

## Ah, perception

Dealing with difficult people, part one. I believe in people. I believe that the prime role of a manager is to create the environment in which the people that work with them (note: with, not for) can concentrate on their job. In practice, this means providing tools, training, encouragement and psychological safety that anything untoward that's heading for them will be stopped at a level above them. This may sound naive - and in part, it's deliberately naive, in that although I know about the monsters that lurk out there in office world, I don't want my people exposed to them any more than they need to develop a basic toolkit to deal with them. And mostly, this works (with engineers it does, anyway) - I have watched my people grow and become in many ways better than me, and I've been proud of every single one of them. Yep, even the one that tried to get me sacked. But it's difficult to keep taking the knocks sometimes.

This week, I volunteered at [W-Tech](#): the recruitment and career development fair for women in IT. I've stopped trying to get a new job for the moment myself (it's not the right time out there, and it's been quite a long journey to work out what exactly I want to be next), so it was quite good fun to kick back, relax, listen to the talks and try to connect as many women as I could to the chances of getting somewhere better than their current job - or in the case of far too many good people at the moment - of getting somewhere that won't mistreat them post-redundancy. Which is probably a whole post in its own right.

I go to a lot of women in technology events - the WIT, the Girl Geeks etc., so I'm not unused to the kind of sensible work advice that was given out at the fair. But it was still quite an eye-opener, from just why men are so [different](#) in the office (I've fought it for years, but even I have to admit that the 9-week change in foetal brain chemistry just can't be ignored any more) to what the differences between relationship-based and meritocracy-based office [politics](#) are. It would be no surprise to anyone except me to find that I've been using a meritocracy-based approach in a relationship-based system. I hope the advice from these talks will help me a little, and I'll be (slowly) publishing my notes in the hope that it might help other people (both male and female) too. But the juiciest piece of advice came from one of the evening speakers - a very sane, sensible director - "if you're using your Blackberry whilst exercising a horse, be sure to get your balance right".