

HELP!

I HAVE A MANAGER!



HOW TO UNDERSTAND YOUR MANAGER'S JOB
& DO AWESOME WORK TOGETHER

— BY JULIA EVANS —

Why this zine?

I've been working as a programmer for 6 years and I've had 8 managers. When I started out, I didn't really understand my manager's job or how to work with them.



Since then, I've had some GREAT working relationships with managers and a few less good ones. Having a good relationship with my manager is the most important factor in my happiness at work.



if working with my manager well is so important, maybe I can do things to make that better!

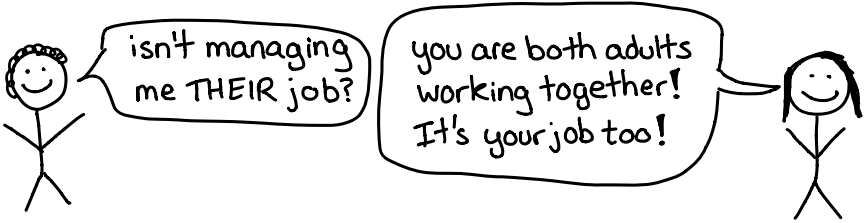
What this zine is about:

- strategies that would have helped my past self work better with her managers
- a little bit of explaining what a manager's job is

What this zine ISN'T about:

- how to deal with a bad manager ← very hard ☹️
- universal advice for everyone. I am just one person who's mostly worked at one company 😊

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what's your manager's job?

Understanding a little about your manager's job helps you work well with them! Some things your manager is responsible for:

make sure the team is doing important projects



- X is a priority this quarter!

keep projects on track



CEO

what's the status of X project?



needs to answer

communicate with other teams



we're doing - X



our teams should collaborate on that!

person on other team

help team members grow



•• I learned so much this year!

how to work well with your manager

Most of the rest of this zine is about

COMMUNICATION

Basically your manager's job is to make sure that your team is getting work done that will help the business.

This is ^{.....}♥♥ awesome ♥♥ because it means that if you just communicate with them well, then you can mostly focus on programming!!!

Communicating well can help you:

get awesome opportunities

solve problems

build trust

understand priorities

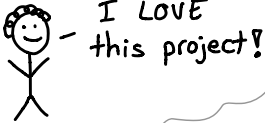
get promoted

get feedback

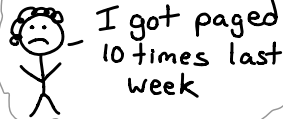
To start, let's talk about 1:1s (which hopefully your manager schedules regularly ☺)

what to talk about in 1:1s

what's been going well



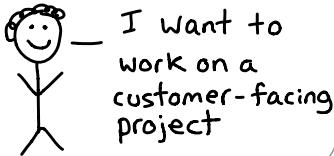
what's not going well



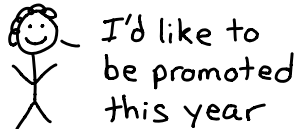
team priorities



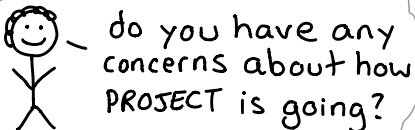
ask for opportunities



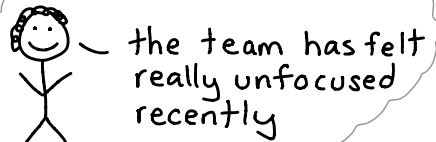
career planning



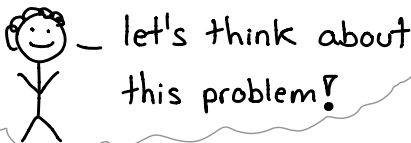
ask for feedback



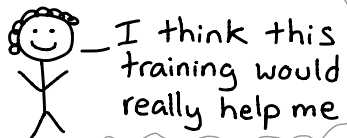
give feedback



brainstorm

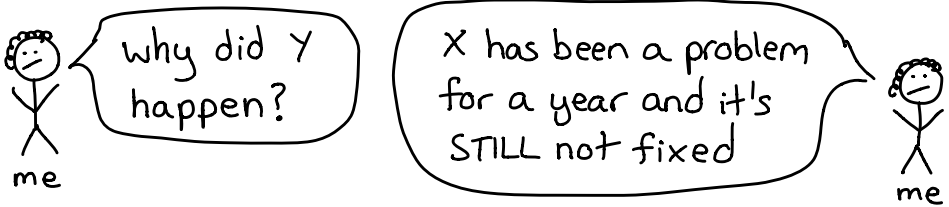


ask for resources

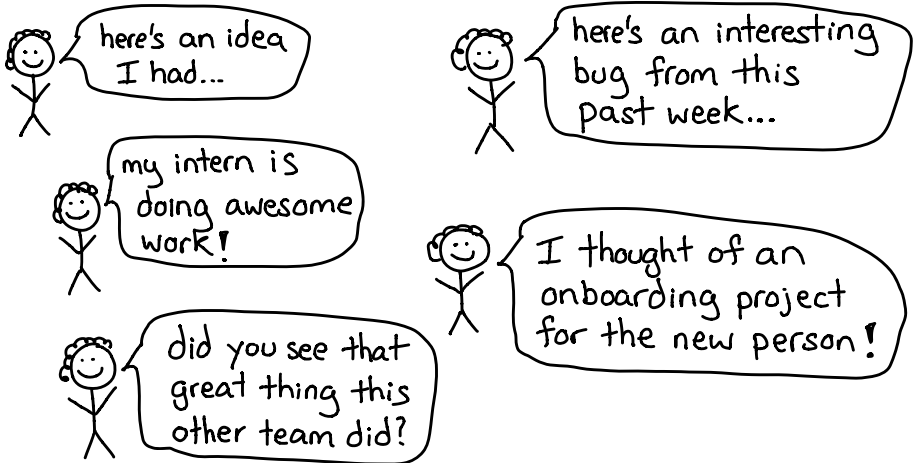


keep conversations mostly constructive

I've had periods with some managers where, every time we talk, we're talking about SOME problem:



These days, I try to bring up problems that I'm interested in fixing and bring ideas for solutions when I can. Often we just talk about our work:



Venting can be useful too though sometimes! If there's a problem, it's often helpful to bring it up even if I don't have a solution.

set clear expectations

I used to often get stressed out about whether the way I was prioritizing my work was reasonable.



I'm spending a lot of time on X and no time on Y. I hope that's okay!!!

Everything got easier once I could just:

- ① come up for a plan for what to prioritize
- ② tell my manager the plan and ask if it sounds good
- ③ trust them when they say yes 😊



this quarter I'm planning to get **BIG PROJECT** done and spend time with my intern. I'm not planning to work on **OTHER PROJECT** at all.



Sounds good!
Just do X too?

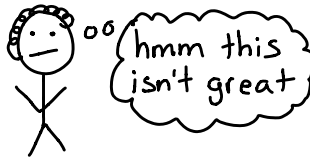
Setting expectations is awesome because:

- I feel confident that my plans are reasonable
- my manager is aware of what I'm planning and can coordinate

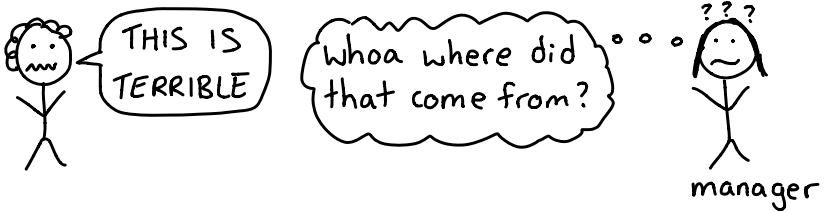
Everybody wins!!!

talk about problems early

Every so often I'll start with a small problem



and forget to talk about it until I'm REALLY MAD



It's way better to bring up a problem early and figure it out before it turns into a big deal!



work with your manager to get promoted

Where I work, my manager wants people on the team to get promoted. If people are being promoted, it (hopefully) means that they're growing & getting more awesome at their jobs, which makes the team's manager look good!



huh, maybe promotions are just a normal thing we can have a conversation about?

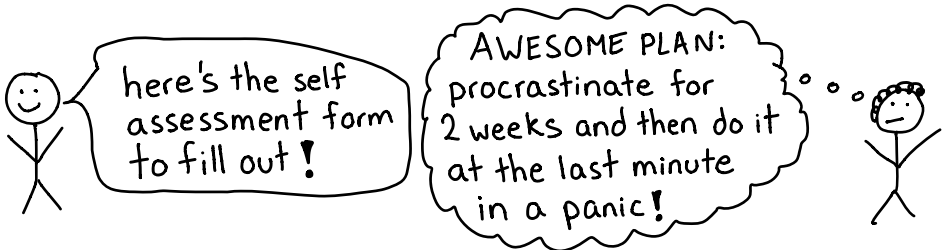
Some ways to start conversations:

- can we walk through the expectations for the next level to make sure that I understand them?
- what areas do you think I should focus on?
- if I accomplished X Y Z, do you think that would be enough to get promoted?

If this is something you care about, keep checking in periodically! The person who cares the most about your career is you ♡♡

on surviving performance reviews

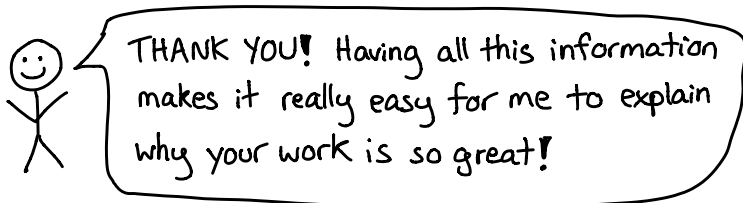
Performance reviews can be really stressful.



Here's what I've been doing for the last year or so, which has helped! About a month before performance review season comes around, I'll compile a HUGE DOCUMENT with:

- every project I did in the last year
 - ★ the project's goals & results
 - ★ cool graphs/metrics that show it was a success
 - ★ what my contributions to the project were
- people I've mentored (eg an intern!)
- project plans & documentation I've written

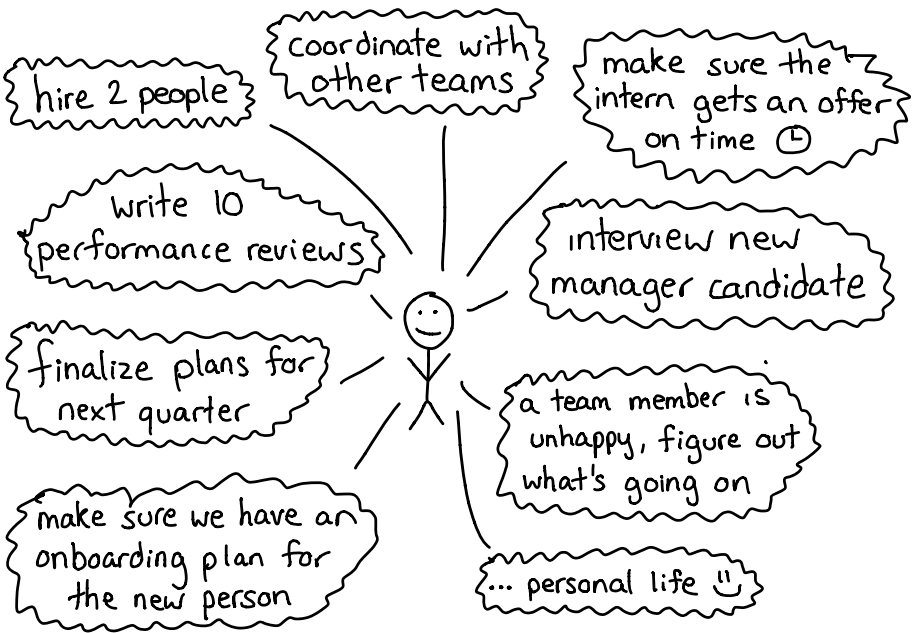
and send it to my manager. My manager's reaction:



remember they're only human

Sometimes I fall into a trap where I think my manager should be able to solve EVERY problem on the team and if they're not then they're not doing their job.

It's helpful for me to remember that at any given time they're probably dealing with a lot!



I try to be somewhat aware of what my manager is dealing with & help out when I can.

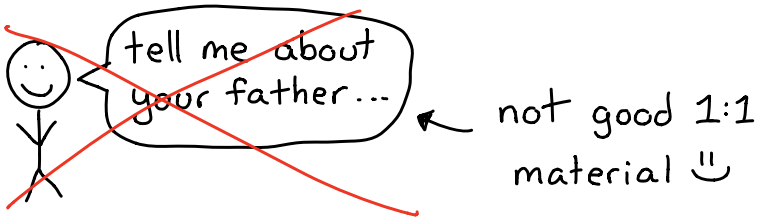


On emotional labour

"Emotional labour" is the idea that dealing with feelings-related problems is work.



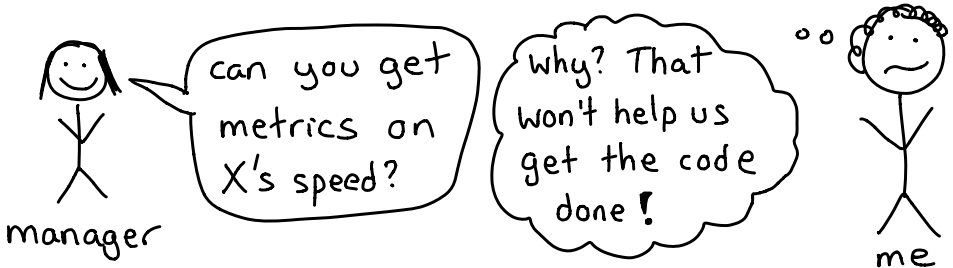
Emotional labour is part of what managers are paid to do. But!! Managers aren't therapists.



When I'm upset about something, I try to be clear about why and ideally explain what I think a reasonable resolution would be.



Understand their goals and priorities



They might be asking for metrics because:

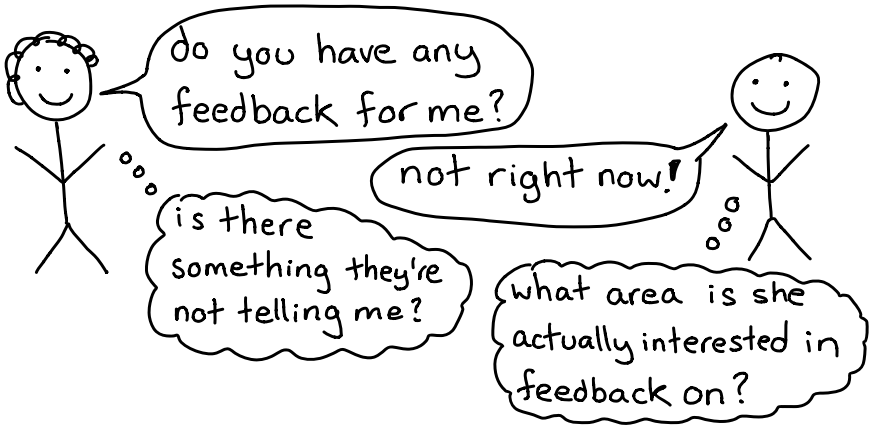
- ① they're hearing complaints about X being slow (that you might not be hearing!)
- ② without metrics, it's hard for them to have an informed conversation about those complaints (& defend you if X is actually fast!)

Having regular conversations about their priorities for the team is SO USEFUL and means that I'm surprised less often 😊😊



ask for specific feedback

I used to ask for feedback like this:



I've learned that I get ★WAY BETTER★ answers if I ask more specific questions!

what do you think of this design?

did I prioritize these things well?

was that email clear?

should I be doing more or less of X?

do you have any concerns about PROJECT?

Bonus: asking specific questions forces me to actually think about which areas I might want to focus on 😊

figure out what they're great at

Different managers are good at different things! I've worked with managers who are amazing at:

product design

helping people resolve conflicts

understanding the business

building remote teams

prioritizing ruthlessly

running meetings

solving tricky technical problems

organizational politics

Not every manager is good at every single thing, and that's okay! I like to figure out what my manager is awesome at and lean on them for those things ♥

Also, strengths change over time! If they're not good at something today, maybe check back in a year & see if that's changed.

build the support system you need

The flip side of "figure out what things they're great at" is that there are always going to be things your manager can't help you with. When that happens, there are a few choices:

- ① Get mad that they can't help
- ② Resign yourself to not getting help with those things
- ③ Find help elsewhere!!!

her blog is GREAT

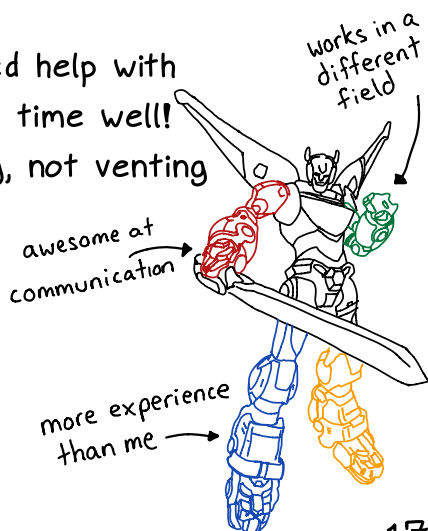
Lara Hogan has an amazing blog post called "When your manager isn't supporting you, build a Voltron"★ about building a crew of people with lots of different skills who you can ask for help!

Some tips she has:

- figure out what you need help with before asking. Use their time well!
- focus on problem solving, not venting

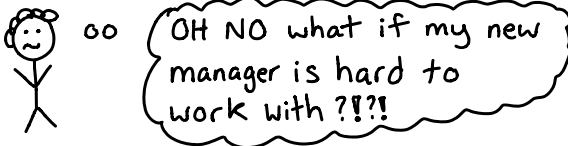
★ A Voltron is a robot built out of several other robots

bit.ly/managervoltronbingo has a useful bingo card!

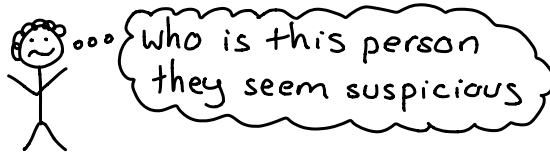


getting a new manager

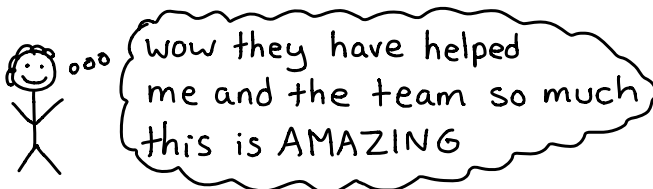
Being assigned a new manager is a little scary.
Not all of my managers have been great!



But! More than once I've started out thinking



and ended up, a year later, at

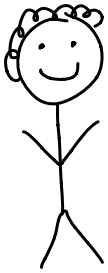


so I try to assume that's where we'll end up.

Some things I've found helpful:

- write a document explaining my past work to them
- ask them about any concerns directly - often they have great answers!
- pay close attention to what they do well
- tell them when they do something great

further reading



thank you so much for reading!
Here are a couple people
I've learned from:

The Manager's Path by Camille Fournier \rightarrow also has a great blog!

A great book about engineering management.

Super useful for learning what a manager's job is, even if you never want to be a manager :)

Lara Hogan's blog (<https://larahogan.me/blog>)

Mostly aimed at managers, but has some amazing posts for non-managers (for instance "what do I do if I'm being underpaid?")

★ acknowledgements ★

Cover art by Deise Lino

Thanks to Jay, Kamal, Brett, Maya, Marco, Maggie, Allison, Marc, Will, and many others ♥



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