How to manage creative types (with a minimum of fuss)

M. Simon, Technical Contributor

The First Mate and I were discussing this Harvard Business Review [1] article the other day, and I noticed a lot of allusions to myself.

The article is about how to manage creative types. There are seven main points (numbered), but I'm only going to comment on a few.

1. **Spoil them and let them fail** - If you are looking for bleeding edge work sometimes, you will be going over the edge. And there is usually no way to tell where the edge is unless you go past it. If you are good AND lucky, you can pull back before total disaster - but not always. The best thing to do is to plan for disaster. And that may mean a plan for rolling up your tent and going home. Better luck next time - hopefully you learned something. But if you don't support your guy (it usually is a guy) at the edge, he will take his marbles and play elsewhere. Is that what you really want? Really?

2. **Surround them by semi-boring people** - Someone has to keep the organization functioning. But they should not be so boring that they don't "get" the guy on the edge.

6. **Surprise them** - More like let them surprise you. Which will often be a surprise to them.

7. **Make them feel important** - That is not hard. Let them and assist them in accomplishing something. What is the point of being creative if you can't create? There is a point. And it hurts. If you like creating. All this was brought on by a piece about Harper Reed [2] and how the Democrats seem more at home with the creative types and it helped them win the 2012 Presidential Election. Harper says this about himself:

> *...if I'm going to do this, and look like an idiot, I have to step up. Like if we're all at zero, I have to be at 10 because I have this stupid mustache.*"

My looks are not so unusual now, but in the early days of my career, like Harper, I stuck out like a sore thumb. Add in a splash of strong arrogance not unknown in the nerd community with very strong opinions about a lot of things, and I, too, had to be at least a 9 to make my way. Although my self-confidence (arrogance) served me well in job interviews - when moderated with a touch of reality. What everybody I ever worked for liked was my strong commitment to results. Testable results. Reliable results. That was especially important in my work in aerospace where I did two stints of two years each for the same company with a ten-year interval between stints. I like to think I was doing something right.

M. Simon's e-mail can be found on the sidebar at Space-Time Productions [3].

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