Maintaining Effective Relations with your Supervisor

Part 6 - Blue Zone Tools (application)

Scenario A: Li

Li is a graduate student in chemistry, working for Dr. Frederick Keller. Overall, she has enjoyed working for Dr. Keller. He has a pleasant manner and is usually quite approachable. Li is a bit concerned though. When she agreed to take on the one-year position, Li understood from the description provided that she would be doing some marking but would also have the opportunity to teach occasionally. It is very important to her that she have the chance to develop her teaching skills. After the first three months, finding that she was only being assigned marking, Li asked Dr. Keller if she would also have an opportunity to teach. He responded abruptly that he was swamped with marking and really needed her to focus on that. This abrupt manner was out of character and left Li feeling unsettled. She was reluctant to bring the subject up again. After six months she is still only doing marking and is becoming more and more upset as time goes on. She feels like Dr. Keller misled her and doesn't care about her goals for the year. Recently, Li has noticed that her frustration is affecting her work. She can tell it is impacting her motivation and productivity and Dr. Keller has commented, asking her if something is wrong. She knows she needs to do something to resolve the situation but is not sure what to do.

1. Obviously, Li cannot go back in time, but if she could, when would have been the ideal time to have a conversation with Dr. Keller? Why?

2. Why do you think this earlier conversation did not happen? What barriers prevented it from happening?

- 3. Use the following questions to help Olivia prepare to "set context" and extend an invitation to Alannah to have a conversation.
 - a. Why does she need to have this conversation?
 - b. How will this conversation benefit her and Dr. Keller?
 - c. What will likely happen if they don't have the conversation?
 - d. Why is it important to this conversation now? Will delaying it make the situation worse?
 - e. What has kept them from having this conversation earlier? Does she need help getting past these barriers?

Draft Context Statement:

Dr. Keller, I have been glad to have the opportunity to work with you this year. I find the research that you are doing to be fascinating, and I am excited to play a part in your work. I believe that we both started year feeling excited about the work that we would be able to do together, but over the past couple of months, something has changed. I am not sure exactly what happened, but I would like to better understand. I believe there may have been some miscommunications or misunderstandings and I am wondering if we could take some time to clear those up so that we can both make the most of our next six months together. When would be a good time to meet?

When would be a good time to chat?

Ask yourself

- Can you hear, "I care"?
- Can you hear, "I want to repair our working relationship"?
- Can you hear, "I want to understand this situation from your point of view"?
- Did she discuss shared goals or potential costs?
- Do you think this invitation would effectively open a door to a conversation Li and Dr. Keller?



Scenario B: Paul

Paul is a PhD student working in the lab of Dr. Susan Chung. Besides overseeing Paul's research project, Dr. Chung is in the process of forming a start-up company.

Paul's project is externally funded and unrelated to Dr. Chung's company. As a result, Dr. Chung spends very little time on Paul's project leaving him to work quite independently. Paul has not been terribly concerned since his work is going well. Recently, though, Dr. Chung has started asking Paul to take on extra tasks that are not related to his project. Tasks that support her start-up company. Doing this extra work is causing Paul to fall behind with his project. He is afraid that If he does not address the situation, he will not be able to meet his next important deadline.