Website developer Kitty ignored the call coming in from a project manager at work. “She’s always yelling at me,” Kitty told her friends. If the project manager could hear that comment, she might reply, “You’re always missing deadlines.” And both statements would be true. Even before Kitty ignored her call the project manager (PM) was livid. “Kitty is talented and she knows it, so she gets away with being a diva.” Some people crave attention, even if it is negative and puts their employment in jeopardy. This time, the PM was not going there with Kitty. This time, she tried something completely different.
Professionals focus on objectives, not problems. Was the PM’s objective delivering the product or putting Kitty in her place? “It’s the product,” said the PM. “But it’s Kitty, too.”

But it’s the product first, right? With her challenges prioritized, the PM could now address them in order. So, how do you get water from a stone, blood from a turnip or a website from a developer? Yelling made the developer feel like a teenager sneaking home after curfew. Maybe Kitty was behaving like a teenager, ignoring calls and missing deadlines, but that did not oblige the PM to play the role of angry parent. Someone had to step out of the drama and approach the project professionally. The PM, not really into dysfunctional family theater, agreed.

I told her, You’ll catch more flies with honey than with vinegar. The PM immediately made the connection. “So, I have to delete my angry email?” Yes, but not permanently.

We know Kitty is capable, so the PM started her new email with a compliment, a bit of honey: Kitty, the client selected you for this project because you are talented and they liked the work you did last summer.

Then, the issue: I have requested several extensions to give you more time; however, the client is questioning our ability to finish this.

Finally, a friendly postponement of the scolding Kitty expects: We can talk later about making

sure future projects go more smoothly, but for now let's focus on completing this one.

She kept the email upbeat and left Kitty with two assignments: get the work done now and talk later about the rest of this mess.

The PM wondered if she might lose some leverage if she waited to voice her frustration. Actually, the PM has all the leverage she needs. The next time Kitty's name is assigned to a project, the PM can say, "I'm reluctant to work with her. She misses deadlines and ignores my calls. I won't put myself or this company in a position to be embarrassed again." If Kitty wants to work, she will quickly change her habits and become the professional she was hired to be.

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