

Mind Your Manners

The stereotypical view of scientists is that they don't have good interpersonal skills, which are crucial to good management. But scientists have one key advantage over many other industrial managers: they're used to working in teams. "The inclusive multifunctional team or work group is the basic unit in industrial science today," says Truman Odiome, director of reliability systems in the chemistry systems division of Dade International (Newark, DE).

Good business manners are essential in team situations, Odiome believes. "A sense of professional courtesy and respect for your colleagues *as* colleagues should form the basis of successful team operations," he says.

Cherry Murray is also a big believer in the positive power of patience. The head of the semiconductor research department of Lucent Technologies (Murray Hill, NJ), she has a group of about 20 people reporting directly to her. "People often come to me with work-related problems or suggestions,"

Murray says. "Tempting though it may be to talk with them only briefly, I find it makes sense to let someone speak his or her mind, explaining things in his or her own way, even if it takes ten minutes instead of two."

Besides being courteous, Murray's behavior is practical: If she truly understands what subordinates are saying, she can provide the proper guidance and assistance, and both she and the employee will make fewer subsequent mistakes.

Perhaps the occasion when it's hardest to maintain a cordial demeanor is when you're involved in a workplace debate. "I've sometimes found this very tough," admits Dan R. Baker, technical manager in the fusion research group at General Atomics (San Diego, CA). "You're trying to convince someone that you are right about a procedure, plan, or point of research, while he's trying to convince you that he is right. It's all too easy to lose one's temper and let good manners fly out the window."

C o m - plicating this sort of encounter, is the fact that as you become tense and agitated, you look and sound more antagonistic. The way some managers handle criticism is a pet peeve of Sanjeeva N.

Murthy, senior principal scientist in the materials characterization group of Allied Signal (Morristown, NJ). "An essential rule of polite behavior, is never, ever criticize someone in front of a third party," explains Murthy. Public criticism is painful not only for the person being raked over the coals; "It's perhaps more embarrassing for those who are forced to be observers," Murthy says. As for the manager doing the criticizing, he or she may easily come off looking like a fool or a petty tyrant. 

