



Dear Chief

By Jeff “Chief” Urbaniak
COLUMNIST

DEAR CHIEF: I’m sick and tired of never getting picked for courtesy business trips at work. Each month the corporate leaders collectively select one person to accompany them, whether it’s to a seminar, conference, trade show, or even an off-site strategy session. They say it’s a reward for good work but everyone knows it’s really for chronic butt kissing--something I refuse to do. One woman got to go because she was good at keeping track of things on spreadsheets and another guy only because he’s good at playing pinochle! Should I become a magician and wow them with magic tricks?

ALWAYS LEFT OUT



DEAR ALWAYS LEFT OUT: Favorites. Almost everyone has them. Most people have preferences about who they work and spend time with for various reasons and situations. In your company, it appears associates chosen for business trips possess a niche that benefits the leaders or the organization. Anyone can possess or develop a niche if they’re willing to pay attention to something, develop a skill-set, practice something, or hone a specific ability.

I once worked for a military officer

Carve out a niche for yourself

who made it a personal habit to find out and remember the names of every unit member’s spouse and child. He even went so far as to memorize their birth and anniversary dates and other significant events such as hospital visits, school trips, and their involvement in community activities/services. When it came time for the commander to select an officer to accompany him on post visits to various installations where unit members were assigned, guess which officer the commander hand-picked to take with him? You nailed it. The officer who could whisper in his ear valuable information about the troops whose hands he was about to shake. And the commander, being supplied with such personal information in a timely manner, appeared to be “awesome” in the eyes of the troops. You can bet your bottom dollar that the commander held his officer’s niche in high regard, especially when it came time to make promotion recommendations.

Carving out a niche means spotting a useful area that no one else has spotted. It might be as simple as being great at spreadsheets or report writing or it could be knowing something else no one else knows. It might be being brilliant with scheduling or budgets or understanding a certain system. Make sure, though, you don’t make yourself

indispensable that your niche backfires and becomes a burden instead of a benefit.

Carving out a niche for yourself also means you frequently get noticed by people other than your boss--other people’s bosses. These bosses get together and they talk. If they bring up your name, rest assured it’ll be in a good way. And guess what? The reputation your niche gives you makes it difficult for your boss to not promote you if he or she wants to win peer group approval. If the other bosses think you are a good idea then your boss really has to go along with it too!

So look around. What kind of niche can you find and develop that will make you a valuable resource from which others or your company can benefit? Once you hone and begin executing that niche, you’ll be the one enjoying extra benefits, called upon for “the cool” duties, or be given additional freedoms that can truly benefit your professional development.



For an opportunity to have your question, issue or concern addressed in the Dear Chief column, go to www.DearChiefAdvice.com and submit your comments or email them to Jeff@DearChiefAdvice.com.