

The Limits of Power and Mission Creep

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Tips of the Day · 2 min read

There is nothing that makes the self feel more comfortable than more – of anything. This is especially so of power – which means, ‘I am in control’. Every job has its boundary. It has a job description. When we go for the interview we want to know what is expected of us and at first we are satisfied with just doing the job. Although the job may be taxing, after a little time we begin to feel on top of the work – that is to be in control. We enter a period of ease. Then something starts to creep in. We see possibilities. And with all the good-will in hearts we do something that is not in our job description. And we are astonished how it causes such hurt and anger. Jack starts to work for a charity as an accounts person. Before long he gets to know how the firm works and realises that the website could be better. He knows someone who designs websites whom he thinks is very good and invites them to come and meet the boss. The next morning he tells the boss what he has done – without prior consultation. The boss is visibly angry, but out of good will sees the designer. Nothing comes of it. Jack feels snubbed. For days there is a distance between Jack and his boss. Again without anything being said, things sort of smooth over. But has Jack understood that his good-will was seen as mission creep, that it encroached on another’s work, that it took no account of the position of the boss? I must confess I was very good at this sort of thing and my manager accused me of wanting her job! And I didn’t. Honestly. It cost me an apology and box of chocolates. As things turned out, when she moved up, I was offered her job – by which time, of course, I did want it. So I must have got something right. In the same way if you are in charge, mission creep undermines others. I always think it is a good idea at some point before I start work to remind myself what my job is. Since I have set up this centre, this has become all too important, since I am the sort of person who has the tendency to do everything themselves. This undermines those whom we have asked to help and generally puts them off offering us assistance in the future. So here we have a basic manifestation of the self as power. It wants to be in control. It gives itself any good reason, but never really takes into account the other, save in that the other serves its purpose. Remember no matter how good-willed the self is, it always turns the other into an object of its desire as a means to achieve an object of desire. To understand the reaction of others to our good-will mission creep, we need to ask ourselves how we feel when someone does that to us. And really, what harm is there in consultation?

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