

Managing your supervisor

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Health Warning

- Managing your supervisor
- Several supervisors asked me if this topic was a “good idea”
- For whom?



Health warning

- You really ought to be asking Brahim, Zeynep, Emmanuel, ..
 - How do you manage Toby?
 - Or is that, can you?
- I'm not sure that I managed Alan Bundy that well!

Outline

- Understanding your supervisor
- Manipulating your supervisor
- Great expectations
- Common pitfalls
- Dealing with conflict
- Managing your career

Understanding your supervisor

- Their goals
- Their skills
- Their hates
- Their inadequacies

Their goals

- Supervision is a poorly paid job
 - I have supervised students at universities that don't even employ me
 - Clearly your supervisor's goal is not (directly) money
- So what is motivating them?

Their goals

- Giving back to the system
 - They were well supervised, ...
- Creating a scientific “legacy”
 - Ambassadors to spread their views, ...
- Multiplying their output
 - My favourite programming language, ...

Their skills

- They **vaguely** know what it takes to get a PhD
 - They surely have one themselves
- They offer different skills over the life cycle of your PhD

Their skills

- At the start
 - Identifying a good question
 - Knowing what has already been done
 - Anticipating when a problem will be too hard or too easy

Their skills

- In the middle
 - Watching over the “bigger” picture
 - Nudging your in good directions
 - Identifying common pitfalls (see later)
 - Keeping an eye on the clock

Their skills

- At the end
 - Telling you when to stop
 - Knowing what a thesis looks like
 - Anticipating problem areas for your viva

Their hates

- Students who quit
 - Wasted effort all round
- Students who finish late
 - They know writing up isn't that pleasant
 - But it needs to be done

Their inadequacies

- Supervisors are only human too
- They are unable to
 - read your mind
 - manage their time
 - remember much

Try to Remember

- They are learning on the job
 - There are no classes to be a supervisor
- They have little experience
 - Like in medicine: do one, watch one, teach one

Manipulating your supervisor

- Inform them
 - Scientific obstacles
 - Personal obstacles

Manipulating your supervisor

- Be positive
 - Your supervisor is more likely to want to help
 - You'll feel better

Manipulating your supervisor

- Work hard
 - They will be more willing to work hard too
 - You'll more likely to get results
 - A thesis is hard work

Manipulating your supervisor

- Write
 - Internal notes
 - Conference papers
 - Journal articles
- They will find it hard to ignore paper

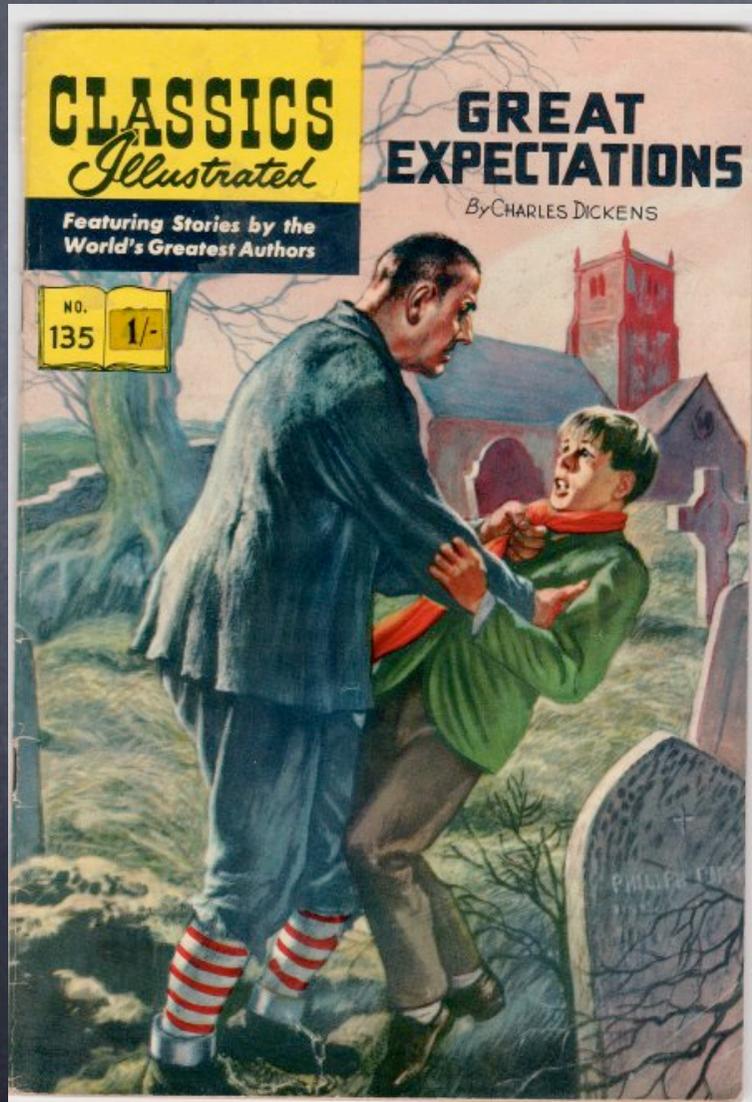
Manipulating your supervisor

- Be their ambassador
 - Scientific contacts
 - Social networking

Manipulating your supervisor

- Make yourself invaluable
 - Reviewing papers
 - Helping run conferences
 - Running the lab/group

Great expectations



- Your expectations
- Their expectations

Your expectations

- Intellectual support
 - Quality assurance
 - Telling you when (not) to stop
- Emotional support
 - Encouragement
 - Constructive environment

Their expectations

- You finish
- You go on to supervise
- Your drafts lack spelling mistakes

Common pitfalls

- Solving the world
- Manna from heaven
- Computer bum
- Ivory tower

Researcher's Bible, Alan Bundy et al.

<http://homepages.inf.ed.ac.uk/bundy/how-tos/resbible.html>

Common pitfalls

- Misunderstood genius
 - Love of jargon
 - If I can do it, it's trivial
 - Love of complexity
- Lost in abstraction
- Ambitious paralysis

Researcher's Bible, Alan Bundy et al.

<http://homepages.inf.ed.ac.uk/bundy/how-tos/resbible.html>

Psychological hurdles

- Self confidence
- Research impotence
- Thin skin
- Cold start
- Theorem envy
- Fear of exposure

Dealing with conflict

- Conflict is common
- Supervision is like a marriage
- Even divorce is possible

Dealing with conflict

- Communicate
- Conflict often caused by breakdowns in communication



Dealing with conflict

Irving and I reached a compromise; he finally understands it's better to just let me have my own way!



- Compromise
- There are two of you in this "marriage"

Dealing with conflict

- Speak to your second supervisor
- Approach a colleague of theirs
- Find your graduate officer

Dealing with conflict

- If all else fails, you can “change” your supervisor
 - Formally or informally
 - Funding may be an issue

Managing your career

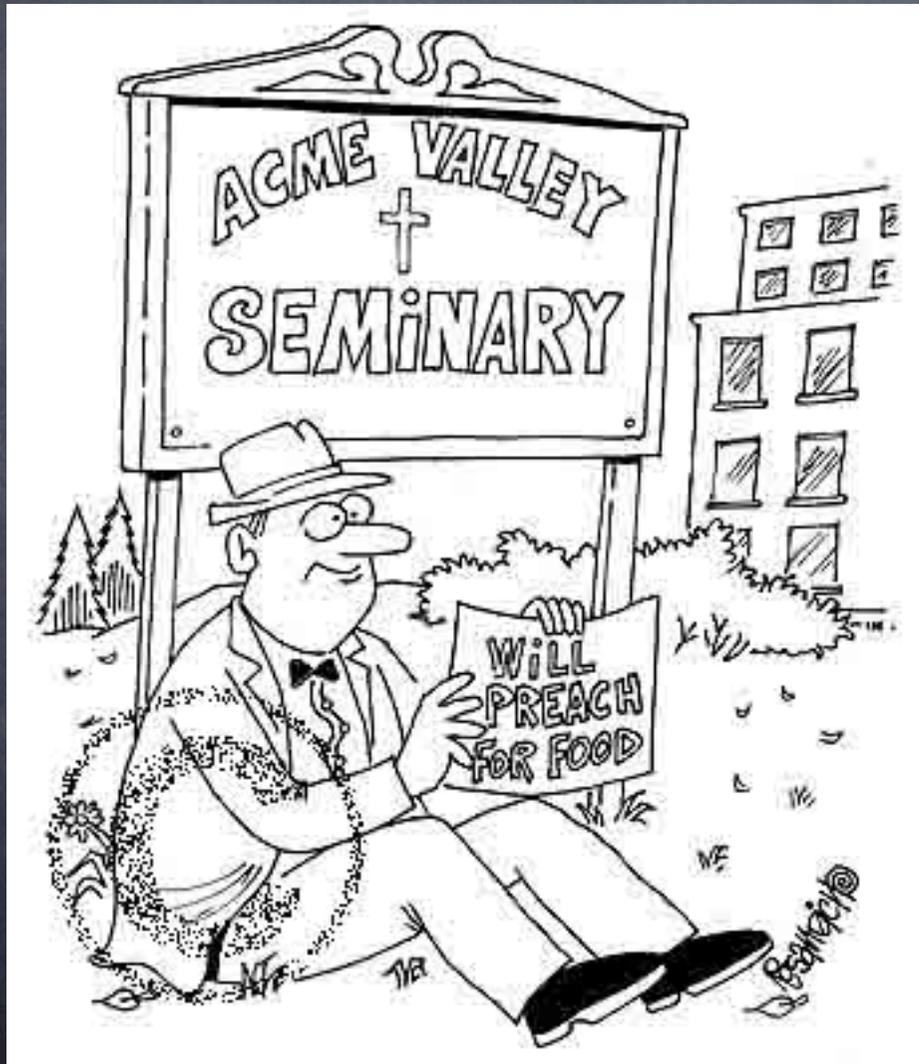
- Your supervisor is your “best” friend
 - Getting your first job
 - Getting your second job
 - ...
 - Your success is their success

Managing your career

- Unlike a marriage, they expect (and want) you to leave
- To see you stand on your own feet
- More like having children?



Managing your career



- Where to next?
- PostDoc
- Faculty
- Industry
- Seminary

Managing your career

- Your supervisor doesn't know everything
- Experience other labs
 - Short visits
 - Post Doc
 - Sabbatical

Managing your career

- Exploit mentors
 - Supervisor
 - Thesis committee
 - Visitors
 - ...

Managing your career

- Help others
 - Your scratch my back, ...
- Contribute
 - Organize workshops
 - Give tutorials
 - Develop web resources, ...

Managing your career

- Set goals, make plans
 - Standard career paths
 - Less conventional paths
- Expect the unexpected

Conclusions

- Understanding your supervisor
- Manipulating your supervisor
- Great expectations
- Dealing with conflict
- Managing your career

The End