



## Questions and Answers

**Q:** For the past six months, due to a reorganization, I've worked closely with "Ron" from another department. Our relationship has been rocky because of unclear lines of authority, overlapping projects, and a personality clash. A new senior staff scientist is coming on board to supervise me, Ron, and four others. I want to start off on the right foot with the new boss. How shall I handle the fact that Ron and I haven't worked well together? I'm afraid Ron will try to sour him against me.

**A:** You are right to recognize that work-life success depends as much on being able to solve people problems as it does on your technical competence as a physicist. I recommend you take the following steps.

First, ask yourself whether your disagreements with Ron have to do with a lack of agreement on goals, processes, and outcomes, or whether the problems stem from a lack of trust. If it's just that you don't agree, but you do trust each other, Ron can play a valuable role in your life. Learn to appreciate his probing questions and his requests that you substantiate your ideas. His questions will only serve to strengthen your work in the way that playing tennis against a good opponent strengthens your game.

If, however, the problems in your relationship stem from a breach of trust on your part or his, then focus your energy on rebuilding that trust. Be clear about how you want to be treated and how you'll treat him. Say things such as, "If we have an issue with each other, let's agree to talk first before going to the boss about it." When you separate issues of agreement from issues of trust, it's easier to work on improving the relationship. A resource I highly recommend is *The Empowered Manager*, by Peter Block (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1987).

Second, say to Ron, "We've had a rocky six months. Let's chalk it up to all the uncertainty during reorganization. With the new senior staff scientist arriving next week, I'd

like to declare a fresh start. I propose that we let bygones be bygones, look for common ground in terms of project goals, and be clear about how we want to work together." Being in open conflict with you doesn't help Ron's career any more than it helps yours. So try to give him a way out, a way to save face.

Third, say to the new boss, "I'd like to fill you in on the projects I'm working on, and how I think you can best use me in the future. During the reorganization, there's been some uneasiness that's made it hard for people to work together. But now that you're here, I think things will calm down and I want you to know I'm committed to working effectively with you and everyone in the department. You can count on me."

New supervisors appreciate help in getting up to speed on both the work that needs to be done and the emotional climate of the office. Talk about past conflicts in a way that blames no one and that focuses on the future. Cultivate conflict-resolution skills. Learn how to make a point without making an enemy. Study those at work who have good people skills, and notice what they do. How do they disagree without being disagreeable? How do they deal with difficult people? How do they use humor? How do they talk about issues of trust when things are not going well?

In adversarial workplace situations, put the long-term gain of doing the job well above the short-term temptation of playing out personality clashes. As someone once said, "Sooner or later, everyone sits down to a banquet of consequences." Let yours be based on the fact that you acted with integrity and creativity in difficult times.

**Q:** My resume is seriously out of date. What should a good resume include to be competitive in today's job market?

**A:** A good resume highlights your achievements in such a memorable, easy-to-read way that you get an interview. Follow these guidelines:

1. Focus on achievements and results, not duties and responsibilities. No one cares what you were "responsible for." The only thing that counts is what you did in the position. Start each achievement with an interesting, descriptive, action-oriented verb such as "devised," "tested," or "initiated."

2. Help the reader visualize the extent of your accomplishments by using quantifiers that answer questions about how long, how much, how many, and so forth. Instead of just saying that you design test equipment, include a quantifier to show how many products, or what savings of money or time, have resulted from your efforts.

3. Put the punch at the beginning of the accomplishment statement, not at the end. Instead of writing "Led a team of 20 scientists to improve quality control in the lab, thereby saving \$75,000 annually," write "Saved \$75,000 annually by..."

4. Use the power of graphics to make your resume easy to read. Experiment with bold-face type, italics, bullets, and capitals. Review other people's resumes to see what appeals to your eye. If you don't have the time or talent to do this, take it to someone who knows the software that will make your resume attractive.

Updating your resume is an excellent way to prepare for a job interview. As the primary document in your career file, take the time to work through many drafts until it features the highlights of your life at work. □

### B I O G R A P H Y

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