

# Working With Colleagues

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# Me

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- Professor in CS Dept. at Williams College
  - Former Department Chair, Acting Dean of the Faculty
  - Prior to that a researcher at NYNEX S&T
- Organizing stuff
  - Co-organizer of this workshop (with Dave)
  - General Chair, ICML 2009; Co-Chair, ICML 2001
  - Co-Director, CREU program for CRA-W
- Lots of committee work
  - ACM/IEEE-CS CS2013 guidelines (with Dave; co-chaired by Mehran)
  - CRA-W
  - At Williams: Appointments and Promotions, Educational Policy, Priorities and Resources, Faculty Steering...

# Themes

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- Golden rule
- Being visible
- Being a good citizen
- Working with colleagues
- Forming teams
- Dealing with difficult situations

# Golden Rule

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*Be the colleague you would  
want to work with*

# Being Visible / Being Present

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- Be visible in your department (and school)
  - Get to know colleagues
    - Go to lunch (potentially have a topic to discuss)
    - Speed talks or other ways to know what others are doing
  - Get help and advice
    - Sharing teaching materials
    - Understand history and culture of department/institution
- Be aware of departmental (and school) issues
  - Attend departmental meetings
- Take your service duties seriously
  - But don't “overdo it” on service

# Being a Good Citizen

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- Follow through on work you promise to do
- Be respectful of others' time
  - Meetings  $\neq$  productivity
  - If you call a meeting, have a clear agenda, etc.
- Time is everyone's most precious commodity
  - Don't ask for documentation no one wants/plans to read
  - Don't call a meeting if it can be dealt with in an email
  - Don't ask colleagues to do work you wouldn't want to do
- Address potential problems early and directly
  - Ignoring a problem won't make it go away
  - A little unpleasantness now avoids lots of it later
  - Don't catch colleagues off guard; avoid putting others on the defensive

# Working with Colleagues

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- Always be professional and respectful
  - A reputation takes years to build and minutes to destroy (paraphrasing Warren Buffet)
  - Your adversaries today can be your allies tomorrow
    - You are building a career, not trying to win a game
- Choose your battles
  - Don't feel compelled to get involved in every situation
    - Don't get pulled into situations you don't care about
  - Take time to understand different viewpoints
  - Take a stand for things you really believe in
  - Justify your position: data always beats conjecture

# Forming Teams (Part I)

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Forming a team is the most critical aspect of a project

- Be deliberate in the team you form
  - Diverse perspectives can lead to better results
  - Consider who will bring something to the table
  - Ask colleagues for suggestions on people to work with
- Working >> talking
  - It's about execution, execution, execution
  - But be careful: don't execute without a conversation that includes all relevant parties
- Don't be afraid to say “no” to someone who wants to join



# Forming Teams (Part II)

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- The Golden Rule still applies
  - Don't ask team members to do things you wouldn't do
  - Be protective of everyone's time
  - Lead by example
- Set expectations appropriately
  - Create a culture of accountability
- Make sure everyone on the team gets credit
  - Allow team members to lead
    - And then “follow by example”
  - Story time: growing a department...
- Reciprocate when (past) team members ask for your time

# Dealing with Difficult Situations (Part I)

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- Try to see the difference between a difficult “interface” and a bad situation, idea, etc.
- Be honest, but polite
  - Skirting around a problem won’t resolve it
  - Take time to understand others’ viewpoints
  - Be direct and forthright about the real problem
- Don’t be confrontational (unless its really necessary)
  - Create a dialogue
  - Look for solutions where everyone gets some benefit
- Don’t lose your temper
  - Makes you look bad
  - Doesn’t improve situation (and potentially makes it worse)

# Dealing with Difficult Situations (Part II)

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- Be a gracious “loser”
  - Be open to being wrong
  - Things won’t always go the way you want
    - Don’t waste time dwelling on it
  - Determine how to best move forward
- Avoid working with people you don’t want to work with
  - If you don’t want to do it, say “no”
    - But, everyone has to sometimes do things they don’t want
  - Not responding ≠ “no”
- Be realistic about what you can do

# A Message I've Found Very Useful

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*Thank you for the opportunity to <<do something>>. I appreciate your consideration. Unfortunately, I must respectfully decline as I am already committed to a number of other concurrent activities and would not have the time to take on this additional commitment.*

*[Option 1: My colleague <<name>> has expressed interest in this <<something>> and would be a strong addition to your committee.] But check with your colleague first!*

*[Optional: If a similar opportunity comes up in the future, please keep me in mind. I would be happy to be involved if I have more time in the future.]*

Let Me Reiterate...

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*Be the colleague you would  
want to work with*

Thank you for your attention

Questions/Discussion