

When co-workers drop the ball

It's late, and you're still stuck at your desk finishing work that your boss needs first thing in the morning. Your shoulders are knotted balls of tension, and your stomach is grumbling.

As for the two colleagues who were also helping with the project, they're long gone. "Sorry, I wish I could stay and help!" they both said, as they left the office at 5 p.m. with places to go.

Most people end up in that position at some point in their careers—left to do the work, after flaky colleagues drop the ball.

"We trust our co-workers to come through for us, and when they don't, we're angry and vow never to trust them again," says Anita Bruzzese (www.45things.com), who writes about workplace issues for Gannett News Service and USAToday.com.

Savvy administrative professionals know they need to do more than manage their own workload. They also need to manage up, down and sideways. That means managing all relationships so that everyone works together like a well-oiled machine.

Bruzzese offers these four tips for handling co-workers who drop the ball, and how to get them to pull their weight:

1. No one is a mind reader. "Make sure that if you need a co-worker's input by a specific deadline, you've made that deadline clear," Bruzzese says. When checking in, be positive and avoid "nagging."

Example: "David, I just want to check in and remind you that our deadline for the presentation is Friday. How's it going? Any problems? No? Great! That's wonderful news. I'll check back in a couple of days."

2. Don't be a martyr. Does it look like the project will require some long hours later in the week? Rather than assuming that you'll be the only one willing to do it, be proactive and broach the topic early.

Example: "Mary, we need to make sure this project is done by Friday, and it looks like we're all going to have to pull some extra hours. What section do you want to tackle?"

3. Safeguard your boundaries. Sometimes it's easier to do something yourself, rather than making sure a co-worker follows through on a work commitment. But doing so will only make you burn out more quickly and create resentment.

If a co-worker is escaping his or her fair share of work, pick a quiet time, not in the midst of a deadline, to address the issue.

Example: "Bob, concerning our last three projects, I've been the one to put in late hours before the final deadline. I'm willing to do my part, of course, but I'd like to talk about ways we can split the work a bit more fairly."

4. Leave others feeling good. When a co-worker finally does come through, it's time to put aside any lingering anger and praise him. That's the only way to ensure that he's helpful the next time.

Example: "I see that you finished your spreadsheets in time for us to include them in the report. That really helped us meet the deadline. Thanks!"

Tip: Find more advice on managing co-worker conflict in our free special report, [**Workplace Conflict Resolution**](#).