

Silence the Hornblower

Do you know someone who likes to toot his or her own horn? Here's how Napoleon Bonaparte, military and political leader of France, handled the situation:

One of his field marshals once requested an audience, and Napoleon knew what was coming. But as every good leader must, Napoleon agreed to hear him out.

The field marshal brought news of a great victory he had achieved. He talked for a long time, piling detail upon detail. Napoleon listened closely, but said nothing.

The marshal was disappointed. He had hoped for a more enthusiastic reception, as well as Napoleon's congratulations. Neither was forthcoming. In his summation, the marshal repeated much of what he had already said.

As the officer rambled on, Napoleon continued to listen politely, and the marshal interpreted this as encouragement. "Surely," he thought, "Napoleon will now give me the praise I so richly deserve."

When the marshal finally stopped talking, Napoleon asked him one question: "What did you do the next day?"

The marshal was speechless. But the lesson was not lost on him. From then on, the marshal understood that he should never rest on his laurels.

And he left it to others to bestow the laurels.

– Beecher Hunter

