

WORK IT RIGHT!
Improving Relationships On and Off the Job

by Gini Graham Scott

WHEN SWEET REVENGE ISN'T SO SWEET

Sometimes the notion of “sweet revenge” seems so fitting. Someone has promised to meet a critical deadline but doesn’t come through. A boss has treated you like an ogre and doesn’t give you credit after you work extra hard. A client guarantees to hire you for a project, but hires a friend.

You may think sweet revenge might be just the ticket to get back at those who wrong you, believing no one will know, if, for example, you make an anonymous complaint by letter or phone. But think again. Sometimes sweet revenge isn’t so sweet, and the fire you start can spread and burn you.

That’s what happened to Betty when she contacted Jane, a recently hired PR person, to get product information for the company newsletter she wrote. After writing about companies providing a gourmet food delivery service, she wanted to sample a typical lunch delivery to include her personal reaction.

But then Betty had problems getting a product sample. After some back and forth e-mails and phone calls, Jane said she asked the service to messenger the company that manufactured the product directly, and added that Betty had been overly demanding and unprofessional in her persistent requests.

At once, Betty exploded, angry that Jane hadn’t initially referred her to the appropriate contact and insulted that Jane had accused HER of being rude and unprofessional. Though Betty called the food company and got the delivery in time for her deadline, she stewed about what Jane had done, and considered ways to express

her anger, such as writing a nasty letter to Jane telling her off for her “rude and unprofessional” e-mail and unhelpful behavior. She even imagined calling Jane’s boss to describe what happened, justifying her actions on the grounds this information might help Jane’s boss train her to better deal with clients or find someone better able to do this.

Yet should Betty do anything at all to get back at Jane; should she seek some sweet revenge? Unfortunately, despite any initial satisfaction, the downside is that any effort at revenge could easily backfire. For instance, an angry e-mail or phone call could lead to an escalating war of words, while contacting Jane’s employer could come off as mean and vindictive, particularly since Jane was a new PR person, just learning the ropes.

So what should Betty or anyone else feeling vengeful do? Generally, it’s better to deal with your angry, insulted feelings and find a more constructive way to respond, rather than giving in to the initial desire to strike back which can lead to escalating conflict and disaster. Just think road rage, airline rage, or other explosions of anger that can even turn deadly. And if you respond anonymously in today’s information age, such responses tend not to stay anonymous very long.

Thus, instead of acting to seek revenge, a good approach when feeling wronged is waiting until your initial feelings of anger subside. Then, if possible, call or write that person and ask to discuss what happened, preferably one-on-one. If they agree, have a heart-to-heart talk in which you calmly discuss what happened and how you felt, with a view to improving your relationship with the future. Or if your boss is not likely to be understanding, if you want to stay on the job, it’s best to contain your anger and let it go, or transform it into doing something productive and profitable.

In short, sweet revenge is often only sweet for a short time, and the long term effects can turn out very sour, when your efforts to seek revenge backfire.

Today's Take-Aways:

- Sweet revenge is often not sweet at all; instead the effort often goes sour and leaves a very bitter taste.
- The problem with seeking revenge is it often ends up seeking you.
- A big danger of seeking revenge is you can fan the flames of conflict even higher, and they end up burning you.

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