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# DOCKET

*INFORMED. INDISPENSABLE. IN-HOUSE.*

**Put Your Money Where Your Mouth is**

**Skills and Professional Development**



My boss Wendy walked into my office one day and handed me a cash-filled envelope. It wasn't a life-changing amount of cash, but the reason she gave it to me — and a similar envelope to every department member — was particularly notable.

Before I finish talking about the money, I need to lay a little groundwork. While I want to be completely honest and share the true backstory, it is a challenge to tell the tale without exposing the people who would rather not be exposed when you work for such a small organization.

For the first 12 of the last 15 years, Wendy and I worked side by side as colleagues and friends. As the result of a structural reorganization, she was promoted to state legislative director and became my boss. During those 12 years as colleagues, we talked almost daily about the ups and downs of our professional experiences. We talked about what we liked, what we disliked, and what changes we wanted to see in the future. We were willing to share our thoughts and frustrations with our bosses and did not just rail against them.

We discussed the kinds of bosses and leaders we would be when we had the opportunity. Wendy's chance came first. At the time of her promotion, I was studying organizational behavior and leadership at the University of San Francisco. Our discussions were grounded in intuition. As I

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progressed in my studies, it became apparent that the ideals we fostered together were supported by research. Organizations that abided by solid leadership techniques were perpetually found on the lists of the best companies to work for.

While our relationship and our conversational topics changed once she became my boss, we continued to discuss how she could develop into the kind of boss she wanted to be. Which brings me to the reason for the envelope filled with cash.

Our employer hosts an annual holiday luncheon where we celebrate the year's accomplishments, acknowledge the service of long-term employees, and announce the employee of the year. The staff voted Wendy to be employee of the year for 2016. With that recognition came a US\$1,000 cash prize. As she accepted her award, she expressed her gratitude for the opportunity to work with — not manage — her team. At the end of her speech, she mentioned that she would be splitting her winnings with the entire department. What kind of boss does that?

The kind of boss who recognizes that their accomplishments are not the result of solo efforts. The kind of boss who gives their staff the opportunity to make mistakes and grow. The kind of boss who believes that the only way that they can be successful is by giving credit where credit is due. The kind of boss who puts their money where their mouth is and fights daily to support and advocate for their team so that they can reach their goals.

I have not had a negative thought about Wendy's management style since she assumed her position. Is she perfect? No, but what I do know about her, and the reason why she was selected as employee of the year, is that she walks her talk. As great as it was for her to share her money with us, we appreciate that her daily actions back up her words, values, and philosophy about what a boss should be.

[Whitnie Wiley](#)



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**Whitnie Wiley** was a long-time columnist for the *ACC Docket*, where she wrote the *Lead the Way* column for more than seven years. The column provided leadership tips for in-house counsel and others as they pursue their personal and professional goals.