

Your Personal Coach

By

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

I'm part of a secretarial pool in my company, so that means I have about six different "bosses." One of the managers will ask me to put the rush on his project and then another will come along and say, "No, put my stuff first." Then the first one will get ticked off and criticize me because his project is now behind the other one. No matter what I do, it seems like I just can't please everyone in my office.

-- They're driving me nuts

Dear Nuts,

Of course you can't please everyone. It's totally impossible, so stop trying. Do your best and let the chips fall where they may. In fact, here's a funny story about the futility of trying to please everyone. Maybe you can post it in your break room. It might get a laugh – hopefully not a hysterical one – from your fellow secretaries.

The story tells about a man and his son going on a journey. The man liked to walk, so he let his son ride their donkey. Along the way, they passed some fellow travelers.

"Look at that healthy child on the donkey. That's kids for you. Riding in comfort while the old man walks." The words made the son feel ashamed, so he insisted that his father ride while he walked.

They pass more travelers who say, "Look at that! The poor little boy has to walk while his father rides the donkey." This time, the father and son both ride the donkey. More travelers. More criticism.

"Look at those two slugs. That poor donkey having to carry all that weight."

"Let's both walk," the father said. "Maybe then no one will complain." So the father and son both walk and lead the donkey along. They pass another group of travelers. "Look at those fools walking in this heat and neither of them is smart enough to ride the donkey." Finally, the father hoists the donkey up on his shoulders and says, "Come on, son. Maybe now people will stop criticizing us."

Do you see just how impossible it is to please everyone? So, instead make your goal to do your best work while insisting that someone in your organization take responsibility for prioritizing your work. Presumably, that's why bosses get the big bucks: for making the kinds of decisions that reflect organizational objectives, but may be unpopular with some of their co-workers or staff.

If this juggling for priority position is a common problem in your organization, you probably aren't the only one in the secretarial pool who is getting tugged in all directions by managers who think their work is the most important. It would be a good idea to take a collective stand and let 'the powers that be' know that this is no way to run a company. You don't have to be like union-activist *Norma Rae* rallying the troops from the top of a table in the cafeteria, but you can call your colleagues together for a civil discussion about how to solve your collective problem.

Then, together, you go to the boss. This doesn't have to be done in a confrontational manner. Instead, offer some positive and creative suggestions about how

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to solve this consistent problem. Be good-natured. Present this problem as interested and loyal members of your organization concerned about productivity and getting things done... not as a whiny complaint. If your supervisors are even remotely conscious managers, they'll appreciate your active interest in solving this systemic problem. You might even get a raise or promotion! Think about how you would solve this dilemma if you had the power to change how things are run at your company.

Be creative. Think outside the box. You and the others in the secretarial pool have the very best perspective to offer real solutions. For example, should your process be "first come, first served"? (Hey, the managers could take numbers like in an old fashioned bakery. "Now serving number sixty-one!"). If that is not a good solution to the problem -- because priorities change for reasons that you may not be privy to -- then it's up to the big boss to step up and take a leadership position to solve this organizational bottleneck.

Somebody should have the vantage point to see the big picture, in terms of what is most important to the overall organization, and make strategic decisions based on that knowledge. If that is not the case, I suggest looking around for a new job because your company won't last long with a lack of leadership and direction. You should just pick up your donkey and hit the road.

On a daily or weekly basis, it should be up to her/him to let the secretarial pool know which projects need to be completed first. If the managers have a problem with these priorities, then they should take it up with the big Kahuna and stop jerking the secretaries around. It is another good idea to put this work schedule in writing. Some kind of document that is posted publicly will serve as a good reminder to everyone just what the priorities are for that week. You might also want to pipe Ricky Nelson's song "Garden Party" through your office Muzak system -- "Well, I'm alright now. I've learned my lesson well. You see you can't please everyone. So you've got to please yourself."

Send your personal coaching questions to kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com, call 473-4004, or direct questions to the Outer Banks Sentinel, P.O. Box 546, Nags Head, NC 27949.

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D. is a writer, personal coach, motivational speaker, clinical psychologist and producer/host of the "HeartWaves" radio program (WVOD-FM, 99.1 at 12:40 weekdays). www.heartwavesradio.com and www.fullpotentialliving.com.

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