MANAGER'S BLACK BOOK

18+

Introduction

An overweight, usually unshaven four-eyes, who's been damn lucky with his bosses and more so with his subordinates, who tolerated his paroxysms of management.

The book has been mostly written during trips and flights.

It contains strong language and we warn you here, so your discretion is advised.

The book is written for those who work in management and those who want to become managers. The book is short, somewhat harsh and simple as a village idiot. I give you fair warning (and i really mean it): if you are faint of heart- stop right now.

It's written in a form of a frank and straightforward dialogue between company owner and his manager, both working in software development company. It's not about methodology and not even about business — it's about the relationships between business as a whole and a Product Manager as a person in charge of software development process. So, if you're suffering because of lack of resources/response. Or simply because a customer who is unable to clearly communicate his requirements and doesn't understand that you're doing your best. Well, then in this book you may find some answers to your desperate questions.

This book attempts to immunize Engineering Managers against the arrogance and stars in the eyes that often happens with us, software people. Since we all are so firmly convinced that we are the ones making business go round, as opposed to the fact that it is the business itself that nurses us and keeps us warm to prevent runny nose. This book has no claim to being an eye-opener or a source of the absolute truth of life. It is merely one more attempt or one more point of view, and not necessary the right one.

Also, I don't claim to be an Software Business guru with experience going back as far as the dark ages. I'm just sharing the knowledge I gained from my superiors (with whom I have been very lucky), as well as that which I now

hear from clients and customers over a beer after another coaching session or training.

Let's put it this way: if I had read such a book when I was starting out, then I would probably have acted quite differently and wouldn't have pissed off all of my bosses and line-managers to the extent I actually did.

I wrote the whole thing in a state of anger, which is why the text turned out "dark" and malicious, which I personally find quite appealing. There may be a "Manager's White Book" in the future (that is if I manage to talk Alex Orlov into writing it).

I often end up speaking your words in this book, Alex, therefore the ideas you shared with me found their breeding ground.

As Slava described me in his book as a sleeping innocent on the window seat, I felt obliged to write a foreword to it — don't want to appear the person who missed out all the action after all.

I want say that this book is somewhat unique. Some may feel uncomfortable with his outrageously cynical approach to money. Anybody but you I hope. For the amount of profit the manager brings to the company shows his productivity and as a result the company's brought to the people he or she works for. All of these things — respect for the customers, managers, each colleague — they are all tightly interconnected. And this book specifically focuses on this interconnection.

Some people may be put off by the strong language. I should say that it's a test of a sort: will you be able to separate the form from the content or not. A swearing customer can

seem obnoxious to you, until you learn the reason behind such language. Perhaps, he's just lost his money because of a mistake that you made, and as a result he and his family have to move out his house.

Similarly, a cursing boss is not necessarily a petty tyrant. More than likely, he has issues,

and more likely than not, you are the cause of them. So why not to try to listen to him? Can you separate the content from the form? This book will help you understand.

[I'm totally serious, it's gonna be candid and simple words]

[OK, I respect your decision.]

[to make a long story short, some subjects will be laid out in the first-person; for your convenience just try to imagine your boss flying off the handle and speaking his mind about how things actually are]

[OK, then put on your helmet and find a nice quiet place for us to speak heart-to-heart and take this vitamin of fortune and happiness together]

The Job.

Why the result really matters

Why the hell are you whining?

You haven't been given this, you haven't been provided with that, not enough staff...

If problems could work themselves out, then I would create a button for it and stop listening to your fucking excuses. The ship is going in a completely different direction, because they don't fucking listen... Deadlines have been dumped on you from on high. The salesmen have promised the customers the fucking moon, and you don't have the faintest idea how to deliver it? I'm just FUCKING SICK OF IT!!!

If somebody has sold something which is impossible for you to create then you have two options: you either have the guts to confront the salesman/boss and tell him that it's an impossible task or you simply don't start doing. If you DO manage it, they will expect it every time — so why not sell the moon? Think about it: first you tell them that it's impossible, then you actually do the job — so who's fucking pulling the wool over whose eyes? If you do the job once — you'll be doing it every time they need you to, because their job is to make a profit, aka lower costs to increase margin, ¿comprende, muchacho?

And by the way, it's the salesman's Porsche that is in your parking space, because he never moans! I, as the business owner, don't mind giving him his due. As long as he keeps up the sales, who gives a shit?!

Your job is not to find reason why, your job is to do what you are told. No whining, arguing or complaining to your team that everything is simply fucked up here. It's 'not working out' just means that you're not doing what's required of you to make it work. Words of wisdom: the performance of an employee does not depend on the project or company he is working for. The truth is that some people are efficient and some simply aren't. Look at the other managers: good managers create good teams who turn in consistently good work. Bad managers struggle to create teams and consequently hand in crap. Are they charmed, or is it you who's living in some parallel

fuckin' universe? Think again.

Yeah, sometimes projects just won't take off, offices will be closed down, companies will collapse, and customers will be driven away. Heck, shit happens. And very often it's certain people who cause the shit to hit the fan. If the employee acknowledges this fact and admits to himself that it's definitely HE is the one who screwed up, screwed up by not taking his job seriously and not giving the customer what he wanted. If he understands this, then next time in similar situation he will not make the same mistake again. And when he realizes that he has fucked up, he will be driven to avoid making the same mistake twice. So there's no magic formula, success is based on hard work. A man wiser than me once said, 'A positive approach yields multiple opportunities, a negative approach yields multiple excuses'. If you can't fucking remember it — write it down.

Work isn't the same as school — you don't get grades for what you know, it's about getting the required result. I don't give a shit about the mechanics of how you got the job done as long as it's done within budget and with the minimum of aggravation. I'm not the devil and I'm not interested in tedious details. I don't give a fuck about your whining and complaining — I need the job done without your lousy fucking bitching.

Ignorance is no excuse for failure. Doing means getting a result, knowing is some fucking abstract potential. If you don't know — ask. Otherwise surf the web, if you have to find someone who does know and if you have to

meet him on your own time, at your own cost, eat magic mushrooms do whatever it takes to get me the result I want.

Experience.

The real value of your experience

Experience, schmexperience, certificates...

It is only until you work here that you're worth something, and out there you're just another unemployed bastard who tries to trade his skills for the comfortable illusion of those skills being worth something on their own. Business and managers need one another. I repeat: EACH OTHER, business does not exist for you to fulfill your personal ambitions. Catch on to it while it's still free: your skills are not self-sufficient — they only convert into money after you're given a project, a customer and a team.

"But I have experience!" you tell me. And I have the money, customers, projects, and office... So what?! If you're such a smartass and a know-it-all about how business should be done in our charming industry, then start up your own business and do whatever you fucking like. Why the fuck are you whining that everything is wrong, namely the customers and our team, huh? The entry fee for this industry is peanuts, so open your own company, catch a project on some freelancer-fucking-net and sweat.

Oh, you have a mortgage, ah, the market is soooo uncertain, and your customer is less loyal than a cat? Hey, are you really trying to sell me that wussy bullshit? I'm the one taking on these risks here, and I take them on every fucking day, while you're just sitting at a nearest bar and sipping your beer, eating nuts and bitching about your job.

Money (a.k.a. dough).

Where your company gets money from
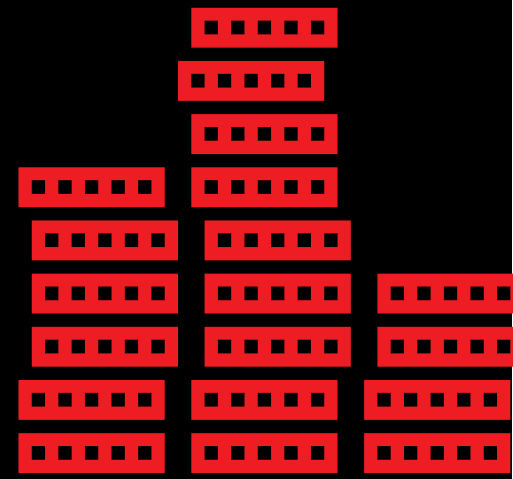
You want good money without giving a fuck about where it's actually come from. Well, babe, let's get things straight here. Business is similar to marriage, which means that a good spouse, i.e. a good manager, always wants to know and actually knows how his or her dearest earns money. And if you're just another babe looking for a ride, the business won't marry you, and won't live a happy life with you, and won't share with you — it'll simply use you, and you'll be had in all ways possible and then disposed of. An awful truth, ain't it?

Some people have certificates, others just have big boobs, whatever. And if it's just money that you are looking for, and your attitude simply lies in "gimme", blinding you from seeing the process, then how can I, as a business owner, have the slightest grain of respect for you? And where the fuck does the surprise come from, that when getting a raise you're automatically moving up in line towards being fired? Show some attitude, show something other than a lousy "gimme-gimme" attitude, be someone who's eager to do something in order to earn more, or just carry on sitting on your fucking ass, counting your crappy money — but in this case, don't you dare ask for a raise.

Oh, you lead a low-profit department? And it's a long way to your customer? That's the lamest excuse ever! Who needs to hear this? ME, for real? Are you stupid, or what? I hear you talking, there are two of us here, though it's obviously not me who'll buy that bullshit, so perhaps you are talking to someone else? (That was the last hint by the way).

Put your thinking cap on for god's sake. If your mother told you that you're the best, or even if it was you yourself generated a great idea — it's okay as long as it doesn't stand in the way of your work; and if it does — it's up to you where you're going to take your ego next. I'm here to make money, thus you're either with me, or piss off. Sooner or later it will depend on the current situation on the market and on your project. By the way, don't forget

that it's not you who decides whether you work here or not.

Now let's talk about your people's salary. This one is way simpler. If a person is able to accomplish 80 per cent of tasks on their own, their salary is the average market amount. If the percentage is about 100, we pay them the highest market amount and think about how to make the best use of their brains for the company's benefit in other fields of our industry. If employees perform their tasks on autopilot, we substitute them with less capable ones and try to use their brains somewhere where such brains are needed. Yep, I'm well informed that it's the biggest pain in the ass, to replace people who are already filling a niche and are good at it. Yep, I know that it's convenient for you. But employees will eventually be bored to death, and your task is to prevent them from getting old in the same position, so shift them around, shuffle them, let their mind work constantly while you think about how to rotate people and figure out who should be substituted by whom — that is precisely what you are here for.

Compare people according to their contribution to the common business. Those who contribute more and show a better result, earn more. Those who contribute less are free to take offence and whine about their lousy salary, even if they work here longer than everyone else. Surprise, surprise! We don't give bonuses for length of service; they've chosen the wrong industry and the wrong agency. That's the scheme. You rank people by salary, sorting the list in descending order: the one contributing more is moved up — without emotions being brought into play, metrics, or measures, just your opinion will do. If your words are not enough, I'll ask, don't worry in advance. And if after such ranking people who earn less rose above those who earn more, give the former a raise, and think about what to do with those, who dropped in the rankings. A second trial period is a tough choice, although keeping on those who have burned out is a road to hell. Try speaking to them, ask them about what they need to continue working at previous levels, and think of what you can actually give 'em. If you can't, then it's best to say goodbye — they won't work as they did before anyway.

Bonuses are given for one-shot efforts, it's not about accomplishing projects on time. To accomplish something on time is your direct responsibility, and it's included in the abovementioned 80 per cent which you're being paid for. If you or someone else has fucked up, and you managed to fix it right on time — yes, that's a reason for a bonus, but it should be well articulated.

People.

To respect people matters more than to get results from them

People, not human resources.

You have to think about the long term when working with the people that have been entrusted to you. And as long as you don't do this, because you don't know how or don't have the time, or feel that this is the responsibility of HRs, you're constantly risking the money I've invested in these employees one way or another.

And if I find out from the customer about problems you're having with the project or people I've assigned to you, you'll be an idiot twice-over for: a) letting this shit happen, and b) being reluctant and stupid enough to not come to me when the shit hit the fan instead of presenting me the problem in good time.

Hoped you'd manage? You fucking HOPED? Try putting your own money, not mine, into your crappy comedy, you fucking muppet. Hoped, my ass. If you know how — do it, if you don't know how — get off your fucking high horse and ask for advice. Think of several options, come and explain them to me — why wait for the sky to fall in?!

You're too busy to talk to your people and to find out when it's their kid's birthday? You don't get why it's important to know such things? Are you out of your mind? For you just don't plan releases and other potentially and "shit hit the fan" things for the days when your people will obviously be with their kids. Kids are very important part of life, and your managerial sand-castles are not — that's fucking why. Get this: there are things more important than you and your plans. Say you didn't see that coming! You're not the centre of the world, and neither am I (although, God knows, that would've been nice).

In other words, people deserve respect (see details below and don't you dare to skip it, you botcher!).

When people work together on the same project, they all understand what they're doing there and understand that together they can do something they can't do independently. They can become a Team. Of course if you don't meddle. Four bearded coders, driven by excitement and interest, work fast, quietly and merrily swearing at

each other without any crappy methodology. Fucking miracle, ain't it?

Where do they get such people, you ask? Why the fuck, didn't they allow you to hire your own team? Whose pain in whose ass is this? You either cut with a blunt knife or you sharpen it until it cuts properly. There are tons of trainings out there, this team isn't your first, smart people wrote myriads of books, so look around and decide where and whom you'll learn from — what's the big deal? The company doesn't pay you for training? Are you a complete idiot or just pretending to be one? It is YOU who wants to continue working here. You. If the company is willing to pay and has budget for it — it's fucking A, and if not? You'll just go on sitting on the fence and stint yourself for lousy couple of thousand, or you'll fucking allocate those lousy thousand from your salary and spend them on learning things those thousands that you were paid to know?

Motivation.

Why people not always want to work and how to motivate them

If a manager comes to the office with "shoot me" written across his forehead, his subordinates can't but see it. No idiots in our industry, sorry. And when you actually say aloud things like "When the hell will we already release this crap?" what do you expect? That your team will shout "Yay! Let's release this crap! At last let's do it! Let's bust our asses and release the crap!" Yeah, right!

"The customer is a bit stoned" is okay for you, too?!

"Everything in this company is fucked up", yeah, precisely, out loud in the smoking room — isn't this the same shit but in different words?

How do you think your people will treat the business, the company, the Customer and each other if every day you're harping on the same "everything's-fucked-up" tune?

Your people aren't motivated, my ass. How — I repeat the key question loudly and distinctly — how on this green beautiful planet are they supposed to get motivated, if you're not motivated yourself? And don't you dare tell me that they came like that before we hired them, I'll smash your head in with a fucking stapler! First you take on the job, then you're blaming your own people... Why not blame the government or the higher education system... Oh, I see you're starting to follow me! The problem has instantly resolved itself again, INSTANTLY, fucking incredible!

So you've got motivation issues yourself? How about you take some vitamins and think again about the reason why you came into this industry. I've got a quick answer for you. They pay well here, and at some point it rained money on us and the business gave that money to you in the form of a salary. It's as simple as that. Your input has nothing to do with it. There were million dollar orders, and everybody tore at each other's throats on the software market to win the best over to their side and show customers functioning products. That's all. None of it is you doing, neither the salary rates nor the hiring situation in the market. Those who needed programming gurus and

admin staff for their own companies could do nothing, but keep up with rising salaries in order to not lose that staff as well as their projects to outsourcers. Managers appeared in their numbers later, when the market became balanced and stable and the market showed growth. It was not until then that those who built this business and managed the first major projects, became directors and CEOs, and went on to provide better products and services, aggressively attracting customers and investors so that the business could grow further and everybody could make a living.

And after all that here you are, sitting in your comfortable Aeron chair, with you new Mac Book Pro with Retina display, and whining about motivation? Think you're so fucking smart? I would get rid of you in favor of someone else with pleasure, if we had that someone else. It's business, nothing personal.

How about you go and sell some cell phones. When you've made enough for your first iPhone and bought it — come back tell me all about motivation.

Your people are demotivated by exactly same things that de-motivate you — silly bureaucracy, with the fact that nobody actually gives a crap about the job done, so it goes right down the drain because expectations have not been lived up to or some chatterbox didn't keep his or her fucking word.

Motivation is of a personal nature. How do you find out about it? Care to ask, maybe? What people live for,

what they loved at their previous job, what they do when they come home? People are simple creatures: they do what they like and they don't do what they don't like. And if they don't like their job, they either don't do it or they do just enough to be left in peace and quiet. Is this what you want from them?

People don't do something for four reasons:

- they don't understand;
- they don't know how;
- they can't;
- they don't want to.

"Don't want" is the fucking last, not the bloody first.

If they don't understand — it's your pain in the ass. Explain it again, ask them to explain things in their own words, try doing that stuff together — it's up to you how you manage that, just keep trying. Everybody's different, so you should find something special that will work with each of them.

If they don't know that it's their fucking problem, for real, because they haven't been taught to recognize this, and if they don't know how to and thus didn't do this, it becomes our pain in the ass, again. Teach them, show them, create work groups or assign them to someone who knows.

It is impossible to do something if there are no resources, such as time, hardware, or they simply eat and sleep

poorly, or their teeth hurt. Such things are to be dealt with because they prevent you from obtaining results... I think you know whose pain in the ass this is.

If one doesn't do something, he must be taught; if teaching doesn't help, treatment might help; if treatment doesn't help — well, then it's goodbye. Fire him and carry on, even if this damages your staff's integrity. Three people working is better than four being idle. People aren't that stupid: when they see it's possible to do less and earn the same money at the same time, they won't bust their asses any more, they'll just sit and wait for payday. That's how your motivation shit works, too. Everything has to be straight: everybody sweats — everybody gets cookies, someone shirks his share of work and affects the overall result — nobody gets cookies. It's all about cookies so far, though — nobody cuts salaries for messing about, it's actually the primal trauma of the industry, and that's why it's so crowded in here, by the way — too many managers. When I say no cookies for anyone, first and foremost, I mean you personally.

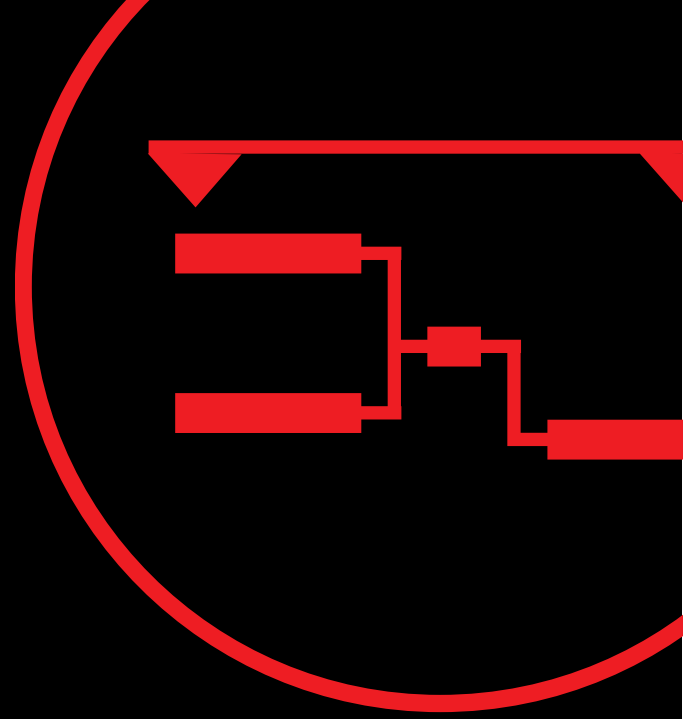# Time.
How a good manager should act

Arrive on time.

It's a heroic fucking deed, no shit. It's rocket science, to set up a reminder on your brand-new smartphone synchronized with Outlook or whatever you're using, a fucking REMINDER, and just leave for the office in ad-fucking-vance. All of us are so busy that the whole world will wait. Put that in your bong and smoke it: if you can't come on time, you deserve no, I repeat, NO fucking respect, because I've come on time and my time costs money.

What's that, its not an important meeting? Oh, excuse me, it's not the customer in person, it's his representative waiting there for you. And that's why you can indulge in being late? Are you really an idiot or don't you get that there's somebody out there who pays him, too? Don't tell me you didn't see that coming — the man is also paid for his time. And it means that it's not the company's time — who the fuck told you that bullshit? — it's the time that a specific person wastes waiting on you, the time of his boss, or the guy who owns the company.

You know, showing up on time is a sign of respect. A respect you're not accustomed to, because you're worth nothing, and by showing no respect, you're worth less than nothing. Read below about respect, and read it thoroughly.

What should you spend time on?

On people. Your direct reports and those of your customer. 80% of time for people who bring 80% of the result. Let's call it the inverted Pareto principle in action. People who've worked in Software Development for more than couple of years say that managing one employee takes at least 20% of the manager's time. That is, if you have five average brogrammers, you can't spare time for anything else but people. So what coding are you talking about?! Are you nuts? You have to work with direct reports, with the product people, with their issues and ways to resolve them, and you just can't spend your time for coding, the stuff that you know less and less about each year you spend in management, especially compared to your guys

who jiggling with this stuff on a daily basis. You know better than any of them do? Then spend half a day to teaching them, then go back to your actual responsibilities, and don't fuck around with something you've already done million times. Teach them and then piss off.
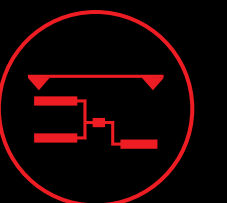
Delays.

How a good manager should act

This one's also about time, or let's say, lack of time. It seems to be sort of a popular type of brain damage here, impairment of the brain area, that is responsible for time management, that's why I have to articulate such shit.

If you're going to be late — make a phone call. Call in advance, not in the last minute, when everybody's already waiting. Not to mention the fact that you MUST show up on time and be prepared for a meeting or a conference call, although we all live in cities where morons just can't miss one another on a three-lane road and where it snows occasionally — well, fuck it, everybody can be late, but why not to call just THE MOMENT YOU REALIZE that you MIGHT be late, not when you're ALREADY late. And if you show up on time after all, you'll just wait and be grateful for waiting and for the efforts on postponing the meeting. Just like that, grateful.

The logic is the same if you're about to miss the deadline with a task or a project. Give a warning in advance, not afterwards. If you clearly understand what your team's velocity is and still you need an one extra day to meet the deadline, then you should put some efforts into speeding things up, catching up on and making the deadline. Can this be done, huh? And guess what you have to do if you've already fucked up with velocity and the deadline can't be met? That's right, you face me and the customer, and fuck it, we're going to change the plan and re-schedule stuff, if there is no other alternative.

If someone screws up some trivial shit, and it's not a permanent delay, simply a wasted day — it's not a problem — it is just a need to come to office and re-do it. On a weekend and without extra fees. You screwed it up — you fix it. Double fees can be charged only if there has been an agreement with the customer beforehand regarding his urgent "requirements changes". In this case your guys can put aside their personal stuff and work overtime. But when it's a case of a screw-up, then there's no overtime, it's a matter of paying debts.

You're not okay with that? Did you actually say that
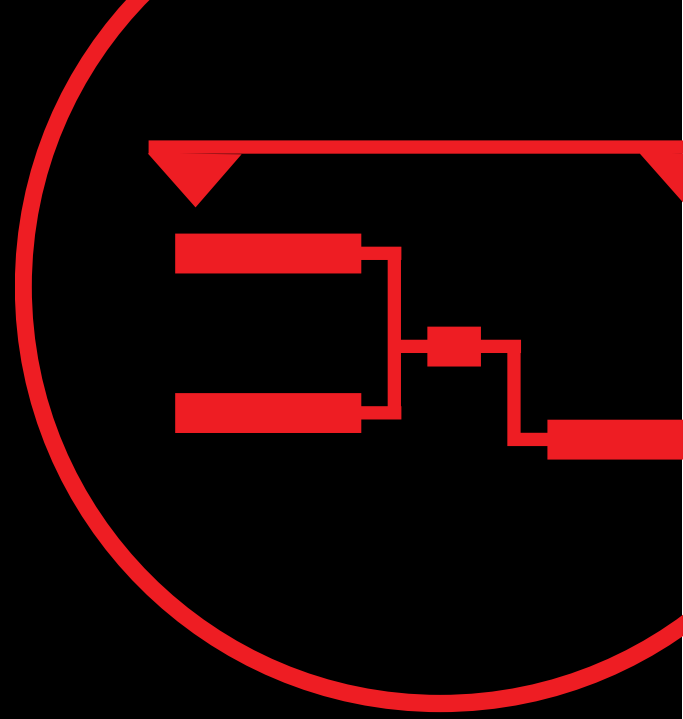
crap? You're fucking NOT OKAY with this? Not okay with admitting that you've just screwed up big-time, like speed planning, or minor things like somebody's botched up at some point?

Well, you highlight my words here, if any of your people have botched something up — it's YOUR fault. Do you hear me? I repeat: if any of your direct reports have botched something up — it's your fault, and it's the only possible way for you to think or talk about it. The only way. If someone screwed something up because you didn't communicate properly, and then everybody's late because of it, it's your problem. Always. Fuck, how else can I put it?...

While you're waiting, time's going by. It doesn't give a shit, it just goes by, and it can't be accumulated in a box and then put out when needed. Surprise! Eureka! Hello there, it's Captain Obvious speaking, check me out on the internet if we haven't met!

While you're waiting, hoping that thing will fix themeself, and it's fucking inconvenient to come and say that you fucked up, we're just running out of time, every fucking minute, to change something, to put things right, to do right manoeuvre. And our customer has plans too, he also reports to someone — now, how does that sound? And as opposed to your idiotic "inconvenience", he had probably put on a bet all his money, his career, and his word, which can cost more than your lousy project, together with all the stationery, furniture, and equipment.

Giving advance notice if you are delayed — once again, it's all about respect.
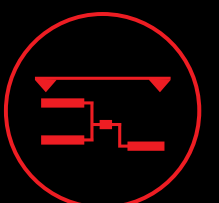
Respect.

Professional relationships — what lies beneath

This is the tiny and imperceptible thing that can't be measured or bought, even though it's one of the key things that any kind of relationships are built on.

If you can't respect somebody, it means that you personally haven't earned respect yet and thus don't know the meaning of the word. So if you can't grasp the concept you must be a sucker or a complete moron who has never been respected for anything. Put your thinking cap on: why would I fucking bother to build something serious with, talk about business to or tell so much to a person such as yourself? People like you are not for negotiating with, they're only good for being told what to do and that's it. Yeah, I remember your "They've Imposed Time-Frame on Me" song.

Do you know what it actually means to respect your co-worker? It's about understanding and accepting (and that's not the same thing, God damn it!) the very simple fact that he can have his own opinion and that he has a right to have it. Which means that you should hear him out before you start teaching how to do HIS job.

Read this over again and try to apply the same principles onto a customer, peer, your wife or any other person with whose opinion you don't agree with. Shit becomes clearer, doesn't it?

To respect your subordinates means to understand that they have their own life, and perhaps a family and kids. Imagine your subordinate has kids, which means that some woman gave them birth and they are raising them together. It's a hell of a job, to give birth, no man can even dream about managing such a thing. Hence it's a woman's job and this woman has chosen your subordinate. And you've got the nerve to be condescending and raising your voice at him? Oh, so you lost it because of all the pressure? What the hell do you know about being under pressure, you overprotected diva? Let's leave it at that and hope it reality kicks in eventually.

Regarding raising voices at people. Well I'll put it simple and in the words of a wise woman:

'A neurotic is a person that shouts at his boss and the person that shouts at his subordinates is simply a jerk'.

Get it? Anything that is serious and important is meant to be said gently and quietly. Yeah, maybe not with appropriate wording, but definitely in calmly. Whenever somebody shouts it means that he's not listened to or that he can't be heard. Ask any psychologist what shouting means. It is a sign of weakness or fear that can't be suppressed any longer. It indicates that a person isn't doing well. The only reason you start shouting your head off is that you're a dimwit to the extent that you can't even broadcast you "oh so bright" idea to a smart person that you fucking hand-picked for the job.

Respect for a customer is based on the simple fact that he pays us money he had earned somewhere else before that. Think about it: he had already done something and after that he came up with an opportunity for us to earn something, too. So while he needs us, you've got the chair to sit in and a chance to read this fucking genius text from your screen.

By the way, are you reading this on your smartphone or your iPad? Attaboy! Did you print that money yourself or got it as a salary? And where's the money for your salary coming from? Now you see, huh? 'Money comes from the bank'.

Respect means coming on time, and calling when you promised, and doing what you've promised, and being honest when you had promised to do something and then fucked up. Respect means congratulating with birthdays and asking what's up. All this is the foundation for relations and relationships. And if you've never been taught such things, your arrogance will just stick out of whatever you do despite your glorious language skills or your ability to divide numbers by numbers when showing some crazy metrics.

Do you even know what happens when a customer realizes you don't respect him? He automatically — AUTOMATICALLY — stops respecting you. And if on his side there's an manager like you, he's likely to have the same kind of issues and wasn't taught to respect people, and his first boss was likely to blab some shit like 'we pay them, so why on earth should we respect them', and that moron bought that. His boss is probably already out of business (because employees won't work with such people in the long run) or sells air (there's plenty of such niches), while that customer-side manager probably still bears remainders of 'we-already-pay-them' bullshit in the back of his mind, and you're encouraging him. Well, it's up to you whether to cooperate equally or to bend over backwards and then to forward your customer's 'inadequacy' down to your subordinates. Your customer's being inadequate means that you either don't understand him or he doesn't respect you already. If he doesn't respect you – that's because you don't respect him. That's it. Other things are mere mechanics: all gearwheels work fine when the system is straight, and don't when the system is messy by design.

Problems.

How constant whining over problems at work may affect your career

Problem means a task that you don't know how to resolve and that has matured to a bigger issue. You're not the only one to dislike problems, so don't procrastinate — think timely, ask questions, try things out and then ask again.

Problems should be talked about (hey, it's Captain Obvious speaking again!), and you don't look like a pregnant teenage girl who keeps mum waiting and hoping that the thing will eventually sort itself out as if by magic.

Problems should be dealt with. The problems that should concern you are time, people, and money. World peace, 'someone is wrong on the internet', and 'the industry is just going down the drain' are only subjects for endless babbling and are not of your concern.

While sorting out stuff stick to the problems — not the people involved.

Let's analyze the following case. You come to a customer to fix something that went wrong the day before and your lead engineer is late. The person who is far more capable than you to explain what exactly went wrong is not here, and you keep calling him. Clearly, you don't have much to say, do you? Even though you could have sorted everything out and written it down yesterday so that you wouldn't look like a second-grade botcher caught unprepared for the lesson.

You keep calling and he doesn't answer. Just two minutes before the meeting when he finally picks up the phone, and what you do then? You start bitching about — what? Yep, sweetie, you start yelling at him 'Why on earth are you not answering the God damn phone?' and his reply will naturally be 'The battery is dead...' (Well, even the smartest people on Earth face the low battery problem, and not quite often enough do they realize that they could go Starbucks and charge the phone). By the way, his behavior is nothing but identical to yours — till the last moment he hopes he'll get there on time. So then you start off again by saying something like 'Why, should I buy you a new phone?! Or should I call and remind you

to charge the God damn phone the evening before?!' In other words, the message that you're actually sending is that your engineer is a dumbass. Let's stop here for a while. Is THIS really the thing that currently disturbs you the most? Or maybe what is really bothering you is what to tell the customer and when? Deal with the problem, not with the man for god sake. I mean what the fuck?! It is not like "him being late" is the main issue here (because someone's being late can't be changed already), it is yours having no idea what to tell the customer that presents the REAL problem. Hence, deal with it — ask him and write down carefully everything he says about what to tell and what not to tell customer. Find out when exactly he plans to be here and go speak to the customer. Be honest about your colleague's being late and that you barely know what exactly happened. Take on full responsibility for the current situation and don't blame everybody else.

That's just an illustration. Now let's analyze something more typical.

An employee is often late. Actually this is not really a problem, even if he's late on a permanent basis and (from your point of view) disrupts your meetings with the team. On a side note, it would be quite good of you to analyze why his being late pisses you off so much. And does he ACTUALLY wreck your meetings (because you have no problems with meetings when he goes on vacation for instance, do you?) or is it just the fact of someone's not obeying you that REALLY pisses you off. Maybe it's just

another psychological issue of yours, bro? Well, fuck your ego, let's get back to the business at hand.

Well, he's late. So what? I know what you're gonna say — I've heard like a thousand times from other managers and engineers who had to put up with this sort of bullshit over and over again:

— 'You violate the discipline on the project.'

— 'Why, I always work it off later and guys are okay with that.'

— 'It's the rules on the project...' This one is really lame, although 'company's policy' would sound even dumber.

— 'So what? Why so serious?'

— 'It is important that you show up on time.'

— 'Important for whom?'

— 'Well, for everybody, for the team. It's the rules, everyone shows up on time. I show up on time, too.' Then you brainwash him for another 15 minutes until the guy almost completely loses his will to live and tells you what you want:

— 'Okay, I'll show up on time.'

Why are you grinning? You think you just got him? Will he show up on time or not depends on his plans and circumstances which you still know nothing about. So what's the fucking problem? Somebody did the job instead of him? It is a problem, although you haven't said a word about it when ranting about that project policy shit. Could he have some reasons for being late? Sure he could. Could his reason be more urgent than your stupid meet-

ing? Maybe his kid walks to school, and the grandma who normally accompanies the kid is no longer able to do that. So do you honestly expect the employee to show up on time next time? You still grinning? You haven't resolved the fucking problem because you simply don't get it. You wanted the guy to bend backwards for you - no other reason for it. It was your "short man syndrome" speaking and it had nothing to do with the company. What should you have done? Well, first of all ask him why. Second — suggest another time. Third — ask him to take part in the meeting via Skype or phone. Fourth — let the guy write down his ideas the night before the meeting and send them to you or someone able to articulate his notes in his absence. Shall I continue or we are done here? Yet again — deal with the problems, not people.

What else could you do?

'Ask him whether he understands there's a problem here and let him suggest a mutually beneficial way to solve it.' Oh wait, did you actually say that? Hallelujah, that's a clever manager speaking, I'm glad!

You know what the key issue is? Fuck being late for meetings. The key thing is that you don't have a word with people, even though communication is the core means of managing people. Your words may be heard or not, depending on whether people respect you or not. If they respect you they will listen for sure. And if you respect them in turn, you're gonna be able to make things work together eventually.

Any task can be completed in numerous ways unless you've turned it into a real problem and you're feeding your ego instead of managing the smart and talented people you were given.

Closing

While typing these simple words, I recall my managers whom I really owe a bottle of good wine in return for all the sleepless nights I caused them back in the days. Those men made me what I am today — a man who teaches others from his own experience and is able to pay the debt.

Thank you, guys. Steve and Paul from VDI, thanks for showing me what real enterprise software development is. Jene, thank you for being such a patient and hospitable customer, for dining with us and endlessly explaining what you actually wanted from us. Denis and Mitya from Yandex, thank you for guiding me through the company's peculiarities. Alan, thank you for showing me what a real professional programmer is. Andrew a.k.a. Hal from UMC, thank you for everything and please don't hold a grudge if something was wrong. Tom, thank you for teaching me how to calculate any business-related stuff on Excel — you really saved me from several major fuck-ups.

I'm sorry if I've forgotten someone. There were so many of you smart talented managers that I learned from.

Alex Orlov, who's sleeping in the seat next to me, thank you for getting me into this business and listening to my bitching about this and that. The day before we discussed what we can offer to Google. Well, I've decided. I don't want to work for Google, I want to carry on working with you. I think this speaks for itself.

Thank you all, guys.

Slava Pankratov, Business Trainer

March of 2013

This very moment Orlov and I are 10,000 meters up on the flight to Stockholm. Just about to descend.