anyone from him. Whenever a meeting ended, he was the first guy to walk out of the room into his own world. It was as if humans were his biggest problem on earth.

Now while Mr. Aloof was otherwise harmless, talking to him was never a pleasant experience. For he kept staring at his computer screen when you walked up to his room to talk to him. He made you feel as if every second you were standing there, you were wasting his time. Everyone around him only preferred to speak to him over emails than initiate a verbal communication. But when it came to a much needed face to face discussion, this guy made everyone feel guilty of using tongue to talk rather than hands to write documents.

So how did I deal with Mr. Aloof and what are my tips for the helpless souls who have such a person in their team?

***Tip# 1: Understand their working style and adapting to it***

While I first detested the idea of not being able to openly communicate with this person, I slowly realized that it was more to do with his personality type than the fact that I had a horrible face that he did not like to see.

He was like this not just with me but with everyone and anyone around.

Whatever it was, I tried to maximize the communication through emails and get stuff going. Although, it meant writing long emails and wasting a lot of good time when a certain thing could have just been discussed in person, but as long as the work was being done, I kept going.

***Tip# 2: Trying to restrict conversations to work***

Mr. Aloof was not comfortable talking about anything else except the task at hand. He spoke point-to-point and the second the discussion was over, he escaped the room. The moment I spoke of anything apart from the problem at hand, Mr. Aloof made strange faces.

As a team, we once ordered his birthday cake. The guy did not bother to come for the cake cutting and instead dropped an email asking us all to enjoy the cake.

At first I could not understand this. Was he a robot or something? Did he feel we were all from Mars or something? Or were we untouchables ? Did he need any psychiatric help?

May be, his wife spoke a lot and office was a place he looked for respite. May be, he was wary of the Gossip Mongers and this was his way of dealing with them.

After all these stupid and random analysis, I just decided to not waste my energies at all trying to make friend out of this person. Instead, I kept my conversations only limited to work so he did not feel offended and did not scare me with his strange faces.

*FINAL TIP WHEN NOTHING ELSE WORKS : I just met Mr. Aloof in the lift and kept a finger on my lips till we reached our floor.*

**Mr. Confused**

“*When did I say this? I think we should put the onus on the customer.”*

After a day..

*“Why is the customer being penalized for this?”*

*Gurrrrrrrr...Dude, it was you who only suggested this no?*

“*Ok sir, we will get this changed.”*

A week later..

*“The customer should get impacted here. He should be penalized. Why haven’t we given that some thought.”*

The employee has already fallen flat by now.

Meet our next character, so often found amongst our workplaces - Mr. Confused.

Common traits of this species - They are confused about the direction they want to take. Just when you feel this time they are clear on where they want to go, they change their strategy. Just when you feel they know their priorities, they change their minds. They forget their own decisions and change their minds with every email/twitter/Facebook comment they get. They are poor at decision making and often try to take the safer routes.

The problem: Believe you me, having a team leader or a boss who changes his decisions at his whims and fancies is a lot of waste of energies. He sees a competitor application and the very next day, he wants a redesign of his own. He hears a buzzword in a conference and immediately tells his team to stop whatever they are doing and start working on this new trending stuff.

Result: Total confusion in the minds of their team members. Lack of clarity and undue stress everywhere. Each time the team walks into a meeting, they know a lot of things they are working on are going to get strapped, a lot of the decisions taken in the last meeting overruled and it is going to add to the chaos and confusion.

While in some situations, the change of strategy may be unavoidable ; it can become a big pain if it begins to become a rule.

Now before you start to feel like pulling your (or even your boss’s hair), before you decide you cannot deal with the person’s confused state of mind, let’s see what you can do. Time for the tips. Sit back and listen.

***Tip #1 : Ask probing questions. Counter question and make him THINK***

The most common reason of a person’s confused state and frequent vacillations is because the person has not thought through things properly in the first instance. It is when the implementation actually starts or goes live that he actually realizes the other implications. And hence the change of mind.

The best way to counter this indecisiveness is to ask questions. Bring out all the side-effects and implications upfront even if he has not thought about it. Ask probing questions. If the person’s decision goes against some known data points or the bigger picture, try and clarify. That ways the chances that the person will come up with the right strategy are slightly higher than just blindly executing his words without putting much thought.

***Tip #2 : Document all decision making whenever possible***

The best way to deal with a person’s indecisiveness is to take his written consent on the decision before actually starting to work on it. Document what was discussed, what are the action items and the logic behind all key decision points. It is a known fact that when a person has to agree or give consent in written, it forces one to think hard and avoids heartburn later.

***Tip #3 : Make the person understand how his frequent change of mind wastes time and energy for everyone***

A friend of mine had a boss who was highly unpredictable. Just when a project was nearing completion, he wanted to change the flow. What appeared as a minor change to him needed a major rework. A lot of the team’s bandwidth was wasted on the multiple iterations, without much real ROI. A lot of times it may so happen that the person may not even realize that what appears as a minor change for him may lead to major rework at the team’s end. Making the person understand the bandwidth wasted due to the change of strategy can sensitize the person and may be make him more careful for his frequent decision making.

*FINAL TIP WHEN NOTHING ELSE WORKS : Every time Mr. Confused gives you a new assignment, wait for a day or two before beginning to work on it; just in case the guy changes his mind and does not want you to work on it.*

**Mr. Time Keeper**

I was 5 minutes late today. My boss looked at his watch when I entered the office. It did not matter to him that I was working on a major release note last night and we had just done a near perfect release last week. What mattered was the number of hours, minutes and seconds I spent looking at my laptop. My attendance sheet was my report card.

Mr. Time Keeper judged the team not by the quality of work delivered but by the number of breaks people took. There were occasions when one had some urgent work at home and had to write a long explanation email promising to be available on emails and phone when required.

If a person was missing from the seat for more than a few minutes in the day, he would call the person on his mobile phone and suddenly want to check the status of all trivial stuff. So terrified people became of this that they started drinking less water fearing that would mean more frequent loo breaks and that might just irk the boss. For those who smoked, the boss specifically asked them to spend an extra hour in office to compensate for the ‘smoke’ breaks.

I was beginning to explode under this tight time keeping. I wanted to ask my boss to find faults in my work if needed rather than counting on the number of breaks I took. I had almost decided to quit as I did not want to work with such a person. And then I had a conversation with a friend that helped me stay back and work with Mr. Time Keeper.

Here is what can be done in such situations:

***Tip #1 : Have a conversation***

Easier said than done. Conversations with bosses can really be difficult, especially when you and your boss have a different opinion on something. But trust me, in a lot of instances, a conversation is what is needed to get things going. At least, it tells you what makes your boss or that team mate the way he/she is. It tells you how much of the situation can be changed. And how much do you need to change yourself in any situation.

When I spoke to my boss, I tried to strike a deal of setting weekly deliverables that I would commit on and deliver. I would be available for all the meetings where I am required. But the time keeping was something I was not comfortable with. He was not comfortable with this. He felt this would spoil the team culture. People would get relaxed and lose focus. He could not give this as a liberty to me and risk a lax performance by the team.

I suggested him to do a secret survey among the team members to see what they preferred. He could do the goal setting with everyone, set some overlap time hours when everyone had to be available (for all the meetings, etc.). But not be too stringent with the time spent on the workstation. He refused.

***Tip #2: United we stand***

The next time around we went on a team lunch, we all brought up this topic in a very subtle way. He could not avoid but listen to our concerns. The power of a team worked and he decided to try out the “productive” time versus the “face” time with us; at least experiment with the methodology. On our parts, we all ensured we delivered quality during the productive hours, were available whenever needed.

The trial worked and we ended up changing the boss’s time keeping habits bit by bit.

***Tip #3 : Shut off during the non office hours***

One of my friend once told me when her boss started pressing the team to spend no less than 12 hours at work, the team stopped checking their emails once the office hours were hour. The boss got the hint and became flexible with the timings. He understood it was worth having people 24x7 on emails than 12X5 at work.

*FINAL TIP WHEN NOTHING ELSE WORKS : Paste the famous speech of Narayan Murthy on your boss’s desk and wait for the reaction.*

**Mr. ‘Avoid Appraisal Discussions’**

It was appraisal time. I thought he would speak to me. After all, I, like all the corporate soldiers had worked like a donkey throughout the year, hoping for a great appraisal. When Mr. **‘**Avoid Appraisal Discussions**’** did not speak to me long after the time to submit rating had passed, I walked up to him to talk about it. But Mr. ‘Avoid Appraisal Discussions’ had suddenly become super-busy. It was as if he was on a secret mission and did not want to be found by his team.

Calmly, I tried to find a time in his calendar and set up a ‘KRA, KPI and goals’ discussion (though the ‘real motive’ I must confess was to find out how much raise was I getting). To my surprise, Mr. ‘Avoid Appraisal Discussions’ accepted the virtual calendar invite. Just an hour before the meeting, as I was planning on all the tricks to boast about my achievements, my boss decided to again play ‘hide and seek’. The acceptance was cancelled. What was even more frustrating was that no alternate time was suggested. Was he busy? Was he avoiding me? Did this mean I was in for a bad appraisal? Did this mean it was time to look for another job? My boss left me guessing.

What did he gain by keeping me in the dark? Wouldn’t every boss want to have this discussion with his team members just so the results are objectively evaluated and next year’s goals are clearly set?

Well my dear friend, if you really think so, chances are high that you have just begun your corporate career. For the gravest problem facing and frustrating most corporate people is actually the lack of clarity of their KRAs or the expectations of their bosses. When it comes to having appraisal or goal setting discussions with the team, a lot of bosses behave like ‘rats’ ; digging holes and playing ‘catch-me-if-you-can’.

So how does one solve this important riddle? Read the famous scripture ‘Gita’ everyday and forget enjoying or expecting the fruits of labor? Or get yourself into an argument with your boss over goal setting?

Before you lose hope, I have some mantras for you. Grab a coffee and read on..

***Tip #1 : Persist***

When someone tries to play *hide-and-seek*, let them win a round or two in the game. But ensure the game is ON till you win the last round. Your boss is busy, no problem. Set another calendar invite. And another. And another. Let your boss know your seriousness towards the discussion. Persist my friend, persist.

***Tip #2 : Write your own KRAs and send it over an email for him to review***

Nothing can get people on track than written communication. While your boss can make ‘n’ excuses when you walk up to him, having things on emails always puts the onus on the other person. If your boss cannot define your KRAs, define your own KRAs basis your experience and understanding. Politely ask your boss to review it as per his convenience. Most bosses, especially those managing large teams can find it difficult to define KRAs. But will be more than willing to review the ones you have set for yourself.

***Tip #3: Team up***

If your boss does not respond to the above 2 tips, escalation is always an option. But before that, try bringing this up in a casual conversation with the rest of the team. May be everyone in the team is equally frustrated with Mr. ‘Avoid Appraisal Discussions’ absenteeism. When it comes to bosses, in almost all scenarios, the *Golden Rule #2* is *United we stand.* Team up (without really ganging up and being political about it). Try to talk to Mr. ‘Avoid Appraisal Discussions’ as a team.

***Tip #4: Vague goals are equally useless as no goals***

So you got lucky and one of the above three tips worked for you? Good. Please send me some cash as my commission.

Hang on, so your discussion happened but now you are all the more confused of what your goals are. Your boss told you to be an important contributor to taking your company to new heights. But exactly how? Urr...Mmm...That he never told. He wants you to be ‘star’ performer. Only that you don’t know if that means you are to work during the nights.

Having unclear goals is as useless as having no goals. Or may be even worse. So just when Mr. ‘Avoid Appraisal Discussions’ is about to trick you and give you vague KRAs, get into a discussion on exact ‘hows’ and ‘targets’ instead of a subjective expectation of building a great company, an awesome product, provide excellent customer service, etc. Walk out of the discussion with focused and specific numbers and then also set quarterly goals for performance reviews and course correction.

If you really achieve this, trust me, your life is going to be much happy an year down the line. Else, Mr. ‘Avoid Appraisal Discussion’ will be smiling his way.

*FINAL TIP WHEN NOTHING ELSE WORKS : If his boss, i.e. your super boss happens to pass through the corridor, innocently ask him if one of your boss’s KRA is to set KRAs for his team.*

**Mr. ‘Notice Period’**

Well who would think Mr. ‘Notice Period’ can be a soul to deal with. Poor guy, after all, is anyway on his way out. So what harm can he do to anyone?

More often than not, we all see Mr. ‘Notice Period’ as a victim than as a person with whom one needs to deal with. In fact, notice periods are times when most people shed away their political skills and become friends to almost everyone around.

But there are reasons why Mr. ‘Notice Period’ can become a pain for people around him, especially the bosses.

Mr. ‘Notice Period’ comes late to office and leaves early. Mr. ‘Notice Period’ does not want to work anymore. He sees the notice period as a time to relax, have fun, do nothing and still get paid. He becomes his own boss and does not care if the boss asks him about his KRAs and deliverables.

One of the most common issues at work is when Mr. ‘Notice Period’ does not give a proper knowledge transfer to the person who steps in his shoes. This leads to a lot of issues for the person who has stepped in that job. The boss expects he knows and Mr. ‘Notice Period’ has not given a proper handover.

The problem worsens more when Mr. ‘Notice Period’ sees this time in the office as a time to bitch about his boss and almost about everything and everyone in the company. His free spirits can trigger network effects and convince many more people to start to look out. He takes far too many coffee breaks with different people and tries to convince them why they should also leave. Forget productivity, Mr. ‘Notice Period’ becomes counter-productive.

So by now, I have made the ‘victim’ guy ‘villain’ again. Now let’s look at how to deal with this ‘villain’.

As a manager, when someone in your team is on his way out, he can damage your team in ways more than one. So what is it that you do? You know the person is on his way out. You don’t really want to bother much about him. You also know that whatever you say now to him would hardly make any sense to Mr. ‘Notice Period’. You also don’t want to pick unnecessary trifles with the man who is already on his way out.

Here is how you can still ensure Mr. ‘Notice Period’ does not leave behind an army of Mr. ‘Notice Periods’ :

***Tip #1 : Set last date as soon as you can***

So you have formally accepted his resignation and now is the time to give him a timeline when he can leave. As a manager, do not keep the person hanging in there for long. Depending on the person’s criticality to the project, plan out his last date as soon as you can. The more you delay the person’s release without much real reasons, the higher are the chances that Mr. ‘Notice Period’ would just be talking loose to the team about you and the company. Setting the last date can help both you and him plan better.

***Tip #2 : Set clear deliverable goals and follow through regularly on the progress.***

What is it that you expect the person to definitely finish on before he leaves? Set clear deliverables with the person so he knows what is expected out of him before he leaves. But more importantly, have regular status checks to keep the person busy. Make sure you follow up to know how the work is coming along.

***Tip #3 : Knowledge transfer should be the immediate plan.***

If someone in your team has resigned, identify the person’s replacement as early as possible and start the knowledge transfer immediately. If possible, try and be part of the sessions so you exactly know what is it the person is handing over and to ensure the knowledge transfer is not done in haste.

I have seen managers giving an entirely new project to people on notice period. That can be really frustrating for Mr. ‘Notice Period’ and the project is doomed to fail even before it starts. Focus on getting the threads closed rather than starting new threads with Mr. ‘Notice Period’.

*FINAL TIP WHEN NOTHING ELSE WORKS : Tell Mr. Notice Period ‘what goes around, comes around’. You never know where again your paths might cross and where again you may end up being his boss again.*

**Mr. ‘Narcissist’**

*I have delivered so many big projects in such a short time and saved this company from distress. Without me, the company would not have existed. Without me, you would not have had this job.*

In my most recent job, I came across a guy who was in love with himself. He could not stop praising his own work and lauding himself as the smartest worker on the planet. He was ‘the one person’, ‘the force’ behind all successful projects or so he thought. He almost felt he was doing a great deal of favor to the people he was working with. He could talk endlessly about himself. When he was done talking about himself, he wanted to hear from me; hear me talk about him, about how great his work was and how I could not do without him.

Some typical conversations with him:

*Me - ‘Can you help me understand this?’*

Mr. ‘Narcissist’ - ‘*This is too difficult to someone so new in the team to understand. I have taken years to build this. I cannot explain this to you in a few hours. In fact, you would never understand the effort behind it.’*

Me - *‘Can you do this first?’*

Mr. ‘Narcissist’ - *‘You managers only know how to command. It is we who do all the real work. What do you do?’*

Me - *‘We will need to do it this way.’*

Mr. ‘Narcissist’ - ‘*I don’t agree and hence I would not code. What can you do?’*

Me - ‘*Ok boss, you are always right. I value your work. Now can you please do this.’*

Mr. ‘Narcissist’ - ‘*Fine, I will give you a solution.’*

He wanted to be given all the credit for the projects we worked upon. When we completed a project, he would send out a long elaborate email detailing all his efforts in the project’s success. My name just happened to be there as a coincidence.

It became a real pain for me to work with this self-obsessed person. Even when he was at fault, he liked to spin the wheel and hold me accountable for the failure. If he forgot something, he blamed me for not reminding him. He often tried to make fun of me and then acted innocent by adding ‘*just kidding’.* It was like dealing with a spoilt child crying for his ice cream. Only that the child happened to be in his late twenties.

When every time he spoke to me, I started feeling inferior about myself, I decided I had enough. I started to feel a strange urge to poke a hole in this hot balloon and deflate his ego. I had a strong urge to tell him about all my achievements and tell him that I was not a person he could just ignore and take lightly. I wondered what was happening to me. Why was I getting thoughts of behaving with me the way he was behaving with me?

Surely, there was a better way of dealing with Mr. ‘Narcissist’ than this. What should one really be doing when one deals with a Mr. ‘Narcissist’? Massage his ego and get work done?

***Tip #1 : Agree before disagreeing***

For a lot of such people, the first sentence they want to hear is ‘*I totally agree with you’.* Say this, even if your next sentence starts with ‘*But, I also feel…”* Chances become higher that you will be heard if you pretend you are on that person’s side and then try to nudge him to consider an alternate viewpoint.

***Tip #2: Focus more on written communication***

As much as possible, try to communicate over emails with this kind of personality. That not just saves you the time and energy you would have otherwise spent hearing about his achievements, but also ensure that all he wants to rant about is written clearly than just being verbally expressed.

***Tip #3: Involve them in other meetings with you***

If you have a Mr. Narcissist in your team, try putting the person in a sales role. The person will speak so good about his product that he might just win you a lot of extra clients. And if not, will at least understand the client’s pain points better the next time you reach out to him. I, for instance, took this guy to a couple of client meetings just for him to appreciate where I came from and what else I did in my work other than to just cater to his mood swings and loftiness.

***Tip #4: Maintain your calm when dealing with them***

Mr. ‘Narcissist’ drives you crazy. I have had instances when I suddenly felt disgusted by this person and felt the urge to walk up to my superiors and tell him I could not work with this person any more. But of course, then I took a deep breath and told myself *This too shall get over.* I reread the famous poetry *Don’t Quit* and continued.

*FINAL TIP WHEN NOTHING ELSE WORKS :* Whenever you are around this person, just smile. And keep smiling. Your smile can be your best weapon against Mr. ‘Narcissist’ who is left wondering what’s cooking in your mind.

**The Love Birds**

There was something brewing between them. Ms. Lily and Mr. Romeo were always seen together in the office, be it a tea break or lunch time. Whenever one had to find Ms. Lilly, all that was needed to do was look for Mr. Romeo and vice versa.

They were calling in sick on the same days and typically left office around the same times too. Ms. Lily was coming to office all decked up and Mr. Romeo seemed to be always noticing her.

They would leave office around the same time, in 5 minutes of each other and yet were seen leaving in the same car.

The ‘Lovebirds’ were the talk of the town. Suddenly, their valentine moves were being noticed by everyone. Even the coffee vendor knew what they ordered together.

All this was speculation until someone told their boss how Mr. Romeo and Ms. Lilly came together but Mr. Romeo would drop her a few meters away from the office, just so they were not seen entering together.

Now, their boss should not have a problem with this, right? What was the harm if the poor souls loved each other? And how can ‘Love Birds’ at all be a feature in this book, you may ask.

But the problem was that amidst all the ‘love in the air’ moments, the two were taking just too frequent breaks from work, leaving early and were found to be missing when surprise meetings were called. Either they were together, or they were busy using the office landlines on their seats talking to each other. Their frequent public display of affection was causing much discomfort among people sitting close to their bay. On days when they had personal issues/altercations, if the boss wanted both of them together for a meeting, they would not talk to each other even a discussion was needed among them.

And so, the boss decided he needed to do something about it. But what?

***Tip #1: Have sufficient facts in hand before any action***

Do not act in haste. Relationships and romances are things that are very personal. Unless your workplace has a policy that clearly details the rules of working in such situations, refrain from being impatient. Even when you wish to take an action, have sufficient facts in hand than merely trying to act basis other people’s speculations or rumors; facts in terms of whether the two are actually dating and facts if their romance is actually impacting the workplace in anyway.

***Tip #2: Deal with it only when needed***

As I said, not all office romances are bad. In a lot of cases, office romances can make people work harder in order to prove their mettle to each other. When a relationship finally solemnizes into a marriage, it can make even mean two stable employees in your workforce. So, leave the ‘Lovebirds’ to build their nest. Unless of course, the romance is creating workplace issues like the ones above. If the situation demands, put them on two different projects so they do not have to work directly with each other.

***Tip #3: Focus on how it is impacting workplace. Period***

When talking to the Lovebirds, focus only on how their affair was causing productivity issues or distracting people. Try to talk as a senior/mentor or a friend rather than as a boss. Do not get personal but restrict the conversation to work. After all, if the ‘Lovebirds’ are able to meet their goals and targets, it is less of an issue what they do beyond and after office.

However, if office decorum is not being maintained, be stern and clear in your communication. If you are not adept at doing this talk, get HR to speak to them, keeping yourself away from the same.

*FINAL TIP WHEN NOTHING ELSE WORKS : I once visited an office which had posters with the caption, “Love your work as much as you love your coworkers” pasted close to all coffee machines.*

**Mr. Divide & Rule**

So what if the Britishers left us decades ago. So what if Britishers have even left the European union now. Some people at my workplace still seem to be descendants of the Englishmen.

Picture this conversation:

Mr. Divide & Rule to Rohan*: You are the best asset in the team. Thank God I have you. Look at Raman. He is so lazy and hardly delivers on his goals. His documentation is so difficult to understand. Why don’t you mentor him to be like you?*

*5 minutes later..*

Mr. Divide & Rule to Raman: *Raman, Rohan is acting quite stupid these days and coming in so late. He feels overworked and is not taking much interest in the work. I may have to give extra work to you, while I take some strict action with Rohan.*

Rohan and Raman both feel they are the boss’ candy while the other person is soon going to be thrown out of the team. Mr. Boss has intelligently created a rift in the group to supposedly maintain his place at the top.

I have met teams,bosses,leaders who feel that if the teams bond well, then they might in-turn get redundant. To keep their insecure persona satisfied, they then play the role of Mr. Divide & Rule.

Almost, no team member is perfect. But Mr. Divide & Rule exposes the weaknesses of one of the team members to the other; hoping to gain some brownie points in his eyes; not realizing that this would really backfire for him, the team and the organization in the long run.

So, if you have such a team member in your team who you find playing Mr. Divide & Rule, here is how you deal with the person’s British tendencies.

***Tip #1: Arrange intra-team fun activities***

In most situations, a team networks through their bosses. But in case of Mr. Divide & Rule as the boss, he does not arrange team meetings but prefers to talk to the team members on an individual basis. In such scenarios, any misunderstandings between the team members is likely to remain unresolved and even to get worse. As HRs or managers, the best way to not let Mr. Divide & Rule gain any foothold is to arrange a lot of frequent intra and inter team fun activities to get Rohan and Raman to interact with each other, participate in activities as a team and really get opportunities to know each other’s work directly than through Mr. Divide & Rule’s statements.

***Tip #2: Enlighten Mr. Divide & Rule with the power of unity***

Enlighten Mr. Divide & Rule how his policy of trying to create rifts in the team is short-sighted and how other teams or his peers stand to gain if they have a well united team who would stand united for them rather than as individuals.

***Tip #3: Be stern with such detractors.***

I once had a tech lead who would poison me against my team members and my team members against me. This meant we never united to stand up against him as a team. It was quite later that we both realized this was happening. Actually, we were lucky to be told by someone else that this was happening. We both walked up to the guy together and confronted him. Silence.

Be stern with the detractors who try to play you against your team. After all, best teams are those where whatever happens stays within the team. Teams with intense rivalries within but still standing together outside as one team.

***Tip #4: Set goals that make Mr. Divide & Rule’s success dependent on the team’s success***

If in the above scenario, my tech lead’s performance was linked to the success of the product and not just his individual coding skills, the tendency to play the poison man’s role would be greatly curbed. As leaders, try and have collaboration goals and targets as much as possible instead of setting individual targets or goals. This is something MBA schools really do well, where most projects are about a team performance. The endeavor is for the whole team to grow together as one unit. Rather than Mr. Divide & Rule to emerge and thrive.

*FINAL TIP WHEN NOTHING ELSE WORKS : If nothing works, take Mr. Divide & Rule to watch ‘Gandhi’. Let him chose if he wants to be thrown out like the Englishmen were. Review the moral of the movie with him. Hope he gets the message clearly.*

**Mr. Nitpicker**

Mr. Nitpicker has his magnifying glass in hand. He is trying to find that one extra pixel which has not been implemented as per his instructions.

“*Disha, this is not the best implementations. I am sure if I spend 2 more minutes on it, I can find a better design for this”,* said Mr. Nitpicker.

I was on the verge of putting down my papers. After all, I could not deal with so much fault finding around me every day. No matter how much effort I put, Mr. Nitpicker would feel something was still not right. Now, it would have been fine if he told me what exactly that ‘something’ was. But I was not his life partner that I would understand the unsaid. He would always seem unhappy but never really be able to pinpoint to exactly what the problem was and how it could be made better. His constant nitpicking was making me lose confidence in my work. Complaining came as natural to him as breathing comes to us.

And then I realized that it was not just me. Mr. Nitpicker seemed to be dissatisfied with almost everyone around; right from the person who cleaned his desk every morning to the CEO of the company.

He once asked a colleague for a movie recommendation and poor fellow suggested it as a must watch to him. The next morning, Mr. Nitpicker came back and started telling everyone around how pathetic the poor fellow’s taste of movies was. Mr. Nitpicker. He did not like that the heroine was overdressed and how the songs were wrongly placed. No one would ever want to watch a movie after hearing Mr. Nitpicker’s reviews. If we went out for a lunch, Mr. Nitpicker would spend 10-15 minutes with the hotel manager telling him how the food did not taste upto the mark or how the waiter forgot to smile while serving food. Huh!

Working with such people who always seem to demean your contribution, feel that something was always lacking and never seem to be satisfied can be really challenging. After all, the next thing that drives a person (beyond money) is how your work is perceived by people around you, right?

So, do you get into everyday battles with them and vent out your frustration at their constant negativity? Or do you battle it out not with the person but his fault finding instincts and find nirvana?

***Tip #1: Do they realize they come across as a negative colleague?***

If the person is not your boss, but a teammate or colleague, the problem is simpler to solve. Try having a conversation with them and figure out if they even know they nitpick a lot. Most nitpickers never have evil intentions. It is just that they love fault finding. Try and talk it out with them how their constant nitpicking demoralizes people around them. Advice them to only pick a few big battles rather than fighting multiple guerilla wars. All this, of course, if Mr. Nitpicker is not your boss. Because if he is, then this tip does not work. Who wants to bell the cat, after all?

***Tip #2: Have options A,B,C ready***

Mr. Nitpicker would inevitably not like the first solution you go to him with. Beat him in his own game. If B is the next best solution you have, do not straight away present him A. In fact, go to him first with C. He will surely reject that. Then tell him how you knew he would reject C. And so you had another plan ‘B’ . Before he tells you what’s wrong with B, tell him how you feel even B did not solve the purpose. And then surprise him with A. When he sees how you self criticize your own work, he will hopefully feel satiated and go less aggressively after A.

***Tip #3: Be data driven.***

This is what I did when I had enough of nitpicking. So when he said, the design may not appeal to the masses, I asked him what exactly it was about the design that he did not like and how we could make it better. Wherever possible, I gave him data on why I came up with this solution and how this design indeed solved the problem for us as per the data. Remember another golden rule, the power of a boss can only be countered by the power of data.

***Tip #3: Nudge him for a ‘better’ solution***

This is like a typical case where a husband keeps finding fault with his wife’s cooking until one day she leaves the kitchen to him. When Mr. Nitpicker tells you something is wrong, go after his life to help you find that ‘something’ which was wrong. ‘Pamper’ him to help you find an alternate solution. And better, try finding that ‘something’ which is wrong in the solution he provides.

Of course, this solution does not work if you have to find a solution in the next one hour.

***Tip #4: Bypass Mr. Nitpicker wherever possible***

This is again something I tried and it worked for me. At a lot of instances where I knew Mr. Nitpicker would create a problem, I went up to his boss bypassing him. I got his boss to approve the solution. And then, backed by his boss’ approval, I presented the solution to him. Bang! It got approved in no time. Even when he felt ‘something’ was wrong, he did not stop the next steps and allowed work to continue.

*FINAL TIP WHEN NOTHING ELSE WORKS : Make peace with the world. You cannot keep everyone happy.*

**Mr. Male Chauvinist**

I know writing this particular one might irritate a few of my lovely readers. But how can the female in me resist writing about this character who so is just so prevalent and yet just so not obvious to you if you happen to be a man.

Yeah, I know we are in 2016. Yeah, I know we are the millennium people. Yeah, I know we talk a lot about gender diversity at workplace. And yeah, I know each of my male friend/colleague always wishes and hopes to have females in his team(s). Only that, there reasons are sometimes weird.

Believe it or not, even today, a lot of people see having women in their teams as a means to increase team engagement, rather than to increase team productivity. I have come across a lot of men who feel that hiring a woman comes with a lot of unnecessary baggage. And they would rather not hire them in the first place.

During one of my work assignments where the organization had flexible timings, one of my senior colleague would often start his day late. I had to work very closely with him and he would expect me to stay late. I was not comfortable doing that and we had lots of issues with these work timing clashes. When I told him this, he told me how this was the reason he never liked to hire females. They always wanted to go home early. Phew!

This is just one example. A lot of men have this feeling of superiority in the back of their minds. The slightest reason and they tell you how they would rather not have you around.

Of course, there are a lot many females too who try and take advantage of their sex to get things going for them. But then there are men too who do the same.

So how do you deal with these grumpy chauvinists who feel that women should be seen and men should be heard?

***Tip #1: Humor***

Sometimes humor can do, what anger cannot. Put your point across without hurting sentiments. The next time your colleague tells you how you are not meant for the project because you want to leave office on time, smile and tell him that is because you do not take as many smoke breaks. The trick is to smile. After all, the smile conveys you are in control.

***Tip #2: Be in control***

In the instance that I mentioned earlier, I started feeling inferior myself. Just because I was leaving earlier than the rest, I too felt may be they were all right; little appreciating the fact that I came hours before them to work. I was not in control of my own future and let other’s opinion of me define me. I started working over the weekends and yet did not feel I contributed enough. Don’t let that happen to you. Let your work define you for yourself, rather than what others felt. Focus on your work than your sex.

***Tip #3: Speak up***

If you feel Mr. Chauvinist is treating you badly, do not wait for a knight in shining armor to come and rescue you from the shit. Speak up for yourself. If you cannot respect your own self, no one else will.

***Tip #4: Don’t be a feminist***

Don’t do the same mistake that Mr. Chauvinist does. Don’t generalize and feel all men want to wrong you. Men and women both, have to live harmoniously as part of the human race. They're both dependent on each other. The situation is highly complex, but you need to constantly remind ourselves that men and women are not at war.

*FINAL TIP WHEN NOTHING ELSE WORKS :* Gift him a copy of *“*T*he Male Chauvinist Pig's Guide to Women*”. Can you beat that? Such a book exists! And the author is none other than “*Male Chauvinist Pigs of America, Inc*.”

**Mr. Fire**

Mr. Fire was at it again; adding fuel to the fire. His bill payment had failed. Like how? Like why? Was there a larger problem that all the customers were facing? Did the company just lose a crore in a second because of this issue? At least, Mr. Fire thought so. He felt the forest was on fire and needed to be saved. Only that instead of water, he was throwing kerosene on the fire.

Did not understand yet?

Mr. Fire is someone who wants to escalate every single issue he faces. Not just to your boss. But to your boss’s boss and to your boss’s boss’s boss and to his boss and so on. Mr. Fire is someone who feels the whole company should just focus on the issue he is facing and solve that immediately.

Mr. Fire drops an email about the issue. And then feels you may never read his email. So, he also copies the world on that email. And then also drops a whatsapp message to the company’s official group. And then sends a reminder every 2 minutes to know if the issue is resolved. He feels the whole company is always conspiring to get things down. And he is the lone soldier and martyr trying to run the show. Mr. Fire feels he is acting as the firefighter when all he is doing is seeking attention.

So how do you put water to this fire?

***Tip #1: Don’t panic. Everyone else can see it too***

Yes. No one likes a person who is always raising issues and complaining. Everyone is looking for a problem solver than someone who always keeps talking of issues but never provides solution. If the issues he raises are genuine, solve them. But do not panic. No matter at what position the person sits. Focus on the magnanimity of the issue rather than the person/

***Tip #2 : Acknowledge the problem and then show him your list***

Agree that the red button is 1 pixel small on his phone. Acknowledge how that is not the best of experience. But then also show him the list of other issues you have. Make him understand how the issue he has raised is miniscule compared to some of the other things you have at your hand at the moment.

***Tip #3 : Ask him for a solution***

Raising issues is the easiest. Nudge him for a solution. True, it may just be in his domain to find a solution. But it would sensitize him and make him at least aware of the complications.

*FINAL TIP WHEN NOTHING ELSE WORKS : Put him in your shoes. Like the movie ‘Naayak’? (only that be sure you are right and he does not become an Anil Kapoor).*

**And then there are more..**

If you recollect, in the beginning of the book; I spoke about two categories of irritating people we meet at work: one who mean no harm and the others who can ruin our days and nights. After having dealt with the latter more dangerous category, I will also like to talk about some other souls whom we meet at work and whose presence causes us irritation but reading about what makes them irritating can trigger an uncontrollable bouts of laughter. Who are these fellows who form a part of our everyday work life?

***Mr. Smell Bad* -** I once had a guy sit next to me at work whose body odor could make people faint. Every day I dreaded sitting next to him. It was as if nobody had told him he needed to brush and bathe at least once a month. He once told me he hated it when his mother called him and reminded him he had not bathed since the last time he had come back from his hometown. I was flabbergasted. Here was I, suffering in silence. And here was he, a twenty something lad whose mother had to call him to remind him to bathe.

There was another chap who did bathe and brush every day. But his body odor was such that the slightest perspiration would make him smell pathetic. This guy was part of my team and couple of people walked up to me and told me to have a conversation with him on this. I just did not know how.

The best way is to drop subtle hints to the person. I started by often saying, “*there seems to be a bad smell in the bay today”* and jokingly asking *“who is it who has not bathed today in the bay?” .* While in my case, the person did pick up my hint and himself walked up to me to ask if he smelt weird ; if you are not that lucky you can even have a casual chat with that person suggesting he use a better deodorant as his current one was not effective at all.This one depends a lot on the equation you share with the person, the timing and the words you chose to convey the message.

***Mr. Perennially Sick*** - A friend of mine once told me she had a guy in her team who kept sick a lot. Any small change of weather and he would report sick. My friend gave him enough leeway, allowing him to work from home, leave early just so the person could manage his health better. My friend thought this was a phase and once the person recovers, he would be a good resource for the team. Unfortunately, that never happened. On the flip side to it, some of the other team members started feeling the guy was being given undue privileges owing to his health issues.

Trivial as it sounds, my friend kept faith in the guy and had a candid conversation with him on how the work could be maximized virtually. As I know, even till date, Mr. Perennially Sick works a lot from home. However, my friend does not put him in projects which need a lot of extended hours. He balances this with the guy’s year end appraisal where he objectively does not give the person as much raise as some of the other teammates who are able to contribute more. Unfortunate as these are, these situations are very common at our workplaces. Depending on the role the person is in and the person’s immediate boss, this can cause a lot of issues for one. But as a co-worker, one needs to be sensitive enough for such situations and colleagues.

***Mr. PJ King -*** We all have people around us who like to share jokes. Only that their jokes only make them laugh. In fact, their constant stupid jokes make you feel irritated. Depending on the frequency of these PJs, you can be driven to different degrees of frustrations. Now you either buy the best quality headphones to save yourself from this unleash or tell the guy sternly that you don’t appreciate the jokes he cracks. Period.

***Mr. Foodie -*** Roma had a weird problem that her colleague was a foodie. No sooner was Roma away from her seat that the guy opened her lunch box and ate whatever she had got to survive through the day. Roma was furious. She did not get up at 5 in the morning to cook for charity. However, she just could not tell this to Mr. Foodie who would offer Roma office food in lieu of homemade food. For years, Roma ate the office food while Mr. Foodie gorged on her lunch. Until she decided that for the next one month, she would use sugar in place of salt and salt in place of sugar. The equation reversed. Today, Mr. Foodie does not eat food Roma offers to him. He thinks she is a bad cook.

***Mr. Specialist -*** We all have friends around us who love to keep talking of topics in which you have no interest. They are movie buffs, but you hate movies. They love books but also assume everyone else is. They go on a vacation and cannot stop talking about their trip for the next 6 months. Mr. Specialists have special interests and are in love with their interests. Little do they realize that their colleagues do not share their interests. Well, for every Mr. Specialist, there is an invention called ‘headphones’.

***Mr. Stand Closer and closer -*** I once had a girl who probably did not have the word ‘distance’ in her vocabulary. For she always stood so close that an inch more and it would seem we were conjoined twins. Every time I took a step back, she followed suit. Eventually I figured out that sitting across the table was the best way to make her stand at a ‘safe’ distance. And thankfully for me, it was a ‘she’ and not a ‘he’. Or else I might have approached the HR to complain about the guy’s malicious intentions.

***Mr. Super Excited -*** There is a newbie in town, fresh out of B-school. He wants to change the world. Good. He wants to start with changing the way the company works. Still ok. But he wants to change from day one without understanding the present. Mr. Super Excited has a lot of ideas, only that those ideas spring without his understanding of the system and the other implications. Be patient with him and wait for him to learn and settle in the system.

***Sutta Buddies -*** There is an old proverb which goes like *A family which eats together stays together.* In the context of corporate world, this holds true for *Sutta Buddies* or people who smoke together. Always seen together, this pack is like the *Sholay* pair at work. They spend so much time together puffing that they automatically tend to share a lot of work related stuff with each other. In fact, a lot of people start to smoke because their bosses do. You may ask why we discuss this species at all, in context of this book. Well, firstly, from what I have known, a lot of people let loose and share a lot of confidential stuff when they smoke. Which leads to asymmetry of information for others. And secondly, these people just take far too many breaks which is no less irritating, especially you happen to be their boss. Now you cannot tell them to stop smoking for fear of getting too personal. And you cannot tell them to clock in 10 hours instead of 8 because they spend 2 hours smoking. Research in the US puts this time lost at a whooping $3,077 based on an estimate of 5 smoke breaks a day. Not to miss, the cost of healthcare to the company and the sick leaves. And then one fine day, the buddies decide to quit smoking. Poor you now need to be sensitive to the withdrawal symptoms associated with this difficult task. I don’t have much a solution for these people around you. Hire them at your own risk.

**Ms. Buddy** - *“How did your weekend go? Went out with friends? Any special friend? When is the good news coming?”*

Ms. Buddy is always interested in knowing what is happening in your personal life; whether you are dating someone (if you are single); whether your wife is pregnant (if you are married) ; whether your child is doing good in studies (if you are married and have a child). She is the most intrusive person who talks less of work but is more interested in the color of the walls of your home. She is mostly harmless and only prides in keeping herself up-to-date about people’s life. But sometimes, she may share your personal stuff with other people making you vulnerable. The worst mistake you can do with Ms. Buddy is to add her to your social network. The best way to deal with Ms. Buddy is to draw your boundaries and clearly state that you would not want to talk about your personal stuff at work. Keep safe distance.

**Mr. Poker Face -** For all the poker fans, you know what I mean. For all the other innocent souls, Mr. Poker Face has no emotions ever on his face. He never smiles, never gets angry. He always talks to you in the same tone, whether delivering good or bad news. If you have Mr. Poker Face as your boss, you probably never know when he likes your work and when he doesn’t. I once had a Mr. Poker Face in my team and we all wondered if he was a robot and not an actual human being.

**Mr. Secluded -** He comes to office, sits in front of his computer and starts working. Come lunch time and he opens his lunch box on the seat, eats and again starts working. When you first meet him, you suspect may be he is impaired and are just starting to curse God for the poor man’s fate when he finally speaks. But he speaks only when needed. He does not utter a word extra than his needed for work. He comes, he works, he goes. Almost like another robot. Mr. Secluded is how he is. You cannot change much about him. You joke with him and he does not laugh. You ask him out for a team lunch and he would flatly say no.

There is nothing harmful about having Mr. Secluded in your team and you might feel such a person would be so productive. But the workplace suddenly becomes dull and boring with such people around. Imagine a workplace full of such robotic people. Imagine spending a day only working and talking only work related stuff. Now imagine doing that day in and day out. And if you happen to get a seat next to this guy, then my best wishes are with you. Happy talking!

**And the list goes on...**

***In the end..***

Hope you had a good time reading this book. As you read along, I am sure you found resemblance of these personalities with people around you at your work. After all, most of these personalities are found almost in every work place. Some species might be seasonal though and flourish best around the appraisal season. Some species do well across the year. Some species are deadly and must be avoided and countered at all costs. Some are less harmful and can be managed with less efforts.

Hope you found some quick tips handy and practical enough to be implemented. Difficult people can challenge your commitment to work. Practice these tips to respond effectively, rather than reactively, and hopefully take your work relationships to the next level.

Next steps?

Try matching people around you to these personality types. Try out these tips and let me know how they helped or didn’t. Are there some other personalities with whom you are at a loss and do not know how to deal with?

I am all ears @ [dreamerdisha@gmail.com](mailto:dreamerdisha@gmail.com)