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Getting Your Work Noticed

by **Lawrence Van Gelder**
[The New York Times](#)

Doesn't everyone want to be recognized for good work? Before that can happen, however, someone has to take notice, and sometimes a little strategic prodding is necessary.

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In the early 1980's, Steve Conroy worked in the public relations department of a hot advertising agency in Farmington, Conn. But, he says, "the hard-working, entrepreneurial owner just hated to see his workers coming in just a little late and then

leaving just a little early." "It was almost an insult to all he had done and provided for them," Mr. Conroy adds.

Mr. Conroy, who now has his own public relations company in Boston, writes:

"To combat this, I told my department that I didn't care what they did all day, out of sight from the front office, but no one was to leave at 5. And, everyone, whether they drank coffee or not, was to bring his cup down to the agency kitchen -- across from that front office -- only after 5 p.m. We called it the 5:17 Rule."

Did it work? "Every time we went to the president of the company, he always gave us what we wanted," Mr. Conroy says. "Our department didn't lose a person in six years." It expanded with more employees, as well as more space on a remodeled floor, more computers and even a nearby shower for runners like Mr. Conroy.

"Of course, we had to do a good job." he adds, "It wasn't all predicated on coffee cups and 5:17, but it sure didn't hurt."

Not every strategy produces its desired results, and even if it succeeds, it may not be without risk.

Stan Kurzban, now retired and living in Chappaqua, N.Y., can attest to that.

About 10 years ago, when he was a senior instructor in the education department at I.B.M., his manager asked him to help with his evaluation by sending him a file that described what Mr. Kurzban had done in the last year.

"Wanting -- and feeling -- that I deserved the top evaluation of 1, I named the file WHYONE," Mr. Kurzban writes,

After their meeting to formalize the evaluation, the manager told Mr. Kurzban that he had decided to give him the 1.

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But, the manager added, he had reconsidered -- though only briefly -- when he saw the name on the file.

These days, Winston Wenyan Ma is studying for a master's degree in business administration at the University of Michigan, but not long ago he was a junior associate at Davis Polk & Wardwell, the Wall Street law firm.

He says that when a firm takes training seriously, as that firm did, the effort to acquire knowledge beyond what is offered or required can pay off.

As a derivatives securities lawyer, Mr. Ma dealt with derivatives groups at major investment banks. "While lawyers focus mainly on legal issues in those transactions, it helps to learn about the finance side of those complex derivatives products to communicate with bankers more effectively," he writes. "So I went to the N.Y.U. Stern Business School for an evening class on options, futures and derivatives. Senior people knew that I was doing extra studies, and I eventually developed a reputation being a 'finance guy' in the group, i.e., a lawyer with substantive knowledge of financial products.

"On one occasion, my client -- a bank's in-house counsel -- informed us about an internal technical discussion among the bankers. The in-house counsel never expected any input from us, but because I was sitting in a derivatives class with John Hull, the author of the textbook that is the bible on derivatives, I was able to supply a way of approaching the issue, which really impressed the client and my boss."

Mr. Ma's peers began to consult him, and his superiors began to give him more challenging assignments.

After three years with Davis Polk, Mr. Ma, left to pursue his business degree with a focus on financial derivatives.

When Bonnie Clewans was hired in 1989 as a head nurse at the Department of Veterans Affairs hospital in Buffalo, she went through a lengthy, complex hiring process that concluded with a determination of her rank and salary.

"Once I was hired, my name was added to the list of all the head nurses," Ms. Clewans writes from Williamsville, N.Y., a suburb of Buffalo, where she is now retired from nursing and is the owner of the Bead Gallery, a design-your-own-accessories shop.

The list, with its names and salary grades, was posted prominently in the nursing office and scrutinized carefully by Ms. Clewans's colleagues.

"I was the first new hire who was classified senior grade, which essentially meant I was the highest-paid new staff member," she says. "My new boss pointed this out and made sure I knew this would cause some discontent."

That was when Ms. Clewans made her move. She has bachelor's and master's degrees in nursing and certifications in critical care from the American Association of Critical Care Nurses and in nursing administration from the American Nurses Association.

"I decided to meet this potentially hostile workplace with some marketing," she writes. "The first thing I did was to frame and hang every diploma, certificate, letter of thanks and anything else that looked official. My new co-workers entered my office and gazed at the walls in almost utter amazement.

"One was so shocked, she uttered, 'I guess you did deserve senior grade.' "

How about self-promotion disguised as altruism? That, in essence, is the approach advocated by Lee E. Miller and Jessica Miller, his daughter, in their book, "A

Woman's Guide To Successful Negotiating" (McGraw-Hill, 2002).

Mr. Miller is a business consultant and executive coach in Morristown, N.J., and his daughter is a commercial real estate developer in Washington.

Their advice goes this way:

"When you want to inform key people of your accomplishments, send an e-mail commending your subordinates for their work on the project. That way you can laud the accomplishment as much as you like without looking like you are promoting yourself. By giving credit to others you not only communicate your successes but show what a good boss you are. As an added bonus, you improve the morale and productivity of the people who work for you."

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