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Career advice: Understanding a new boss

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Hill is this month's Premier 100 IT Leader, answering questions about the side effects of pursuing a graduate degree, the opportunities available through working remotely, and the best way to become a teacher. If you have a question you'd like to pose to one of our Premier 100 IT Leaders, send it to askaleader@computerworld.com and watch for this column each month.

When my boss retired earlier this year, someone from outside was brought in. She operates very differently. Where my old boss liked to pick the staff's

brains and foster discussion, this new one gets ideas of her own and isn't interested in any input from us. Many of us feel we're heading in the wrong direction with some of her initiatives, but we don't get a lot from her about why she's doing what she's doing. What can we do? Understanding what others want and need is one of the hardest challenges in management, and being managed. Often, the experience you are describing stems from basic personality differences or a lack of understanding about what others are perceiving. It may be that your old boss was an extrovert, and thrived on discussion and collaboration, while your new boss is an introvert and is more comfortable working with ideas. Often, the latter can be perceived as not wanting input or just coming up with their own ideas solo, but the reality is they just are not as comfortable asking for input or proactively creating outbound communication. Remember, she is new in the job, does not know the team well, is trying to prove herself, and would likely benefit from you and the team taking the first steps to reach out and collaborate. It may take multiple tries.

It sounds as if you could be waiting for her to somehow know what you want and provide that to you. All good managers and leaders know how to get input from their team and channel that input into action. I suggest giving her the benefit of the doubt and help her with collaboration, something that is obviously a personal challenge for her. If that fails, then she operates at her own peril, because a manager is only as good as her team and she needs you to be successful.

I'm paying my way through graduate school by holding down my full-time job doing networking for



a big company. I'm doing my job as well as ever, but I sense some resentment. I guess I just want someone to tell me what that's all about. Congratulations on your motivation and work ethic. I have managed people pursuing graduate degrees while working full time, and I've done that myself, so I know that you have to manage your energy levels and make sure you are still contributing the same amount of creative energy at work as you did before your graduate studies.

There is a difference between "doing the job" and contributing creative energy that goes beyond basic job requirements. It may be that your co-workers or managers are picking up on an energy change with you and sense you have begun to reallocate your energy away from the job. You may not even be aware of this potential change in you because you are so busy trying to manage all your time demands, and the signs are subtle. They could also have picked up a sense from you that when you get your degree you will begin looking for a new job. Earning a graduate degree says a lot about your character and is excellent career advancement for you, but it can breed resentment in those who believe they see you preparing your exit. Ultimately, they only know what you telegraph or say about yourself. Carefully manage those perceptions, and perhaps obtaining your advanced degree will result in a promotion at your current employer. They would be crazy not to want people like you.

I live in a smallish city where there aren't a lot of options for someone working in IT. I've worked in Windows support and network administration. I like the lifestyle here but the job is getting a bit boring. Every time I think about moving to a bigger city, I feel unhappy. Are there other options I'm unaware of? You have an opportunity to work at the cusp of the continuing trend in IT staffing, especially in the skill positions: working remotely. Before you unhappily pack up for the big city or stay in a rut in a small town, you should aggressively and patiently explore the world of outsourced IT services. Over time, it matters less and less where skilled IT workers are located. Desktop support, help desk roles and network administration are increasingly being managed remotely. End-user companies continue to turn to outsourced providers for these managed IT services.

I would suggest you leverage your skills and look to the companies providing IT outsourcing, managed services and support services before throwing in the towel. If your skills are current and you are self-managing, you should be able to find roles with the increasing numbers of IT service providers that don't care where you actually live. NOCs (network operations centers) are rapidly virtualizing.

Live locally but think globally. Reach out to the many global and regional service providers and systems integrators that provide their customers managed Windows support and network administration services remotely. Leverage this trend for yourself now.

I've been working in networking and security for about 12 years. Lately, as I think about what to do next, I've been thinking that teaching others has been the favorite part of my job. Any suggestions on how to make a move into the training field? After working in networking and security for 12 years, you should have developed considerable expertise. There are many companies that provide IT training, and I would suggest that you "just do it." Apply for the training positions in your skill domain and position your résumé to demonstrate the helping, teaching and supporting aspects of your previous roles. Demonstrate your motivation to become a teacher. Another opportunity for you lies with your local colleges and universities. Many institutions employ adjunct faculty for teaching, which allows you to teach while keeping your day job. And it's a challenge for them to find qualified instructors. You may find that a balance of continuing to be a practitioner while teaching is the most rewarding. It allows you to stay current and not rely on teaching full time, not to mention earning a higher income than teaching alone. Reach out to the IT skills educational companies, of which there are many. If you are willing to travel to teach courses, your opportunities will expand even more. I know personally that people who are skilled, technically current *and* good teachers are hard to find. You should have success with this path if you apply yourself to it.