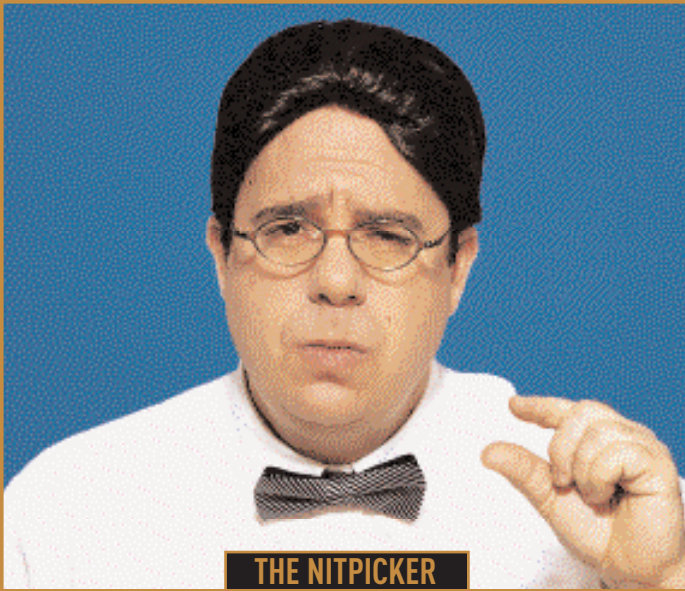




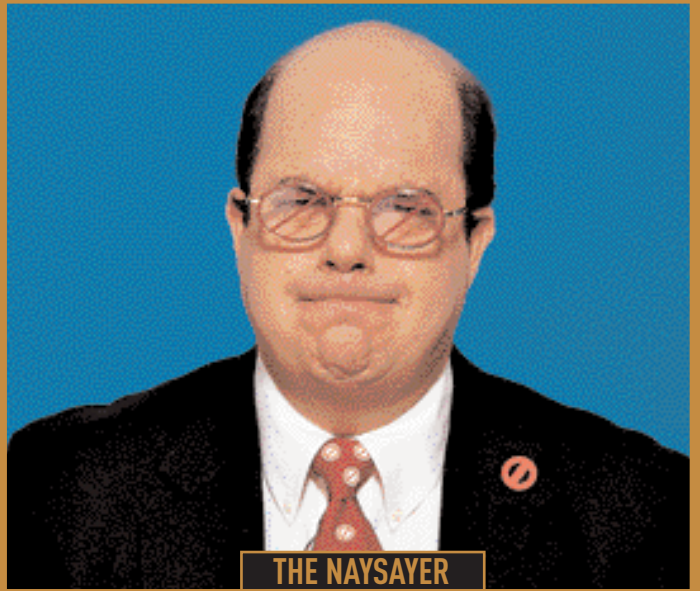
THE SPOKESMODEL



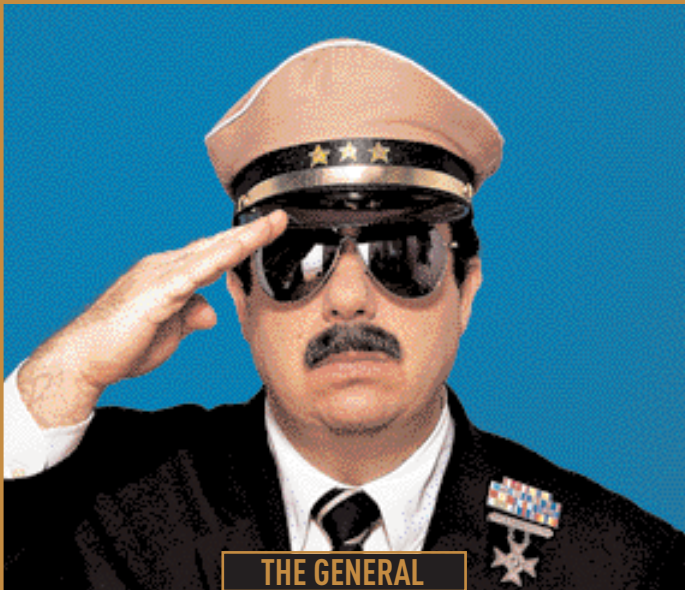
THE JELLYFISH



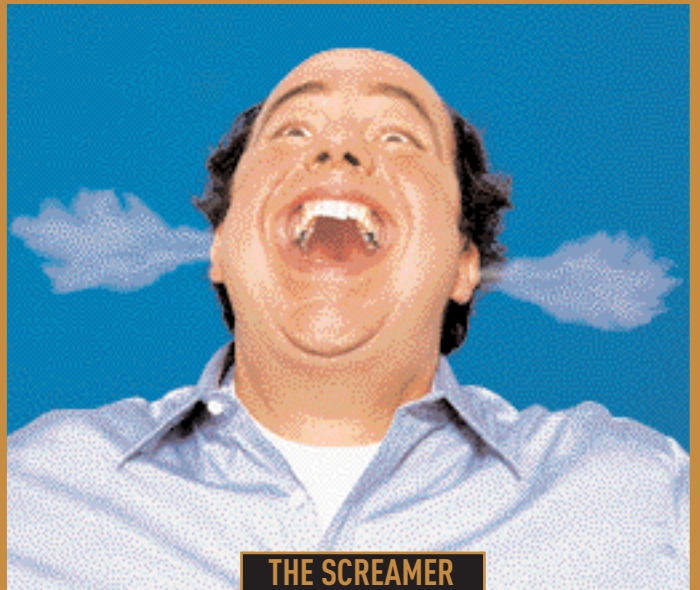
THE NITPICKER



THE NAYSAYER



THE GENERAL



THE SCREAMER

PRiNCiPALS *from* *HELL*

Don't let a difficult principal drive you crazy. Here's your guide to getting the cooperation you deserve. **By Lee Ann Murphy**

When the school year began, third-grade teacher Susan was brimming with enthusiasm and ideas. She proposed a plan for a multicultural holiday party to her principal, who never responded. Susan reluctantly abandoned her idea. But after a nearby school received positive media attention for a similar event, Susan's principal suddenly took notice.

"I'd like you to plan that party," she ordered, with a mere three weeks to go before the school break. "And make sure you invite the newspapers."

Despite the short notice, Susan dove into action, recruiting volunteers and working overtime to launch the party, which went off without a hitch. At the end of the evening, Susan glanced over to see her principal cozing up to a local newspaper reporter—whom Susan had dutifully invited—and taking full credit for the successful event. The principal paused for a moment in the middle of a particularly self-aggrandizing speech about how the party was "her brainchild," smiled for the cameras, and glanced over at Susan like she'd never met her before.

Does this scenario sound familiar? Some principals have personalities >>

principals

that can drive you around the bend and back again. Sure, most are wonderful bosses who support teachers in any way, but woe betide you if you're unlucky enough to run across one of the six dreaded "problem principals" that we identify here. You don't have to be held hostage by difficult leadership styles—here's your guide to neutralizing their negativity. Who knows? You just might change your principal's attitude for the better, reminding her why school is such a nice place to be.

the spokesmodel

THE TYPE: Susan's principal is the quintessential Spokesmodel, most interested in public opinion. She tries to please all of the people all of the time—except for the teachers who work for her.

If you work for a Spokesmodel, you're probably the one who does the lion's share of the work on the big-picture projects that will get the school noticed, but rarely get much of the credit. On the bright side, the Spokesmodel can attract much-deserved attention and community commitment to your school. But when it comes to everyday logistics, she's often too busy to help.

WHAT TO DO: Since the Spokesmodel is focused on her interests, you need to stay focused on yours. That means finding an alternative way to get your day-to-day needs met. Fourth-grade teacher Chris Beasley suggests relying on an assistant principal or other administrator who has the authority to help you. Be diplomatic when talking to your new proxy. You don't need a griping buddy. You need an advocate.

When it comes to problems like the one Susan faced, the best defense is a good offense. Now Susan puts everything in writing. She shares her original ideas via e-mail (copying the assistant principal and the Spokesmodel's secretary) and requests feedback. She sends polite follow-up e-mails weekly until someone finally responds.

You might have to accept that you'll never get the recognition you deserve from the Spokesmodel. But take heart: Other administrators see your good work, and someday, they may be in a position to reward you for the dedication you've shown over the years.

the* General

First-grade teachers Joanne and Adrienne both had great ideas for improving their school's chaotic parent-teacher nights, and were ready to share them at the staff meeting. Before they could open their mouths, however, the principal slapped a chart up on the wall and whipped out a pointer. It was a complicated and rigid schedule for parent-teacher night, and everyone would be required to adhere to it. As the principal's pointer tapped its way down their depressing marching orders, Joanne and Adrienne felt shut out and shut down.

THE TYPE: The General runs a tight ship. It's his way or the highway. There's no discussion; just "yes, sir!" This kind of behavior is sometimes caused by deep-seated insecurities. The only way he can feel in control is to have absolute power. Accepting that you have good ideas would be tantamount to an admission of his own weakness. On the bright side, Generals often care deeply about results, generate good ideas of their own, and show backbone in the face of outside detractors.

WHAT TO DO: Making sure the General doesn't steamroll over you is difficult but doable, says Yvonne Bender, author of *The Tactful Teacher*. "You must be mature enough to stay calm and focused when approached in an extremely direct and assertive manner," she says.

To prepare, write down everything you want to say. Anticipate arguments and practice your responses ahead of time so that you can present your case clearly.

Strength is key. Always make eye contact. Avoid making emotionally charged comments or pleading. If you feel you're

being ignored, respectfully repeat your argument. Get others on your side by sharing your ideas in writing, so the General will see it's a battle he can't win.

One last warning about the General. He knows it's easier to shake you when you're not prepared. If he asks you for a meeting, don't commit to a time until you know what the meeting is about so you'll have time to build your case.

the Screamer

As the representative for the school's extra-curricular activities committee, it was Jennifer's job to ask her principal for funds and other scarce resources. When she made a request, she cringed and waited for the blow. The principal began to puff up like a blowfish. "You're completely out of touch!" he raged. "How much money do you think the school has?"

THE TYPE: The Screamer doesn't know how to handle frustration. When he feels like he's losing control of a situation, he explodes with yelling, wild accusations, and unfair generalizations. It's a mess. Not that his heart isn't in the right place—it is. He just doesn't feel heard without turning up the volume.

WHAT TO DO: When dealing with a screamer, don't let yourself blow up in response. And don't withdraw and run away either. Instead, stay calm, say communication experts Drs. Rick Brinkman and Rick Kirschner in their book *Dealing with People You Can't Stand: How to Bring Out the Best in People at Their Worst*. Try to get the Screamer's attention. Repeat his name loudly. Use simple words and don't get into specifics. For instance, Jennifer could repeat, "We do care about the budget, Mr. Ryan. We really do."

After several real blow-ups, Jennifer realized that the Screamer grew more angry when she defended the teachers' requests. One day, when they were both calm, she asked the Screamer what he expected from her. "I expect you to be an advocate," he said, "for both me and the teachers." Aha! The Screamer got >>

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principals

so angry because he felt Jennifer wasn't properly representing him. Jennifer started listening more carefully, admitting to the principal when she thought he had a point, and sharing his side of things with the teachers. The Screamer came to trust in Jennifer's fairness. These days, his outbursts are practically an endangered species.



Eager to start a drama club, middle-school teacher Melissa approached her principal. "Sounds like a great idea," yawned her principal, returning to her paperwork. "But it will never work here."

THE TYPE: This jaded principal is overly negative, apathetic, and disconnected. Her main goal is to fly under the radar. The biggest problem with the Naysayer is that her negativity can spread like a virus. Remember that Naysayers are often highly experienced administrators who've seen it all and fought countless battles in the past. The trick is to get them back in the game.

WHAT TO DO: Going head to head with the Naysayer and confronting her negativity will likely leave you exasperated and more negative yourself, say Brinkman and Kirschner. Instead, try to understand why she's disillusioned. A principal's job can be filled with political land mines and serious disappointments. Empathize.

When you get negative feedback, don't fight it. Thank her for all of her "helpful suggestions" and tell her that you will take them to heart and rethink your approach, but that you'd still like to go forward with your idea. Melissa might try saying, "I see why you're hesitant about starting a drama club. But I'll start out small and get a parent to help out. I'd like your permission to go ahead despite the challenges. I'll take full responsibility for the outcome."

Once you get her permission, remind her that she's a member of the "team."

After the group's first performance, Melissa could say, "Thank you so much for allowing me to put this group together. It wouldn't have been a success without your support." This turn-the-tables strategy is disarming for the Naysayer. Plus, your good attitude (and success) might just turn that Naysayer into a cheerleader.

the* *jELLYfish

The mother of Michael's fifth-grade student, Jeremy, has come to the school to complain that he isn't getting enough one-on-one attention in class. "What Jeremy really needs," thinks Michael, "is to do his homework and for his mother to stop accepting his excuses." As Michael watches his sweating, stammering principal crumble before the mother's complaints, he wishes that, for once, the principal would stand with him in trying to get Jeremy's mom on their team.

THE TYPE: The Jellyfish hates conflict and has trouble trusting his own judgment so he tends to avoid decision-making. He picks the path of least resistance for himself, which unfortunately is often the path of most trouble for you. On the bright side, Jellyfish can be great listeners: They *want* to be convinced.

WHAT TO DO: As long as he feels somewhat free from responsibility, he's often willing to go along with you. That's when you need teamwork. Chris Beasley has a colleague who once worked for a Jellyfish. She and fellow teachers from each grade level started a leadership team. The group met to discuss issues and problems and came up with possible solutions. The Jellyfish rarely attended the meetings, but the assistant principal did, which lent the group legitimacy. Often, if the team presented ideas to the Jellyfish, he'd be willing to go along with them. So your best bet is to present cogent ideas and let the Jellyfish acquiesce to you for a change.

Nit the* Nitpicker

If third-grade teacher Ellen knows anything it's this: She makes fantastic, make-them-stop-in-their-tracks bulletin boards. So she was taken aback the first time her new principal passed one saying, "Hmph. A bit much, isn't it?" Now it seems to Ellen that whenever she's really proud of something, her principal has something bad to say about it.

THE TYPE: The Nitpicker isn't happy unless she's finding fault with something. She equates criticism with improvement. She may even think she's motivating you to do better! As deflating as she can be, at least she's paying close attention.

WHAT TO DO: Your best bet with the Nitpicker is to laugh it off. But Ellen couldn't do that. She was too worried that the Nitpicker truly disliked her or thought she was an inferior teacher. When it was Ellen's turn to design the big bulletin board at the school's entrance, she decided this was her chance. The Nitpicker said exactly what Ellen had predicted: "Hmm. Not what I was expecting." Comments like this are many Nitpickers' M.O. They're vague, making it difficult to offer a defense. But Ellen was ready. "What *were* you expecting?" she asked in a calm, friendly voice. "Oh, I don't know, exactly," said the Nitpicker. "Just not this." Ellen responded, "You know, I've always thought that arts and crafts was one of my strengths. So, I'd like to get some feedback on what you specifically dislike." The principal was caught off guard, and, pressed further by Ellen, scuttled away in a hurry. She never picked on Ellen's arts and crafts projects again, and Ellen finally regained the confidence she should have had all along.

So what's the moral of these stories? If you're faced with one of these problem personalities, remember that the answer to your happiness is usually within you. □

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