

Being the go-to guy
They're smart, efficient and they get things done

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The go-to guy. He's the person in your office you turn to when you need a piece of information that no one else has. He's the high-achieving type you turn to when you need to get something done fast. She's the one who smiles accommodatingly when you hand her yet another task even though she's maxed out with work.

"The go-to person gets things done," said Stephen Goldberg, a workplace coach and trainer with Optimus Performance in Pointe Claire. "He's accomplishment oriented. He has a lot of knowledge and is not afraid to make decisions. He could even be the boss." The go-to guy works and thrives in certain kinds of workplace cultures, Goldberg said, and his very existence says a lot about those working environments, not all of it positive.

In his role as a workplace consultant to small- and medium-size businesses, Goldberg sees three kinds of go-to people: the experts, the achievers and the pleasers.

The expert, he said, is the guy who's knowledgeable.

"He may be a centre of expertise about something in particular or a generalist who knows how things function," he said.

But knowledge is power and in a perfect world, Goldberg said, this expert go-to guy would share power by sharing knowledge.

"When people refuse to share their knowledge, it's a way of harbouring power," he said. "If you're not encouraged by your company to share your knowledge, it could be because there's a lack of trust or transparency in the organization.

"Or, you may be keeping your knowledge to yourself because it enables you to control things. Fear causes the expert to hold on to his knowledge." It can also be problematic for the organization if the expert go-to guy leaves and takes his knowledge with him. This kind of go-to guy should be encouraged to share knowledge by mentoring or coaching other workers, Goldberg said.

The achiever go-to guy's mantra is often: "To get a job done right, you have to do it yourself." "He's the guy who's motivated by getting results," Goldberg said. "I once consulted to a company that manufactured machinery. It was a small company of about 25 people and they couldn't seem to deliver products on time. But there was one person in the company who supervised a department and his department was the only one that could deliver on time. He ran a tight ship and, unfortunately, was considered a bit of a dictator, so there was problem with his management style. But he did produce." And he became the manager people went to for results.

"As the company grew, the man was given more responsibility until he became the operations manager.

"But people from various departments would still go to him to fix problems because he's accomplishment oriented," he said. "Also, he's not afraid to make decisions." The problem in this go-to scenario, Goldberg said, is that other workers were not assuming responsibility. Moreover, the go-to guy was shouldering much more responsibility than necessary for other people's work and it impinged on his ability to perform his own job.

"I was consulting to someone who owns two hotels," Goldberg said. "As the company owner, he's the go-to guy and he fired his general managers because they couldn't live up to his expectations. So now, he's doing their jobs as well as his own." When go-to people continuously pick up the slack for others in their organization, he said, the result is a disempowered workforce.

"Front-line workers should be autonomous. Each department has a manager who should be delegating work to employees, but he'll end up doing their work if he hasn't taught them to do their jobs. Managers become go-to people when they don't empower their workers to take responsibility and that has a domino effect right up the management chain," he said.

"Managers who do the work of their disempowered employees force the next person up the corporate ladder to pick up the slack for them." Another type of go-to person is "the pleaser." "I was consulting in one company that had a purchaser who was a helper type," Goldberg said. "Everyone would go to him to order goods. The problem in his case was that he wanted to please everyone and he would make too many promises and be unable to fulfill them." Receptionists in some companies often become go-to people by default, he said.

"Receptionists tend to be pleasant and are good with people. Everyone goes to the receptionist if he doesn't have a secretary. The result is work overload. She drops the ball and feels bad about it because she's not living up to expectations." Go-to people might get an ego boost from their role, but it seldom benefits the organizations in which they work.

"Go-to people need to empower others by training them and sharing their knowledge," Goldberg said. "Ultimately, they need to relinquish the go-to job."

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Are you the go-to person in your workplace?

Stephen Goldberg, workplace coach and trainer with Optimus Performance, says there are several things go-to people can do to step out of the role.

The pleaser needs to set boundaries.

"This person needs to be more assertive with people. For instance, when the overworked receptionist is being given more tasks, she needs to question people about how quickly they need the work and agree on an alternative solution."

The expert can stop being a go-to person if he agrees to share his knowledge with others. He can also mentor co-workers.

The achiever must realize that others in the organization are capable of taking on tasks.

"He needs to delegate work and train his staff."

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